A Shadow and a Wolf

by Gracques

Summary

Tyrion Lannister weds Sansa Stark and everything goes as it happened in the show. However, just before Joffrey's wedding, an unexpected event changes everything. The forced husband and wife will have to go beyond their family loyalties in order to survive and hope to win the game of thrones.

Notes
Author's Note: This is the first story I publish but I intend it to be long. I already have about sixty chapters that are planned and it is going to grow. I'll do everything to publish at least one chapter every week and hope to do even more.

In this Game of Thrones FanFiction, one event is going to change the whole story of Westeros and Essos. It follows the events of the TV series, though I will borrow some elements from the books when they don't contradict the series. The first chapters may seem to be a repetition of the TV show, but something different will happen close to Joffrey's wedding. In fact, I tried to imagine what might happen if THIS event happened in the show, how would the story change with it. I'll try to make it as realistic as possible.

The story will first focus on Tyrion and Sansa, but will expand to all the other characters as it moves forward. I hope you enjoy to read it as much as I enjoy to write it.

If you find the first chapters boring because they repeat a lot from the show, you may skip immediately to chapter 23 (Tywin III) where the story starts to diverge from the canon.
Tyrion Lannister straightened up in his chair. It was the end of afternoon and sunset was coming. The end of the day, though it was no end for him. His duties as Master of Coin were tiresome, even more than those he had when he was acting Hand of the King it seemed. In fact, Tyrion worked as hard as in these times, the difference was he couldn’t enjoy it. When he was acting Hand, people would bow before him, pay him respect even if they had none for him. He was also able to neutralize his sweet sister schemes and plots against him. He discovered that he was very good at wielding power and enjoyed it, even if that was to protect his repulsive nephew. But he was also proud of what he did at this time, he felt useful for his family and, even more surprising, for the people. His father had trusted him enough to name him at this position, going as far as calling him “son”. Well, he hadn’t called him that, but for probably the first time he had acknowledged him as his son. Tyrion had wanted to prove himself worthy of House Lannister and he had. He managed to control Joffrey more than Cersei would ever have been able and he saved the city, leading its defenses during the battle. For that he earned his ugly scar… and the less desirable position on the Small council.

The Realm was tens of millions golden dragons in debt towards the Iron Bank of Braavos. It was the priority, but he also had to be sure the crown had enough to pay back its debts towards his father. Then came House Tyrell (their new ally), the Faith of the Seven, several eastern banks and cartels from Tyrosh and a few minor houses. The debts were so high Tyrion had no idea how the crown would be able to pay them back. The repayment to the Iron Bank was the priority or else Braavos would start to fund Stannis, Robb Stark, Balon Greyjoy and who know else against them. He could persuade the Tyroshi to delay the payment as long as the interests would accumulate, perhaps do the same with the minor houses and the Faith (he helped to bring the present High Septon to his position). Lord Mace Tyrell would probably be ready to do anything to please the king, Tyrion could even hope he would forget about the gold Joffrey owned him, but Lady Olenna wouldn’t. As for Tywin Lannister, the Lord of Casterly Rock would never forget the debts towards him, no matter what happened. He would be as ruthless as the Iron Bank on this.

Tyrion couldn’t fail. He would never give the pleasure to his father to show the world his second son was unworthy and unable to carry out his duties. Tyrion needed to find new sources of revenues, but with winter coming he couldn’t raise new taxes on harvests or trade. They needed to fill granaries before it was too late or else hundreds of thousand people would starve to death in the Riverlands, the Westerlands, the Stormlands and the North. So Tyrion had turned to reducing expanses once it was evident little could be done to raise new revenues. The sooner the war would be over the better for that, but he had no control over it, not anymore. At last Lady Olenna Tyrell agreed to cover half the expanses for the royal wedding last week, which was very good considering it was extravagant. “What good is the word extravagant if it can’t be used to describe a royal wedding,” she said. Anyway, extravagant or not, Tyrion saved a great amount of money with this. However, he would have to find new ways to reduce expenses and bring some more revenues to prevent the realm to go bankrupt.

He was looking at the sunset, lost in his thoughts, when his quire entered.

“My lord, you wanted to remind you when it would be time,” Podrick said.

“You’re a good lad Pod. I’ll have you knighted someday,” Tyrion replied. He nearly forgot it with
all the work he had to do. Pod could spill wine, but he had a very good memory. He never forgot anything.

With a resigned sigh, Tyrion rose, grabbed one of his ledgers and went to the Tower of the Hand. His father had summoned him to meet him in his solar at this hour and he had charged Podrick with the task of reminding him. He would bring the good news that he saved a tremendous amount of money for the crown a few days ago. His father wouldn’t be pleased, and that was the reason why Tyrion would tell him. You won’t get rid of me so easily father. You won’t get a single opportunity to say I’m useless and incapable. After a short walking in the corridors of the Red Keep and a breathless climb of numberless stairs, he finally reached the top of the Tower and entered the new Small council chambers. His father sat at the end of the table, but someone else was sitting at his left, near the other end.

“You’re late,” stated his father.

“What’s she doing here?” Tyrion asked, hinting at Cersei’s presence.

“Our business concerns her too. Sit.”

Tyrion sat on the other side, face to face with his sister who was looking intently at him. He decided to ignore her.

“You’ll be pleased to learn that after one conversation with Olenna Tyrell, I’ve saved the crown hundreds of thousand on this wedding,” he said, trying to be a disappointment to his father’s hopes as usual.

“Never mind that now. We have something important to discuss,” his father replied.

“I’m Master of Coin. Saving money is important.”

Cersei didn’t stop looking at him with a little smile all this time. It bored him.

“Stop that,” finally returning her gaze. “You’re making me uncomfortable.”

His father chose that moment to speak of the subject he summoned him for. “Your sister has learned that your new friends the Tyrells are plotting to marry Sansa Stark to Ser Loras.”

“Very well,” Tyrion said, a little bit surprised. “She’s a lovely girl. Missing some of Loras’ favorite bits but I’m sure they’ll make do,” he added in a mocking tone. Though Loras will be a far better husband for Sansa than Mad King the Second. Better someone who loves cocks than someone who loves to beat you.

“Your jokes are not appreciated.”

“It wasn’t my best, but I thought—”

“I bring them into the royal fold and this is how they repay me, by trying to steal the key to the North out from under me.”

“Sansa is the key to the North? I seem to remember she has an older brother,” Tyrion pointed.

“The Karstarks have marched home. The young wolf has lost half his army. His days are numbered. Theon Greyjoy murdered both his brothers. That makes Sansa Stark the heir to Winterfell. And I am not about to hand her over to the Tyrells.”
That was news. Tyrion was aware of the murders of his cousins Willem and Martyn by the hand of Rickard Karstark. He had been horrified by this. They were the twin sons of his uncle Kevan, only fourteen-years-old. Squires. Children. Nothing more. The sons of an uncle who always showed him respect. And Lord Karstark had killed them to avenge the death of his own two sons who died fighting. Robb Stark reacted by beheading his lord bannerman. Tyrion would have sent him to the Wall instead, they needed men more than ever now. An honorable decision, but a foolish one nonetheless. The son of Ned Stark should have taken Lord Karstark hostage and forced his men to fight alongside him if they wanted their lord to be released once he would win. And if the young king was defeated, he could give Lors Karstark to Joffrey for better terms of surrender. But the boy made the same mistakes than his father, acting with honor without considering the consequences. There were the consequences. Half his men had deserted him. He would never be able to defeat the Tyrell-Lannister alliance now, no matter what he did. His father would crush him. And of course, if Robb Stark died, Sansa was the Lady of Winterfell. Who controlled Sansa controlled the North and his father would make sure it was the Lannisters.

Tyrion didn’t really like the King in the North. When he came to Winterfell after his visit to the Wall, the young lord had given him a very cold welcome. Now Tyrion knew why. He thought Tyrion and his family had tried to kill his brother, not without good cause. If only Jaime and Cersei had been more discrete. How much blood was shed because of this? However, Tyrion admitted he understood the young man. What would he do himself if the Starks had Jaime beheaded? And Tyrion couldn’t help but feel sad about Bran and Rickon. He remembered the smile the cripple boy had on his face when Tyrion told him he would ride again. He didn’t seem to have smiled much for the last days at this moment. Did he have enough time to try the saddle I gave him the plans for? As for Rickon, how old was he? Six? Seven? It seemed there was nothing good in the Greyjoys. All they were capable of was plundering, murdering, slaughtering, and betraying now. He could still smell the burning sailors in Lannisport, ten years later. He turned his attention back to the conversation.

“The Tyrell army is helping us to win this war. Do you really think it’s wise to refuse them?”

“There’s nothing to refuse. This is a plot. Plots are not public knowledge. And the Tyrells won’t carry this one out until after Joffrey’s wedding. We need to act first and kill this union in its crib.”

“And how do we do that?” Tyrion asked. He already knew the answer.

“We find Sansa Stark a different husband,” his father replied.

“Wonderful.” Of course, that’s what his father would do. Sansa was the king’s ward, the Hand could marry her to whoever he wanted. Who would the girl have the misfortune to wed? Lancel? Cleos? Tion?

“Yes, it is.” For the first time in the meeting, Cersei spoke. She stared at Tyrion, a great smile upon her lips. Tyrion stared back, not understanding first. Then, as he understood, he turned to his father who looked back at him very seriously.

“You can’t mean it,” Tyrion said in a low voice. He can’t really think about it.

“I can and I do,” his father replied, as if he was stating an evidence.

Tyrion couldn’t believe it. “Joffrey has made this poor girl’s life miserable since the day he took her father’s head. Now she’s finally free of him and you give her to me? That’s cruel, even for you.”

“Do you intend on mistreating her?” His father seemed more curious than concerned and his next words proved it. “The girl’s happiness is not my concern, nor should it be yours.”
“She’s a child!” Tyrion shouted.

Cersei chose this moment to stand in the conversation. “She’s flowered, I assure you. She and I have discussed it at length.”

“There, you see? You will wed her, bed her and put a child in her. Surely you are capable of that.” Tywin Lannister spoke without a hint of emotion. He didn’t care about the girl. He saw her as a tool to get his hands on the North, not as a frightened child who had been beaten and nearly raped since her father died before her eyes. He was going to force Tyrion upon her, a girl whose family was in war against his own, who was about twenty years younger than his second son, who hated the Lannisters with very good reasons… and who had Tyrion’s lover as her handmaiden.

Tyrion was angry and disgusted. Sansa was a person, not some child’s workshop. “And if I refuse?”

“You wanted to be rewarded for your valor in battle,” Tywin Lannister told him on a mocking tone. “Sansa Stark is a finer reward than you could ever dare hope for. And it is past time you were wed.”

“I WAS wed,” Tyrion stated firmly. That made his father turn his head. “Or don’t you remember?” He stared directly in the eyes of the man who sired him, daring him to deny it, to deny what he did to Tysha and what he forced Tyrion to do back then.

Tywin stared back, grinding his teeth, and let it out. “Only too well.”

Both of them stared at each other for a few seconds, while Cersei made a nasty comment that it was more than what Tyrion could hope for. Tyrion looked at the table. He couldn’t refuse. If he refused, his father would once again point that he was a burden and a shame to his family. Sansa was far from a bad match. The girl was lovely, young, beautiful, courteous, well educated, a real lady in every sense of the term. She was also intelligent, much more than most of the people would believe. Tyrion was still impressed by the way she had endured the bad treatments she was submitted to when he was acting Hand. She was also the heir to Winterfell, which means Tyrion could rule the North as regent if they had children. But still, she was a child. A flowered child perhaps, but still a child. Her father was killed by his own nephew, her family was in war against his. Sansa’s life would be miserable with him as her husband. She would never see him as something else than her goaler. They would never be happy together, especially more once her brother would be defeated. But Tyrion had no choice. Tywin would wed Sansa to another Lannister if Tyrion didn’t. Her life would be even more miserable with one of his cousins. There was no escaping, nor for him, nor for Sansa. While he was deep into his thoughts, the Hand of the King turned to the Queen Regent.

“Tyrion will do as he’s bid. As will you.”

“What do you mean?” Cersei asked, plainly unaware of their father’s meaning.

“You’ll marry Ser Loras.”

In other circumstances Tyrion would have laughed, but strangely he felt some pity for his sister on this moment. Now you know what it is like, big sister.

“I will not,” Cersei said, looking away. But she would, just like Tyrion would. No one could disobey Tywin Lannister.

“The boy is heir to Highgarden. Tyrion will secure the North, you will secure the Reach.”

“No, I won’t do it,” his sister repeated.

“Yes you will. You’re still fertile. You need to marry again and breed.”
“I am Queen Regent, not some broodmare.” Now Cersei was shouting.

“YOU’RE MY DAUGHTER! You will do as I command and you will marry Loras Tyrell and put an end to the disgusting rumors about you, once and for all.” Tywin spoke in a tone that let no place to discussion. But Cersei tried a last attempt. As usual, when orders wouldn’t work for her, she would plead.

“Father, don’t make me do it again please.”

“Not another word!” Tywin Lannister, Lord of Casterly Rock, Warden of the West, Lord of the Westerlands, Shield of Lannisport and Hand of the King rose on his feet and looked down on his children with contempt. “My children! You’ve disgraced the Lannister name for far too long.”

As his father walked, Tyrion and Cersei stayed behind, deep in their thoughts. If they ever shared something, that was the contempt of their father for them. Except perhaps the love they had for Jaime, though it wasn’t the same sort of love. How am I going to announce it to Shae? She is not going to like it.
Tyrion I

Chapter Notes

First chapter of the story (I don't consider the prologue). Tyrion and Sansa get married.

One little thing, I must warn you English isn't my first language, so don't be too severe if sometimes I don't seem to write properly.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

TYRION I

Tyrion stood near the marriage altar, on the top of the stairs, between the statues of the Father and the Mother. Here, in a few minutes, he would marry Sansa Stark. That wasn’t something he looked forward. Three weeks ago, he had gone to the young girl to tell her they were to wed very soon. He preferred to do it himself instead of Cersei. If Cersei had been the one to announce it, she would probably have come with a great smile upon her face, bringing a new gown for Sansa to try it. Once Sansa would have put the gown and it was arranged to fit her perfectly, Cersei would have revealed it was the gown she would wear for her wedding. Probably Sansa would believe it was her wedding with Loras Tyrell that the queen was talking about, unless she remembered Cersei wasn’t supposed to know about it, then she would suspect something was wrong. Then Cersei would tell her the truth, the wedding with her wretched brother with the big scar, the fact she had no choice but to do it since she was a hostage, probably going as far as wondering aloud if her children from him would have her traitor’s nature or his height.

But that wasn’t what happened. Instead Tyrion decided to tell it to Sansa himself. He hoped he could reveal it in a way that wouldn’t throw her in great despair. *What a fool I was to believe it. No matter the way it was presented to her, she wouldn’t want it.* He had gone to Sansa’s quarters and asked to see her. He couldn’t have chosen a worse moment. Sansa was trying a gown and was unfastening it when he entered. Even more, Shae was there. Tyrion was limiting his contacts with her since his father told him the next whore he would find in his bed would be hung, so he didn’t have an opportunity to tell her about his marriage. Sansa quickly put back the gown on herself, holding it with her hands. That made Tyrion quite uncomfortable. He wondered why. He had seen so many naked women in his life that he wasn’t able to remember a tenth of them, but he was afraid to see a northern girl wearing only a corset? Perhaps because all the women he saw naked before were whores when Sansa wasn’t. At least she didn’t seem annoyed and angry about his presence, she was even smiling. *I’m probably the only lion who doesn’t savage wolves.*

Then he had tried to send Shae outside, without success. Shae was suspicious ever since he had told her one day that Sansa was a great beauty. Of course she was, who could deny it, but she was a child. Tyrion had never desired her… or at least never wished to desire her. He had tried to warn Shae indirectly that she didn’t want to hear what he had to say right now, but there was nothing to do. So he had to announce to his lover and his bride-to-be the new at the same time. The shock on
both their faces was quite obvious when he told them. Shae had recovered more quickly and her eyes had darted upon him. Tyrion quickly told Sansa that it was the decision of the king, that he didn’t choose it either and that the wedding would take place in three weeks. After some poor excuses, he retreated out of the chamber. There was nothing he could do.

Now, three weeks later, he was there, standing next to the High Septon who was talking to him about the chance he had to marry such a lovely and faithful woman, about his duties as husband and the vows he would take. Tyrion didn’t need a lecture. He knew everything about the Faith and its rituals. He was wed, a long time ago, and before that he had wanted to become High Septon. His encounter with Tysha changed his plans, but Tyrion didn’t forget easily. He could still recite entire passages of the Seven-Pointed Star by memory. If he hadn’t met Tysha, perhaps he would be there at the place of this man he helped to reach this position. No, instead he had fallen in love with a whore, only to see her raped and worse. And now here he was, forced to marry another girl, only this time she really was an innocent and mistreated girl. It was no act. And his father would force him on her.

Tyrion looked down at the few people who would attend the wedding. There were the members of the small council (his father, his sister, Varys, Pycelle), Bronn who was now a knight, Lady Tanda Stokeworth with her two daughters Falyse et Lollys (she hoped to convince Tyrion to marry the younger before the riot), the future queen, the Queen of Thorns, a few novices and other western and reach noblemen and noblewomen. They had to be about sixty or seventy. Quite little for the wedding of the heir to Winterfell. Sansa always dreamed of a great ceremony with hundreds, even thousands guests, a beautiful knight, a lord or even a king with strong arms to bring her under his protection. Instead, she would marry the Imp in what looked like a secret wedding. She doesn’t deserve this. She deserves someone better than me.

He saw his sister and Lady Margaery talking together, arms in arms. Or, to be more accurate, the Tyrell girl put her arm under Cersei’s and kept it here, no matter the efforts of Cersei to get away. Margaery was smiling as usual. She was a clever girl. To the opposite of Cersei and his father, Margaery understood it was better to have people do what you wanted because they loved you instead because they fear you. Fear could be useful, but if people feared something else more than they feared you, they wouldn’t follow you no matter how you threatened them. And once they only had their fear for you to lose, then you were done. Cersei never understood that. Fear was everything she inspired. At least his father inspired respect, but Margaery could inspire respect and love. And she had the power of the Reach behind her, so no need for her to hang someone for the people to fear what might happen to them if they tried anything against her. The Rose of Highgarden would make a very good queen. Tyrion only hoped Joffrey wouldn’t eventually break her as he nearly broke Sansa. He looked at the beautiful brown-haired girl, who was still smiling while Cersei talked to her. Perhaps she would manage to get along well with Joffrey. She seemed able to control him so far, something Cersei, Tyrion and even their father had difficulties with. And Joffrey wouldn’t dare so easily to mistreat the sole daughter of the Warden of the South. Sansa had no protection when she was betrothed to him. Her family away and in war against the king, her father dead, no one could protect her or dared to. No one but Tyrion and Shae. And the Hound, which was strange.

Tyrion suddenly saw Cersei pulling her arm away from Margaery’s grip. He listened closely. What he heard frightened him. “If you ever call me sister again I’ll have you strangled in your sleep.” The
Queen Regent went away from the future queen, letting the Rose with a look between fright and astonishment. That wasn’t good. But future thoughts were banned as the doors of the Great Sept of Baelor flung open. People on the flooring moved and formed two lines, the Tyrells and the Reachmen on the right, the Lannisters and the other people on the left. Sansa came through the doors, two septas on her sides. In the sunlight and with her golden gown, she looked like an angel. Her face showed some nervousness, but nothing more. No joy, no anger, no sadness. She was hiding behind her armor of courtesies as usual. That was her shield, her only protection here in King’s Landing. Tyrion didn’t fault her, she did what she must to survive. But she should have smiled, laughed, be happy at her wedding. Again, Tyrion reflected she didn’t get what she deserved. Why must the innocents always suffer from the powerful?

And here he was, his nephew the king. Sansa’s father was dead, so it was the king who would deliver her to her husband. Joffrey escorted Sansa to the altar, a snooty grin on his lips. Bronn slightly bowed his head when she passed before him. Near the steps, she made what looked like a little smile when her eyes went towards Margaery. The two girls were friends. It was good, since Sansa had no friends in King’s Landing except Shae before the Battle of Blackwater. Tyrion and Shae had done everything they could to protect her from Joffrey in these times. Tyrion turned his eyes aside as his soon-to-wife approached. He protected her before, he would continue to protect her now, from Joffrey, Cersei, his father, the Tyrells, everyone. That was the least he could do. She had allowed herself a little smile when Tyrion had come to bring her to the ceremony sooner, after he promised her he would never hurt her. Tyrion meant it, and even more. He would not allow someone to hurt her again. Not even himself.

Sansa and Joffrey reached Tyrion’s level and then, Joffrey took the stool and brought him with him down the steps. Tyrion couldn’t do anything. What was his nephew hoping to gain from that? Another humiliation for a member of his family?

The High Septon began to speak. “You may now cloak the bride and bring her under your protection.”

Hesitantly, Tyrion unrolled the red cloak under his arm. It was huge, heavy, crimson velvet with lions and gold on it. A very beautiful cloak, even though he was sure Sansa wanted nothing of it. He didn’t see how he could put it on Sansa’s shoulders. She was nearly twice his height. What would it be once she is fully grown. Thrice his height? People were laughing in the Sept, Joffrey among all. At least the Tyrells, his father and his sister had the decency to not. His father stared at the little crowd and many stopped laughing at once. For a second he felt grateful for Cersei and their father, until he remembered they were responsible for this wedding. Without them, there would be no ceremony and no one would be here to laugh at him. Finally Tyrion moved forward a little on Sansa’s right, bringing her attention.

“Could you…?”
Dutifully, Sansa knelt on the floor and Tyrion wrapped in the Lannister cloak. “Thank you.”

They stood before the High Septon who then began his prayers. “Your Grace your Grace, my lords, my ladies, we stand here in the sight of gods and men to witness the union of man and wife. One flesh, one heart, one soul, now and forever.”

Many prayers followed, then Sansa and Tyrion hands were tied together with a ribbon to symbolize their union. Sansa’s hand was shaking at this moment. Tyrion tried to give her hand a reassuring squeeze but he didn’t know if it had the desired effect. Then they said their vows, not looking in each other eyes, and came after the hardest part, when he had to kiss Sansa. She knelt so he could do it, obedient as always and closed her eyes. She probably didn’t want to look at his ugly face. Tyrion put a light kiss on her lips, making it last only the necessary time. Sansa raised and they stood together up the steps, facing the guests as they applauded.

For the second time in his life, Tyrion Lannister was married. And this time, he wouldn’t allow anyone to hurt his wife. He had sworn to protect her and was determined to hold this one vow at least.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter is Tywin POV
Tywin Lannister was sitting uncomfortably in the Small Hall. The chair wasn’t the problem, it was his children and grand-children who made him uncomfortable. The Old Lion was a sober and frugal man who didn’t eat much. A cake half-finished was right before him but he didn’t take a second slice. Nor did he take a second cup of wine. The first was nearly finished, but some Arbor wine still laid at the bottom of the cup. He wasn’t thirsty nor hungry. He looked at his grandson taking another cup while his daughter was emptying her fourth. And this dwarf, newly wed, sat on the top of the dais with his wife, barely eating but drinking for ten men, which meant he was drinking for twenty dwarves or even more if we considered a dwarf wasn’t even worth half a man. There is my legacy. A band of drunken fools. A boy who reminded him the first king he served, a queen who thought herself clever when she wasn’t and a vile dwarf who killed his wife.

Tywin did everything for this little creature. Finally, after years he managed to find him a suitable wife. Once he impregnated her, he could claim and rule the North. Their first son could even become the heir to Casterly Rock if Jaime never returned. That was more than Tyron could ever hope, more than he deserved, he who was a perpetual embarrassment for the family. Tywin had tried several times to marry him, each time without success. With Elia Martell not long after his wife died, with Lysa Tully after Jaime donned this stupid white cloak. Yohn Royce and Leyton Hightower also refused when he proposed them, even the family of Delena Florent who Robert Baratheon disgraced in the wedding bed of his brother. Now he was married and, like always, he got himself drunk. The Lady Sansa could well seem uncomfortable her too. He didn’t dare to imagine how his own wife would react if he had behaved this way at their wedding. But that wasn’t what Tywin was concerned about. Drunk as he already was, Tyrion wouldn’t be able to perform his duty. They needed a Lannister child as quickly as possible, especially now that the young wolf’s host was heading towards the Twins.

Half the people were drunk, but Tywin wasn’t. Nor the Tyrells. The Queen of Thorns was detailing to her grandchildren all the family links that were created through the three marriages. Ser Loras finally rose, unable to support it. Tywin knew he wasn’t happy, but not because the Stark girl wouldn’t marry him. He was unhappy because he would marry his daughter. What a foolish boy he was. Tywin was offering him the most beautiful woman in the Seven Kingdom, a mirror of her lovely mother, the mother of the king, and the boy didn’t want her. Bored, Tywin went to talk with Ser Addam Marbrand, one of his bannermen’s son, now Commander of the City Watch. They quickly discussed about the security for the wedding and around the Red Keep, then of the state of the people in the streets. Ser Addam had nothing very important to report. He was drunk, which Tywin believed was a good sign since the Commander wouldn’t get drunk if he believed the streets weren’t safe. Tywin quickly turned around to see his daughter-in-law had left her husband. She was now talking with Varys and Tyrion was looking in their direction. Tywin chose this moment to
remind him of his duties. He advanced until he was towering the little shit.

“You seem rather drunk.”

“Rather less than I plan to be,” the dwarf replied with a large smile. “Isn’t it a man’s duty to get drunk at his own wedding?”

Tywin ignored the jape. He had enough of them during his time as Hand of Mad King Aerys, a halfman wouldn’t bring again these days to him. “This isn’t about your wedding. Renly Baratheon had a wedding. Your wife needs a child, a Lannister child, as soon as possible.”

“And?”

He acted as if that wasn’t important. “If you’re going to give her one you need to perform,” stating the evidence. Did he forget what the true objective of the act after visiting so many whorehouses? Tywin wouldn’t be surprised by that. As usual he had to remind his children about their duty because of their stupidity.

“What did you once call me?” Tyrion said after another sip of wine. “A drunken little lust-filled beast.”

“More than once.”

“There you have it. Nothing to worry about. Drinking and lust, no man can match me in these things. I am the god of tits and wine. I shall build a shrine to myself at the next brothel I visit.”

As he brought his cup to his lips once more, Tywin caught it and put it abruptly on the table. That was enough. He didn’t care so much if this dissolute dwarf whored and drank as long as it was in a brothel or a tavern. These were the places for it. But they were at court, during a wedding, with their allies and enemies watching for every weakness to exploit. He made things clear enough.

“You can drink, you can joke, you can engage in juvenile attempts to make your father uncomfortable, but you will do your duty.”

Firm, Tywin shook his hand were some wine had slipped. Tyrion looked at him, holding his stare, even returning it. Easy for a drunken fool to look brave when he isn’t. Though that stare reminded Tywin of someone else’s stare. A stare he last saw twenty years ago. He pushed that thought aside and went back to his place while the Tyrells were looking at them, smiling. How much time must I support the mockery of other people because my family refuses to do what’s necessary for family.

Tywin Lannister devoted his entire life to the family, bringing back the Lannisters to their former glory and even more. He crushed the Tarbecks and the Reynes when they rebelled, became Hand of the King, had his daughter married to the new king when the mad one was gone. And now, he was fighting a war his children started. Tywin tried to teach all of them the importance to do their part for the family for forty years, as he did his own, and yet none of them seemed to understand it. None of them except Cersei perhaps, though she proved to be more than an inefficient ruler. She nearly destroyed their family with her mistakes. She and Jaime. And Tyrion too. Tyrion allowed Catelyn Stark to take him prisoner, which obliged Tywin to declare the war against Rivverun, then Winterfell. Jaime was so foolish in his pride that he attacked Ned Stark in the streets of King’s Landing, crippling him and preventing him to ride against Ser Gregor Clegane when Tywin sent him to ravage the Riverlands. Instead Ned Stark sent Beric Dondarrion, a man who refused to die no matter how many times he was killed. Tywin could have ended this in a few weeks if Jaime hadn’t attacked the Warden of the North, making a show of it. Then Tyrion escaped from his captivity and Robert Baratheon was dead, Ned Stark arrested. Things seemed to go well for them as Jaime
Then, everything fell amiss. The young wolf captured Jaime and lifted the siege of Riverrun. Foolish as he was, Jaime ran head down into the heart of the battle, getting himself captured while Cersei allowed her son to behead Ned Stark, then also lost one of the Stark girls. Renly and Stannis Baratheon took up arms against them, using their uncertain situation at their advantage, concocting a filthy lie that his grandchildren were the product of an incest. And everyone believed it. In these times, Tywin had no other choices. Even Kevan seemed helpless in this situation. But Tyrion wasn’t. He was wounded on the battlefield at the Battle of the Green Fork, but his savages slaughtered by themselves the two thousand men Robb Stark sent against them. Then Tyrion was the only one to point out peace was impossible since Ned Stark was beheaded by Joffrey, destroying his cup of wine to demonstrate it, something Tywin would never have thought possible. This drunken fool, breaking a cup of wine, even emptied. Perhaps he had been half-wrong, as the dwarf suggested him. He even warned him to not underestimate Robb Stark. And it proved to be true. Tyrion had been the only one to who he could turn for sorting the mistakes of the family. Tywin had made mistakes, Tyrion had, Cersei had, Joffrey had, Jaime had. He needed to correct it. And to Tywin’s great surprise, Tyrion succeeded. He managed the town very efficiently, fooled Varys, Baelish and Pycelle, convinced Catelyn Stark to free Jaime, managed to control Joffrey (mostly), made an alliance with Dorne, burned half of Stannis’s fleet with wildfire (only losing a single ship of the royal fleet in the process) and held back Stannis’s army long enough for his army to attack it from the back and scatter it. Grudgingly, Tywin had to admit he had been proud of Tyrion then. But that was before he discovered the other things he had done. Putting his pet sellsword in charge of the City Watch. Threatening his own sister for beating a whore. Sending whores to Joffrey to have them beaten. Drinking with thieves. Coming close to lose the last Stark hostage they had in the riot. Slapping Joffrey in front of his Kingsguards. Calling the king a half-wit in front of the whole court. Allowing Sandor Clegane to desert. Taking off his helmet during the battle, something even Jaime would never have done. Promising Catelyn Stark to free her daughters once Jaime would be back at the capital. All this Tywin learned it from Cersei. And Varys confirmed every fact Cersei gave him. Tyrion’s scar wasn’t a proof of bravery in battle, it was a proof of his foolishness. Tywin couldn’t risk Tyrion to cause any more shame to the family. As soon as he was reinstated in his position as Hand of the King, he stripped of their charges Tyrion’s men, paid the hill tribes so they would go home and moved Tyrion from the Tower of the Hand so he might reflect on his past actions. Tywin decided later to give him the office of Master of Coin on Bealish’s recommendation. There Tyrion would be useful, with reduced possibilities to make mistakes that would shame the family. And if he did, Tyrion would only say that he tried, as a father, to give his son a chance, a chance he failed to take, and that he wouldn’t allow his second son to occupy any important charges in the future to prevent such failures to happen. But so far, Tyrion gave him no reason to remove him from his position. He wasn’t as efficient as Baelish, but made a rather good job considering the circumstances. Making the Tyrells bear half the cost of this extravagant royal wedding was something. He wondered how he managed to convince the Queen of Thorns.

If he proved himself worthy in his task and if Jaime never came back, perhaps Tywin would allow him to act as regent for Casterly Rock and Winterfell until his sons with Sansa came of age. If he put children in the Stark girl of course, which Tywin doubted, seeing how the drunken lust-filled beast drank himself to death.

Suddenly, Tywin’s attention was attracted by clapping hands. Only one pair of hand. His grandson was standing over the dais along with Lady Sansa. “Time for the bedding ceremony,” the king announced. People cheered all over, especially those who were drunk. They began to gather around
the dais to carry the groom and the bride to their bed. But not Tywin. Tywin hated that ceremony. He never liked it, but he started to hate it the day of his own wedding.

“There will be no bedding ceremony.” As drunken as he was, Tyrion still managed to speak.

“Where’s your respect for tradition, Uncle?” Joffrey brought Lady Sansa down as he continued to speak. He was clearly drunk. Much less than Tyrion, but when Tyrion was a shame when drunken, Joffrey was a danger and with much less wine. People continued to gather around the dais, but Tywin sat still. He noted Varys and the Tyrells did the same. But what was interesting was that Varys was sitting with the Tyrells. “Come, everyone. Pick her up and carry her to her wedding bed. Get rid of her gown. She won’t be needing it any longer. Ladies, attend to my uncle. He’s not heavy.”

“There will be no bedding ceremony.” Tyrion repeated. He was still drunk, but he seemed serious now.

“There will be if I command it.”

A dagger was planted in the table then. It was in Tyrion’s hand. “Then you’ll fucking your own bride with a wooden cock.” Tywin stood up. That was trouble. Is he trying to get himself killed? Tywin had supported humiliations during his own bedding ceremony forty years ago, so why not Tyrion too? But it was no matter now, he had to neutralize the situation before the king or his uncle did something foolish.

“What did you say?” Joffrey asked, looking around him as if he was searching for some confirmation of what he just heard. The king was there, mouth wide open. It was obvious he couldn’t believe what Tyrion said. “WHAT… DID YOU… SAY?!” The king screamed this time and Tyrion wouldn’t stop looking at him, anger and hatred filling his eyes. People were holding their breath for what would come next. *He means to do it, he won’t hesitate, drunken or not.* Tywin had seen this look on another face, thirty-three years ago. Two different looks in the same evening, from two different people, but they appeared on the very same face this very evening. Tywin knew from that look that Tyrion wouldn’t hesitate. So he stepped in.

“I believe we can dispense with the bedding, Your Grace. I’m sure Tyrion did not mean to threaten the king.” Tywin hoped Tyrion would catch the bait, or else there would be some kinslaying tonight. Tyrion closed his eyes and turned his head right, seeming to make some effort to think. Then he turned again towards the king, laughing. The dwarf had seen the bait and caught it.

“A bad joke, Your Grace. Made out of envy of your own royal manhood.” He was playing with his dagger as he spoke. “Mine is so small. My poor wife won’t even know I’m here.”

Tywin Lannister allowed a smirk, partly for the show, but also from satisfaction. “Your uncle is clearly quite drunk, Your Grace,” he observed. Tyrion may be a drunkard, but he was no fool as he realised at the Green Fork.

“I am. Guilty. But—” Tyrion stumbled over the dais, taking a last sip of wine. “But it is my wedding night. My tiny drunk cock and I have a job to do. Come, wife.” Lady Sansa followed reluctantly. She hadn’t moved all this time, just like everyone else in the hall. “I vomited on a girl once in the middle of the act. Not proud of it. But I think honesty is important between a man and wife, don’t you agree? Come, I’ll tell you all about it. Put you in the mood” The couple walked outside, no one talking except Tyrion. Tomorrow, Tywin would see if the dwarf did his duty. For now, he needed a good night of sleep. He had enough of this wedding. But before, he went to see his two most loyal and trustworthy guards.
“I want you to stay close to my son and his wife’s chambers for the whole night. Don’t let anyone get near it. Especially the king. And report to me anything you hear behind these doors.” They knew what he meant.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter is under production. It will be Sansa POV.
Sansa I

Chapter Notes

OK everyone, the first chapter from Sansa's POV. Up to now, she seemed quite discreet in the story, very passive, but that's not surprising since this is what Sansa tries to do in the TV show in order to survive. She will occupy a much more important place in the next chapters and it begins right now with her own chapter.

Remember this story is based on the TV show, the way Sansa feels toward Tyrion is different from the way she feels in the books.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

SANSAN I

What did he think he was doing? He could have gotten both of us killed? Though she had to admit she wasn’t frustrated to miss the bedding ceremony. Such were the thoughts of Sansa Stark as her husband led her to his chambers. Their chambers now, they were married. As they left the Small Hall, everything was silent. With his threat to Joffrey, Tyrion put an end to every conversation, every laugh, every whisper, every sound. Even the dead seemed afraid to move as Joffrey reached a level of anger he never achieved before. Well, except for the time he started a riot. In her childhood, Old Nan used to tell her stories about frightening monsters who lived thousands of years ago, like the White Walkers. Sansa hated these stories, but they were the favorite of her brother Bran, so she had to support them from time to time. Even them wouldn’t have dared to move at this moment, she was sure. But Tyrion managed to get out with his head and tongue intact, both of them, Tyrion laughing at his manly parts. A lucky thing he was drunk, or else he could be dead right now. And Sansa too.

“Sorry about that my lady.” Tyrion’s voice took Sansa out of her reflections as they went far from the hall. “This is no pleasant way to leave a wedding, but better than leaving through a bedding ceremony or without a head. I never quite liked my head, but I don’t want to see it removed yet.”

He didn’t seem as drunk as he was a minute ago. Was it possible it was only an act? A way to escape Joffrey’s fury? She couldn’t be sure, but with all the wine her lord husband drank during the feast, Sansa knew he must be drunk. No man could drink so much and say afterwards he was sober.

“There’s no need to apologize my lord. If it pleases my lord to leave the feast this way it doesn’t bother me,” Sansa replied, hiding behind her armor of courtesies as always.

“You’re a good liar, my lady. No wonder you managed to survive here.”

They stayed silent for the rest of the short walk. Sansa didn’t know if it was too short or too long. Each second spent in the corridors enhanced the chance for Joffrey to appear and execute his threat, or worse, but each second also delayed the moment Sansa should do her duty as wife. They finally reached the door and Tyrion opened it, allowing Sansa to enter first. When she entered she noticed several chests and books along with a couch on the right, but as she moved forward her eyes were attracted to the bed on her left. Their wedding bed.

Sansa turned her back to the bed, watching Tyrion close the door. It could be worse. I could be married to Joffrey. Sansa hoped Joffrey wouldn’t dare to come later in the night. He was a coward. After what Tyrion said at the feast, Sansa didn’t expect Joffrey to execute his threat to rape her. He
feared his uncle. Joffrey would complain he was the king and could do as he like, but he never dared to do as he liked when someone dared to hold his line against him. And Tyrion would surely never let his nephew rape his wife. She remembered the time he came to her rescue when Joffrey had her beaten before the whole court. He had called him a half-wit then, something Sansa agreed with, though she would never say it loudly. If there was a Lannister she could expect protection from, it was Tyrion. Though Sansa would never trust him. She would never trust a Lannister again, not after what they did to her father. She wondered if Tyrion would be able to stand his ground in his current state.

He seemed to walk in her direction for a moment, but then turned right and walked over the table where a wine decanter stood. He began to fill himself a cup. “Is that wise, my lord?” Sansa asked. Why did he drink so much?

“Tyrion, Sansa. My name is Tyrion.”

“Is that wise Tyrion?” she corrected.

“Nothing was ever wiser.”

He sat on the end of the couch, looking at her with a strange expression. She couldn’t decrypt what it meant. As the silence lingered, Sansa grew more unsettled. She didn’t know what to do. What was going to happen? What would he ask from her? Septa Mordane never gave her much details about the intimate activities between husband and wife, only stating she would have to do her duty and satisfy her husband. She never was to take the lead. She had to wait for the man she would marry to tell her what to do. The only useful information she got from her septa wasn’t quite reassuring. *It will hurt the first time, when your maidenhead will break. However it will become easier with time. You’ll come to enjoy your husband’s company, whoever he is. All men are beautiful.* But Sansa couldn’t find this beauty in Tyrion. Even with what Margaery told her. The scar didn’t make him uglier, true enough, but he was still a dwarf. And a renowned whoremonger. The uncertainty of what would come caused Sansa to shiver.

“Astoundingly long.” Tyrion said suddenly.

“What?” What did he mean? What was long?

“Neck. You have one.” Sansa had no idea how she should react to this comment. He’s drunk.

“How old are you exactly?” he asked.

“Fourteen.” The answer she gave seemed to have some effect on him. He looked down, as if he was ashamed.

“Well, talk won’t make you any older.”

She realized he was as frightened as she was. That made her feel some pity for him, but didn’t help to stop her shaking. What sort of wedding night would it be with two people afraid to do the deed?

After another silence, Tyrion suddenly stood up. “My lord father has commanded me to consummate the marriage.” Not a single second he looked at her while he said that.

Sansa averted her gaze. Slowly, she went to pour some wine for herself. That would give her some more time as a maid. And perhaps the wine would help to make the act less arduous. She drank deeply. *It will be easier if I am drunk as well.* She emptied the cup as slowly as she could with a single gulp, then slowly walked to the bed. *I must do it. I played my part so far, I must continue until the end.* She began to undo her girdle, very slowly. *Everything is going to be alright. Everyone must*
do it a day or another, whether they like or not. She was fumbling. She had ten broken thumbs instead of her fine fingers. He’s a dwarf. He’s a whoremonger. He’s a Lannister. Clumsily, she undid the numerous laces and buttons of her gown. The beautiful gown the queen had prepared for her. For her wedding. It could be worse. I could be married Joffrey. He helped me. He could be good to me. He’s quite experienced according to Margaery. Finally she dropped her gown on the floor. Still slowly, to gain time. Or perhaps only because otherwise she wouldn’t be able to take out her clothes and Tyrion would have to take them out himself, something she didn’t relish to. His family killed my father. His kin is in war against mine. I wasn’t supposed to marry him. I was supposed to marry the Knight of Flowers, to escape this place, to become the Lady of Highgarden one day. I don’t want him. I was supposed to marry a handsome and courageous knight, not a dwarf. All the time she disrobed, Sansa felt Tyrion’s gaze upon her. She heard his footsteps as he moved behind her. Luckily, he only seemed to turn around. He didn’t get closer. Nor farther. Only her under-silk remained on her. No, there would still be her smallclothes after that. Then nothing. He told me he shall never hurt me. Joffrey once told me the same. Can I trust him? Her shaking was threatening to become uncontrollable. No, I can’t trust him. He is a Lannister. She held back the tears that threatened to roll down on her cheeks. She wouldn’t look weak. She was a wolf. She would do what was necessary to survive. She began to lower the strap of her under-silk, letting her right shoulder bare.

“Stop.” For the first time in what seemed like an eternity to Sansa, Tyrion spoke. She turned her head to look at him. “I can’t.” Sansa covered back her shoulder. Tyrion was looking on the floor. What did he mean? He couldn’t?

“I could. I won’t.” Before she could think about asking he corrected himself. That made more sense. Tyrion was known for his whoring. How could a man unable to do his husband’s duties visit so many brothels? Wait. Did he just say he wouldn’t? That made no more sense. They were married. It was their wedding night. It was his right to claim her maidenhead. Why wouldn’t he do it?

Carefully, Sansa began to ask “But your father−”

“If my father wants someone to get fucked I know where he can start.” Tyrion cut her, speaking loudly and in a very crude way of the Lord Hand. “I won’t share your bed. Not until you want me to.”

Sansa didn’t know what to think about it. Was he serious? He wouldn’t bed her as long as she didn’t want? That could be some trick. Joffrey made her promises once, then he killed her father, forced her to watch his head on a spike and had her beaten by his Kingsguards. She still remembered the pain on her cheeks when Ser Meryn Trant slapped her with his iron gauntlet. Or on her back when he hit her with the flat of his sword. She could have died this day if… if Tyrion didn’t save her.

“What if I never want you to?” Almost as she said the words, she regretted them. What an idiot she was. How would he react? She had abandoned her armor of courtesies for half a second and that was the result.

To her astonishment, and relief, Tyrion showed no anger. He only lowered his eyes and looked away, as if he was ashamed. Finally, he raised his cup. “And so my watch begins.” With a smirk and one last gulp, he emptied it. Then he stumbled to the couch and laid on it, falling into sleep instantly.

For a few minutes, Sansa stood here. That wasn’t the wedding night she had pictured herself a long time ago, back at Winterfell. One day a singer had come and told her life was a song. Young and innocent as she was then, Sansa believed him. Later, when the royal party came in the North, she thought her song would begin. Ever since the singer left, Sansa always thought she would marry a young, handsome and beautiful knight or lord. Then King Robert arrived at Winterfell with his son
and their fathers arranged a betrothal between them. Sansa had thought she was dreaming. Everything seemed perfect back then. Then, on the road to King’s Landing, the accident with Arya, the butcher boy and Nymeria happened and Lady was killed. Ever since that day, things got from bad to worse. And the foolish child she was still believed then everything would be perfect. She hadn’t wanted to see that Joffrey was a monster, so bound she was to her dreams to become the queen, to rule over millions who would love her and to have beautiful children with her handsome prince.

And now here she was, married to the Imp, still a maid with her husband asleep from his drinking. A shiver went through her skin. She sat at the end of the bed, covering her arms with her hands. She would keep her maidenhead for another night. But after, she could be sure of nothing. And so my watch begins. The words of the Night’s Watch. Did he mean he would go celibate for the rest of his life? Sansa doubted it. A man known for his nocturnal activities who would suddenly stop because he was married? She didn’t think so. Well, at least, she wouldn’t have the troublesome task to fulfill her duties as wife in the bed. She would stay a virgin while he would continue to visit brothels and bed whores. What a marriage it would be. That is, if he remembered his promise on the morning, which was also doubtful considering how drunk he was.

But for now, Sansa decided she needed to sleep. The day let her exhausted with everything that happened. The wedding. The feast. Joffrey’s threats. The scene between her husband and the king. And what just happened. She allowed herself to not worry for tonight. Joffrey wouldn’t take action after Tyrion’s performance. Lord Tywin would stop him and, even if he didn’t, Joffrey would be too afraid of Tyrion. At least she hoped. Hope was everything left to her. Hope for her brother to win the war. Hope for Joffrey to stay under Margaery’s control. Hope that one day she would escape this place and be reunited with her family. She was so tired. She rose and went to the head of the bed. She would sleep alone for this night. She would care for the other nights the following days.

Before she went under the blankets, she glanced one last time at Tyrion. He was sleeping in an awkward position. It didn’t seem comfortable to sleep this way. She walked with caution in his direction. There was a red blanket on one of the chests near the couch. She covered Tyrion with it. She also noticed a dressing gown and a cushion under his head. A handmaiden probably left the gown here for next morning, ignoring there would be a wedding but no bedding. Perhaps she ought to remove it. Instead she rolled it in a ball and, very carefully, she pushed it under Tyrion’s head. She didn’t want to trust him, but that didn’t mean she had to be unkind. He allowed her one last night as a virgin. That was the least she could do for him.

Sansa went to the bed and slipped under the cover. Very soon she fell asleep, dreaming of her family. Her father, her mother, Robb, Arya, Bran and Rickon, even Jon and their uncle Benjen. All their direwolves were here too, Greywind, Nymeria, Summer, Shaggydog, Ghost. Even Lady. They were there, all the people she loved, smiling at her while she stood before the altar between the Mother and the Father, side by side with Ser Loras Tyrell as they said their vows. She was happy. The bard of her childhood was there, playing. She could hear his sweet words. Life is a song. And yours is just about to begin. When she turned her head to face her husband, he wasn’t there anymore. Then a door opened. Dawn and a handmaiden brought her back to the bitter reality.

Chapter End Notes

My little interpretation why Tyrion had a blanket on him the morning after the wedding and why Sansa’s gown was under his head.
Next chapter: Shae. And I will introduce a new character who is not in the show, but is part of the Game of Thrones universe.
Chapter Notes

Shae's chapter now. I enjoyed very much to write this one, I hope I represented Shae's thoughts and feelings the right way. I prefer Shae in the show than in the books.

And my new character is introduced. I was very eager to make her appear.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

SHAE I

On the other side of the castle, in the servant’s wing, a young black-haired woman with dark eyes laid on a simple bed among many others. Shae got the opportunity to go to sleep before the other handmaidens since her mistress had left the wedding before everyone else. But she was there during the whole ceremony until the time for the bedding came. She was there when the king threatened to come and see Sansa to rape her in the night while two Kingsguards would hold her. She had wanted to plant the dagger attached to her leg in the throat of the monster. But it was suicidal and proved useless finally. It wasn’t her who saved the poor girl. It was Tyrion, threatening to geld the king when he insisted for the bedding ceremony. Shae saw everything from over the dais. She feared for Tyrion’s life when the hall went silent, but it was over soon enough. Tyrion escaped by pretending to be drunker than he was. Shae had seen Tyrion drunk more than often. She knew when he reached his limits and how he acted when he was really drunk. All this had been an act. Everything except the gelding threat.

He had protected Sansa as he did before. Shae never cared about that once. Tyrion had placed her as Sansa’s personal handmaiden not long after they arrived in King’s Landing because Shae was bored. But he also charged her to keep an eye on Sansa, to prevent anything bad from happening to her. Shae didn’t complain. She liked the girl. Sansa reminded Shae of herself when she was her age. She had lost everything and everyone she loved. She had become her confident and worked closely with Tyrion to prevent Joffrey from hurting her. Shae felt useful during this period. She was doing something good, something else than fucking a man who paid her.

Then, one day, Tyrion came to see Sansa. He asked to speak to her alone, something Shae couldn’t understand. She voiced her protests loudly and refused to leave, something Sansa granted her. Then Tyrion spoke and she learned the crushing truth: they would marry. Not me and Tyrion. Sansa and Tyrion. It was a good thing Sansa was shocked as well as she was, or else the girl could have discovered there was something between Shae and Tyrion. She couldn’t believe it. Yet it was true, the wedding of this day was proof enough now. That wasn’t supposed to be like this. She and her lion were supposed to be together. Tyrion was hers. And Shae was his. They had said it to each other not long before the Battle of Blackwater. Shae could never forget that night.

She was waiting in the Tower of the Hand. Tyrion lived here at this time, before his father kicked him out when he came back. She had liked to sleep with Tyrion in the Hand’s bed. It gave her the impression to wield some power. And these nights with him… they were wonderful. When she met Tyrion for the first time she wasn’t really sure what to expect from him. She was a camp follower back then, serving some knight in Tywin Lannister’s army. She couldn’t even remember his name. Then one day she heard the son of Lord Tywin (the second one, the one they called the Imp, not the
first and handsome one Shae spotted briefly at the beginning of the campaign) had arrived with three thousand hill tribesmen from the Vale of Arryn. Shae didn’t pay much attention to this first. But then, a few days later, as they neared the Green Fork, some sellsword approached her while she was washing the knight’s clothes. They began to chat about all and everything. Shae liked this one. Then he declared she would be very fitting. Shae refused first. He was a sellsword and, even though he seemed quite funny and of good company, she couldn’t accept. He would never offer her more than her knight. But that wasn’t for him he wanted her. It was for the lord he served: Tyrion Lannister. Shae had been dumbfounded then. She had heard a lot of rumors about the Imp, some horrible, some very funny. What would await her with him? Though, it seemed to be a reasonable risk to take. He was the son of Tywin Lannister, the richest men in the Seven Kingdoms. She would be paid at least ten times what she was right now. That could even be her chance to leave whoring after some time. She had dropped the wet clothes and followed Bronn to Tyrion’s tent. And when the knight tried to stop her, Bronn broke his arm.

Shae had awaited in Tyrion’s tent for some time. The tent was comfortable and richly decorated. Many objects were made of gold and furs covered the ground. When Tyrion arrived he wasn’t exactly what Shae expected. Rumors said he was very ugly. Instead she met a dwarf with silver hair and green eyes, about half her height. She guessed he could be considered quite handsome for a dwarf. He seemed in some bad mood, but sober. Quite the opposite of the drunken whoremonger everyone described. Though he began to drink as soon as he entered. It wasn’t difficult to decide whether or not to enter his service. He seemed to like her with her act of the mysterious foreign beauty, not inclined to mistreat her. She had safety for the time she would spend with him and more gold than she could hope to spend during her entire life at the end of this time. A Lannister always pays his debts. Shae didn’t think ill of him then. He didn’t mistreat her, even seemed to care for her. He wasn’t the best man she spent time with and was far from the worse. Though she admitted he was surely the best halfman she even encountered. She managed to learn more about him. That was a way for her to better please her clients. All men had a sad story to justify the fact they would visit whores. And Tyrion had one Shae never expected. She had felt sorry for what happened to him and his wife, and still was now. Though she considered him stupid back then.

However, things evolved during their time in the capital. Shae understood Tyrion quite well. He wanted more than a whore to fuck him at nights. He wanted one who would act as if she loved him, who talked to him, lived with him. Shae didn’t care to act this way, Tyrion was a holy man in comparison to her father. But their mutual feelings changed with time. Not only Tyrion’s feelings toward her. Her own feelings for him began to change. First their nights were different from those she had spent with other men. Tyrion didn’t only want her to please him. He wanted to please her too. That was unusual, but Shae played her part. She acted to look as if she was subdued by him. With time she didn’t have to act anymore since he really brought her to heavens. What a change it was, considering she fucked for years only for money. She rediscovered pleasure. Second, her mission to watch over Sansa gave her a purpose and made her feel like a normal person, something she thanked him for. Third, she came to see Tyrion as a very good man and took interest in him for this reason. She didn’t try to understand him anymore for gold. She simply wanted to know him better. But she banished any idea of romance between them. Despite all of this, Shae knew she was only a whore and that Tyrion would let her go as soon as he would be bored of her. Until that night.

He rushed into the room, shouting her name. He had taken more time to come than previous nights. To spend time Shae began to read one his books. It was one of his many books on dragons, a fragment of an Unnatural History from some Septon Barth. She had learned to read a long time ago, during her time in Dorne. Men there took paramours openly and they lived with their wife and their children, so one man took her as his paramour for a time. Since Shae was lowborn and illiterate, the Dornishman allowed one his daughter to teach her to read and write. Shae had liked the little girl, almost as much as she liked Sansa, though she was much younger than the Stark girl at the time.
After a few months however, the man grew bored of her and sent her away. Shae only had enough time to let a little message in the girl’s room to say her goodbye and thank her. She never saw her again.

Tyrion had seemed panicked, as if he was afraid something bad happened to her. He had talked to her in a way he never did before. But what disconcerted Shae the most was his eyes. There was no lust in them, no desire. Shae hadn’t understood. No man had ever looked at her this way. Was it love? She couldn’t know for sure. Shae never knew what love was. Her parents denied it to her as soon as she came into the world. As always she played her act and, when he asked her, she said the words. I’m yours, and you are mine. This night Tyrion didn’t leave her like most of the others. Most of the time after they fucked, he would don his clothes and sit to read reports or books for most of the night while Shae returned to the servant’s quarters. This night they only slept together, his head wrapped into her arms. And this night, Shae thought she could be able to stay a while longer with him. Nothing more.

Then came the Battle of Blackwater. Shae feared for Tyrion during the battle, but no too much. He always managed to get himself out of trouble. And she had no time to worry about him since she had to worry about Sansa. She didn’t join the prayers, wanting all her senses alert so she may react quickly if anything happened. After the battle, she learned Tyrion was badly injured and probably close to death. It changed something in her. She worried about him as she never worried about anyone else in her life. When Sansa went to pray in the Sept, she would accompany her as always, but this time she didn’t fake her prayers. She prayed for real. For Tyrion to survive. Not to the Father and the Mother (her own gave her nothing good, why would these ones do?), but to the Warrior and the Crone. Finally Varys came to her a few days after the battle to tell her Tyrion would survive. How relieved she felt then. It still took a few days before she could finally see him. There was a big bandage that concealed half his face and when she removed it, his face looked as if it had been sliced in two pieces, then the two pieces had been put back together. He spoke to her as if she was a whore, something that never bothered her before since it was who she was. But this time it bothered her. She wasn’t here for his gold. She didn’t really know why she was there in fact. But she realized it through the discussion. She wanted to leave and start a new life somewhere. With him. But Tyrion refused to go. His only talent was to use his wits against bad people. Shae wouldn’t go without him. She belonged to him, and he belonged to her. So she said the words again. I am yours, and you are mine. This time, she meant them. And for the first time, she saw Tyrion cry. As his arms wrapped around her, for the first time, she thought she understood what love was. And felt it.

All this happened only a few months ago. And now here she was, brooding about how foolish she had been. Right now Tyrion was fucking the poor child, doing what he was only supposed to do with Shae. Shae felt so sorry for Sansa. A bit jealous too to be true, but mostly sorry. The poor girl already suffered enough, now she had to go through this. But more than everything anger was filling her. Right now her eyes were darker from anger. They both said the words to each other. And yet Tyrion said the words with another woman before dozens of people. A great beauty, as Tyrion told her once. Shae should be the one to marry him. They could avoid it. Escape to Pentos or another of the Free Cities and start anew. But no, Tyrion had to stay because of his stupid family name. Probably he also wished to fuck Sansa. He visited so many whores in his life, surely he couldn’t be satisfied only by Shae. He would come back to her, for sure, but he would also bed his wife and have children with her, while Shae would stay the whore he would fuck when he grew bored of Sansa from time to time. What a horrible and despicable little creature he was, full of lust and perversions. How Shae could be blind enough to believe he truly loved her? And fool enough to fall in love with him? She spent the night thinking about this, her thoughts turning darker and darker every hour as dawn approached. Soon, she would have to bring their breakfast to the newly weds and collect the bloodstained sheets that would prove the consummation of their marriage. Once the sheets brought to the washing room, she would go back to empty their chamber pots, then dress her
mistress, brush her hair, clip her nails and do everything so that she may be the most beautiful woman for her husband. Shae wouldn’t weep. She would be stone, act as if nothing was, show no emotion. If Tyrion wanted her to cry because he chose another woman, a child in this case, over her, he would be deceived.

Finally daylight came. Shae rose from her bed without having slept a single hour through the whole night, but she wasn’t tired at all. She went to the kitchen and took a rack of food with bread and many fruits, bringing it to Tyrion’s chamber. Tyrion and Sansa’s chamber now. Sadness began to fill her heart as she went ahead. What would she find there? The two of them wrapped in eachother’s arms. No, that was stupid. Sansa would never sleep this way, especially not with her arms around Tyrion. Unless she decided to like him. After all, he saved her and helped her more than once. She even prayed for him during the Battle of Blackwater. Sansa confessed it to Shae not long ago. She had spent all her anger during the night and now came the time for despair. But it wasn’t time. The door was only twenty feet ahead. She gained her composure again, walking straight like stone. If she had to weep or whimper, that would be later. For now, she had to show nothing could move her. She would act, as she did all her life.

When she entered, Tyrion was laying on the couch, a red blanket over him, two cushions and Sansa’s dressing gown under his head as pillow. Probably he went to sleep there after he satisfied his urges on Sansa. The girl was sleeping in the bed on the other side of the room. She awoke and raised when Shae entered the room, while Tyrion barely stirred and grunted. “You really ought to knock.” He was still drunk from yesterday’s wine.

“I brought your breakfeast,” Shae said dully while she unceremoniously pulled away the gown, letting Tyrion’s head fall abruptly on the head of the couch. Surely it would help him to wake up. As she helped Sansa to slip on the dressing gown, she shot a glance at Tyrion. Now he was sitting, looking back at her. Resolved to show him nothing of her true feelings, she turned her back to him and went to collect the sheets. The damn bloody sheets. Though when she pulled the upper ones, the only color she saw was white. Something was wrong. Sansa was a virgin. She should have bled. Unless…

Shae looked back at Tyrion with a questioning gaze. With an imperceptible movement of his head, he told her what she wanted to know. Shae collected the sheets, then walked out of the room to the washroom. Before leaving, she sent a little smile in Tyrion’s direction. Suddenly, she felt lighter.

Things went smoothly afterwards. She brought the clean sheets to the servants responsible of cleaning them, where the other handmaidens asked her how were the new husband and wife. All wanted details about how they were after their wedding night. Shae paid no mind to this gossiping. “Ask the sheets, they are the best placed to answer you,” she told them. Shae never got very close to the other handmaidens. She kept Sansa’s secrets as if they were her own. Then she went back to her chambers.

Tyrion wasn’t there. Sansa sat alone at the table, breaking her fast silently. Shae was a bit distraught. “Where’s Tyrion?” she asked, more to herself than to anyone. Sansa heard her however and thought the question was directed to her.

“He left soon after you came to pick up the sheets. My lord husband said he had important duties to attend as Master of Coin.”

Shae felt a sudden rage growing in her when she heard Sansa call Tyrion her “lord husband”. *He’s not your husband. He’s my lover.* But she restrained herself just in time, remembering Sansa only spoke like this because she had to and knowing the consequences if Sansa got to know the special relationship between Tyrion and her handmaiden. She went to empty the chamber pots by the
window. She wondered if someone ever received a great splash of it through the numerous times she emptied it this way. Surely once at least. Perhaps the Queen Regent herself was right under the window at this very moment.

Once she was over with this, Sansa had ended her breakfast. She didn’t eat much. The rack was almost full with untouched food. She helped Sansa to put on her purple gown, one of her favourites. Then she began to brush her hair as she sat before the boudoir. For a time, when she thought she would be marrying Loras Tyrell, Sansa ordered Shae to braid her hair in the Reach style. Shae had found Sansa so silly. She was probably the only one in the Red Keep who ignored the special tastes of Ser Loras. Nevertheless, Shae had been happy for Sansa. It was the first time since they met that Sansa had seemed really happy. At least, she would be able to leave King’s Landing. In her stead, Shae would be more than happy to trade Tyrion’s monstrous nephew for a man only interested by other men. There was much worse on the two sides of the Narrow Sea. And the Knight of Flowers was also far better than Lord Baelish. Of course all this was before she was betrothed to Tyrion. Now she had gone back to simpler braids, fashionable in the capital. Today she chose to let her hair free, hanging on the two sides of her face before her shoulders. It didn’t take long, but allowed enough time to Shae to make a little chat with her mistress.

“Is my Lady alright?”

“Yes, I’m fine. Thank you, Shae,” Sansa answered. Shae never asked personal questions to Sansa, only trivial ones. If Sansa wanted to talk about something more important, then Shae would oblige, but she never was to start it. That wasn’t her place to do that. Even Sansa could get suspicious if she allowed herself too much with her.

“I thought your husband would break his fast with you,” Shae added. That was a disguised question, to know why Tyrion was gone so quickly in the morning.

“He said he wasn’t hungry. And that in his state the food would probably leave the wrong way.”

“Did he really say it would leave the wrong way?” Shae was skeptical.

“No, he said he would vomit until the chamber pot seemed cleaner than the floor.”

Shae allowed herself a light laugh. That was the difference between Tyrion and Sansa. Tyrion would always bluntly say things as they were, while Sansa, acting like a true lady, would always find a way to state the events in some proper form. As the laugh escaped from Shae’s throat, she glimpsed in the myrish glass what could have been a timid smile on Sansa’s lips for half a second. For a moment Shae felt to tell Sansa her handmaiden was the only one who could laugh at Tyrion’s jape. But she reminded herself again and said nothing. How stupid Shae was. That wasn’t as if Sansa was about to fall in love with Tyrion only because she found one joke from him a little funny. Wasn’t it? And she couldn’t even be sure it really was a smile. It was so quick. Perhaps she imagined it. And the glass didn’t give a perfect reflection.

When she was done with her hair, Sansa went to do some needlework, as she did every day, while Shae would clean the table, then bring the food back to the kitchen. What a waste. There were still so many hungry people in the streets and the Red Keep found new ways each day to waste more. No wonder there was a riot only a few months ago. As Shae was done cleaning the table, a knock came from the door. She went to answer.

On the other side of the door stood a young woman clad in Highgarden clothes. There were more and more of them in the capital as the royal wedding approached. Soon the Reach would flood King’s Landing with their people and their food. But there was something about this one that unsettled Shae. She was about the same height than her, a few years younger (no more than eighteen
namedays surely), was very slender with green eyes and black hair braided in the same way than the other Tyrells, along with a pale skin that allowed some pale red on her cheeks. But what really troubled Shae was the way she spoke.

“Please excuse me. I am Lady Margaery Tyrell’s handmaiden. I have a message for the Lady Sansa.” She spoke with an accent and in a way Shae never heard before. Shae had travelled through all the Free Cities and visited more than a half of the Seven Kingdoms through her life. Only the Vale and the North she never went to, but even so she met people from all the Kingdoms and could tell their origins only by the way they would speak, dress or behave. But with this one she couldn’t make it out. That frustrated her. She couldn’t trust this one. She felt something wasn’t normal about her.

“Very well, give it to me. I’ll give the message to my mistress.” Shae wasn’t paranoid, but she didn’t want to take any chance with this one.

“I’m sorry, but I was told by Lady Margaery to give the message to Lady Sansa personally.” She spoke in a monotonous tone, without a hint of emotion. That reminded Shae of someone. Someone she knew too well. Sansa! She spoke the same way Sansa spoke when she donned her armor of courtesies. Why?

“Alright. If it comes from the future queen, then I have no choice.” She opened the door wide and allowed the puzzling girl to enter, watching her the whole time. Sansa rose when the handmaiden bowed before her.

“My Lady. Perhaps you remember me. I am one of Lady Margaery’s handmaidens.”

Sansa looked at her, obviously trying to remember. “Yes, I think I saw you talking with her a few days ago.”

“My name is Mira, my Lady. Mira Forrester.”

There was a shock on Sansa’s face all of a sudden. “Forrester?” she asked on an unbelieving tone.

The name sounded familiar to Shae too. She heard it somewhere, but she couldn’t recall where. She tensed, ready for everything. Why was Sansa so shocked at the name?

“My family are sworn bannermen to the Glovers of Deepwood Motte. My father and my eldest brother are riding alongside your brother.”

In a fraction of a second, Shae understood. She was a Northerner. That was why she couldn’t decide where this girl came from. The way she spoke was a mix of Reach and Northern accents, and she was wearing Reach clothing when she had the physical attributes of the North. Surely she spent a few years in Highgarden and had adopted their way of speaking, without completely erasing her northern way. Shae relaxed. No arm would come from this one. Her family was sworn to Sansa’s and honor was very powerful in the North as far as she knew. She also understood why she seemed to speak the same way Sansa did. She too had to hide under an armor of courtesies here. Though Shae wondered how a Northerner ended up in Margaery’s service.

“I remember,” Sansa said. “My father went to visit Ironrath one day. He said it was nearly as impressive as Winterfell.”

“I’m glad to hear it. I was very young back then, but I remember your father very well. He seemed to be a good man at this moment. Many in my family were very sad when they learned he was dead.”

Sansa didn’t reply immediately. “My father was a traitor.” She dressed again in her armor.
“Of course.” Shae didn’t see Mira’s facial expression since she was behind her, but there seemed to be some sadness and regrets in her voice. “I’m sorry, my Lady. I shouldn’t reminisce about the past or bring back dark memories. Lady Margaery would like to know if you wish to sew with her in the gardens. She would be very happy to spend time with you. She’s alone right now.”

“Yes, that would please me a lot. Let me only take my needlework. Wait for me outside.”

“Very well my Lady.” Mira Forrester left the room while Sansa grabbed what she needed.

“Close the door Shae,” Sansa commanded her. Shae obliged, not sure why she should close the door since her mistress would leave in a minute.

“I’m probably going to spend most of the day with Margaery, so take time for yourself once your work is done.” Sansa walked to the door, then stopped as she reached for the doorknob. She turned back to Shae. “You may eat the food Shae.”

The two girls exchanged smiles as Sansa left the room. That was Shae’s favourite part of her work as handmaiden. When Sansa wouldn’t be hungry, sometimes she would allow her to eat the good food destined for her, as long as other handmaidens weren’t around. As Shae began to fill her stomach with good bread and delicious fruits, she told herself this day was going to be beautiful finally. The only thing that missed to make it perfect would be a private moment with Tyrion.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Margaery POV. The first chapter with entire original content.
Margaery I

Chapter Notes

My longest chapter up to now. 
And the first one that is entirely original. No content from the show.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

MARGAERY I

Margaery Tyrell was sitting in a comfortable chair in a corner of the Red Keep gardens. She was wearing one of her lightweight gown that displayed all her back and half her shoulders. King’s Landing may be colder than Highgarden, but winter wasn’t yet here and climate was still warm. And Margaery liked to say Tyrell blood runs warm. She looked at Blackwater Bay, where shipwrecks from the battle could still be seen. The work from Sansa’s husband. She had sent Mira to fetch the new Lady Lannister. They would be there in a very short time. Margaery had a lot of questions for the Stark girl.

While she waited, Margaery’s thoughts went to her handmaiden. She couldn’t express how lucky she was to have Mira into her service. Margaery didn’t really know what to think of her when she arrived in Highgarden three years ago. Her clothes, her accent, her behaviour, everything put her aside from the others. But Margaery had welcomed her with open arms as she did with everyone. Mira was all alone, she knew no one in Highgarden, so Margaery decided to take her at her personal service. She taught her everything about the Reach usages and, very soon, Mira made herself a very good place in her family household. She even passed the test to stand an entire supper with Margaery’s grandmother without losing her composure a single time. The Lady Olenna had told her granddaughter then she should never let this one leave her service. She said she would be very useful. And she was.

Mira adapted very quickly to the world of the Reach. She adopted their clothes, their lifestyle, even their accent (mostly). She became a very good friend of Margaery’s favourite handmaiden, Sera. She shared the same pleasures than the other girls, though in a less extreme way. She would drink wine, but never get drunk. Eat at feasts, but never more than she could. Talk with very charming boys and men, without withdrawing a single time with one of them. Laugh with the others, but always lower. She dressed beautifully, but simply. Margaery’s cousins and other handmaidens tried more than once to bring to do some dirty things, but never succeeded. And no one could laugh of Mira without getting a reply that would bring the others to laugh at him even more. And her replies were always diplomatic and well placed. A true example of righteousness in Highgarden.

But that wasn’t why Mira became in time Margaery’s favourite handmaiden and friend. Mira was sociable, yet discrete, so Margaery began to confide her some of her thoughts and secrets. Mira proved to be very attentive to her, but also a very great help. She was intelligent, cunning, and resourceful, though not many people could see it. But what surprised Margaery was her entire loyalty toward her new mistress as soon as she entered her service. Mira would never do or say anything against her. She would prefer to shame herself instead of betraying Margaery, even for the most insignificant things. Mira called it “honor”, something Margery didn’t entirely understood. But no matter, Mira had been someone who Margaery could always count on. That was very strange for a person as intelligent as Mira. She would prefer to put her cunning and her skills at Margaery’s
service instead of her own service. Mira didn’t even seem to have personal ambition. She could be so much more than what she was, but didn’t seem to bother about it. She looked happy to be Margaery’s handmaiden and did her duty better than anyone else. The young woman could entrust her northern servant with everything. And right now she would bring her Sansa.

As she thought the latter, Margaery saw the two northern girls walking in her direction. Mira was carrying Sansa’s needlework materials while they quietly spoke. Mira never asked to be presented to Sansa, since she never asked anything. But Margaery thought her friend would be happy to have the opportunity to speak with the sister of her liege lord and it seemed she was right. Both of them were smiling timidly. As both reached Margaery’s corner, Mira made an imperceptible bow with her head and put Sansa’s work next to an empty chair.

“You may leave us Mira. I’m sure you have more interesting things to do than listening to two ladies gossiping.” Mira gave a thin smile. She didn’t enjoy very much woman’s talk, though she participated to it from time to time.

“Very well, my Lady. I’ll go back to my chambers. Lady Sansa. Lady Margaery.” She turned her heels and walked in the direction of the Red Keep, probably going to read some book. Or writing a letter to her family. She wrote a lot of them these days. No wonder, considering Robb Stark was losing the war and her father and eldest brother were fighting alongside the young wolf. She had many reasons to be worried about them. Margaery hoped the fate of Sansa’s family didn’t await Mira’s one.

Margaery turned her attention to Sansa. “Would you take a seat Sansa?” The girl seemed confused.

“Yes, Your Grace,” she replied. She still called Margaery by her future title. She sat and took her needlework.

“How many times must I recall you to call me Margaery. I’m not yet the queen, and when I’ll be we’ll be part of the same family.”

“Sorry, Margaery, I forgot.”

Sansa didn’t look happy, yet she didn’t look sad either. Margaery guessed that was a good sign. Sansa felt so desperate after she learned she was betrothed to Lord Tyrion. Perhaps now she saw some good side to her new situation. Margaery had to admit if she had the choice, she would rather wed Lord Tyrion than Joffrey if the two possibilities allowed her the same amount of power. She was to marry Joffrey in order to be queen, nothing else. She wondered what it would be to make love to a dwarf. She had to ask questions to Sansa.

“How do you feel, Sansa?” she asked.

“I’m alright.” She said no more. Margaery would have to be patient in order to get some details. Sansa visibly didn’t want to talk very much.

“Thank you for coming. I needed some company here.”

“Where are all the other ladies of Highgarden?”

“Mostly preparing the royal wedding. I had need of a rest from it. How difficult it is to prepare such a ceremony. My grandmother finds a way every day to make it even more complicated. I begin to envy your own wedding.”

Sansa didn’t answer. She turned her attention to her needlework. That would be more difficult than Margaery believed. What could have happened? Was she so traumatized about her wedding night.
The soft way wouldn’t do. Margaery decided to take the direct approach.

“Come on, Sansa. Tell me about your wedding night.” Margaery asked kindly but firmly.

Sansa stopped her work, but kept her eyes down. “I don’t want to talk about it Margaery.”

“Why? Did something wrong happen? If it is because it hurt, you don’t have to worry, it’s always like that the first time. With time it gets quite pleasant and—”

“I know that very well! I had a septa to teach me these things,” Sansa said, exasperated. She finally looked back to Margaery.

The Tyrell girl made a little pause before asking again. “Did he hurt you?”

“No, he didn’t. He was kind with me.” Sansa’s voice softened.

“Very well. There is no problem in this case. So, tell me how it went. What did he do?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

Margaery remembered the time Mira told her that sexual relationships wasn’t a subject lightly addressed in her family. Could it be the same in Sansa’s family? Sansa never looked comfortable when Margaery got into this kind of discussion.

“Is there something wrong to talk about these things?” Margaery asked.

Sansa seemed to struggle to find a convenient answer. “Well, we never talked about it very much at Winterfell. And when we did, it was always seriously, not in public, and… we always talked about it….” Sansa didn’t seem able to finish her sentence.

“Properly?” Margaery suggested. Sansa nodded to confirm. “I’m sorry Sansa. In Highgarden I talk about it without any problem with my family and my friends. There’s nothing incongruous about it. And you’ll have to talk about it to someone one day or another. Why not me? We are friends, remember.”

“Just like the rest of your family were my friends when I was betrothed to your brother? Their friendship proved to be quite frail after I was betrothed to Lord Tyrion.”

Sansa talked on a reproachful tone. That was Margaery’s turn to lower her eyes. She knew all too well what Sansa was talking about. When her grandmother decided to design a plot to marry her brother to Sansa, Margaery had been very happy. She always wanted to have a sister but never got one. She had her cousins, Sera and Mira, but even though they were good and close friends, they were still only friends. If Sansa married her brother, it would make of her a sister for Margaery. She liked Sansa, even though she was about four years younger than Margaery. And Sansa had suffered enough in Joffrey’s hand, Margaery wanted to help her. They were women in a world dominated by men, so they had to stand together. Margaery was very happy about the excitement in Sansa’s eyes when she announced her she would arrange a marriage between her and Loras once she would be queen, though it had a bitter taste since Sansa didn’t know about Loras preferences. She would never find love with him, yet she anticipated a perfect life with Margaery’s brother. At least she would leave the capital and escape Joffrey forever. And Margaery would have a sister.

But then, the Lannisters discovered the truth and disrupted their plans, betrothing and marrying Sansa to Lord Tyrion and betrothing Loras to the Queen Regent. The second arrangement required a threat to name Loras in the Kingsguard, which would have deprived her parents from their sole male heir. They had no choice. Afterwards, the Tyrells stopped to spend time with Sansa. She was no more one
of them. Her lessons on the harp with Leonette, the gossiping with Janna, the stories with Merry, the needlework with Elinor, Alla and Megga, the discussion over lemon cakes, the singing in the sept… Everything ended. Everything but Margaery’s friendship. Margaery couldn’t really blame her cousins. They had seen Sansa as a future Tyrell and Tyrells stood together, that was why they had welcomed her. Margaery was very sad when she learned she and Sansa wouldn’t be sisters. That was so cruel. Especially for Sansa. But she wouldn’t abandon her. The girl was alone. Margaery couldn’t bring herself to leave her without defense in the lion’s den. So she tried to make see the good of her situation to Sansa, to make her understand it was an opportunity for her, that Tyrion was far from the worse Lannister and had many qualities. She remained Sansa’s friend despite her family’s disinterest toward her. That was important for her. Especially since Sansa was an even more important piece in the game of thrones with her marriage.

“I’m sorry about the way my kin reacted to your betrothal Sansa, sincerely.” Margaery was more than sincere in this moment. “I’m not like the rest of my family. I’m still your friend. Else I wouldn’t have invited you to sew with me on this morning. I wouldn’t have left my kinsfolk when I enjoy so much my time with them to spend time alone with you. And I wouldn’t have been with you after the news of your betrothal came, trying to explain you it was far from the worse that could happen in your situation and that you might even enjoy your marriage. Even more than a marriage with my brother.”

Margaery believed everything she said. And she knew Sansa would know it. She had spoken with a firm but kind voice. Sansa suddenly looked ashamed. “I’m sorry, Margaery. You’re not the one I should complain to. You’re right. You are one of the only true friends I have here.” Sansa looked at Margaery directly in the eyes, her own beautiful blue eyes full of sadness. Margaery felt a lot of pity for the girl in that moment. “It’s just that everyone only seems to look after my friendship when they have something to gain from it. And once they have it or realize they cannot have it, they abandon me and act as if I never existed.”

“I am your friend, Sansa. And I will always be your friend, whatever happens.” Always. Sansa’s eyes were filled with tears. Margaery perched on the extremity of her chair and gave a big hug to her friend.

“Thank you,” Sansa said weakly. They stayed in this position a few minutes for Sansa to gain back her composure.

“So,” began Margaery as they broke their embrace, “what happened last night? If you say he was kind with you, that he didn’t mistreat you, why are you so reluctant to tell how it went between you two? There’s nothing shameful about speaking of these things with another person. This is part of a normal life.” Margaery used the moment to bring Sansa to speak about her time with Tyrion.

“You don’t understand, Margaery.” Sansa stopped, still hesitant. “It’s not that I fear speaking of it. The problem is… I have nothing to say.” Nothing to say? What does she mean? There are always a lot of things to tell about a wedding night. “We did nothing. There was no bedding. He didn’t bed me.” Sansa said the last two sentences very quickly, as if she was afraid to say it too slowly.

That made quite a shock to Lady Margaery. She stayed unmoving for a very long time, trying to assimilate what she just heard. “He didn’t… bed you?” she asked, unbelieving. How was that possible? “Was he so much drunk?” Margaery could hardly believe it. She saw many drunken men through her life and knew their behaviour when they were in such a state. Lord Tyrion had acted drunk during the whole feast, drinking more than anyone could believe a man of his size could. Calling himself the god of tits and wine in front of his own father. That memory from yesterday nearly brought a smile to Lady Margaery. But the way he behaved when he threatened Joffrey, that was no drunken action. Drunken men would search the battle without really wishing for it, boast
about their greatest talents in a way that would make everyone doubt them, say incomprehensible things that only themselves seemed to understand, laugh at things they were the only ones to find funny,… but they would never threaten someone the way Lord Tyrion did. Margaery had seen the anger on his face, he was really serious. She suspected his laughs and rude language that followed were only a way to look drunker than he really was, a way to get out with his head still attached to his body. Afterwards Margaery had thought that could even be some chivalrous attempt to dispense the humiliation of a bedding ceremony to his wife. A very risky attempt, but a chivalrous one nonetheless. With what Sansa told her now, that made no sense. Could a dwarf act differently from the other people when he was drunk?

“No,” Sansa answered. “Well, I mean yes, he was drunk, but that wasn’t the reason. I began to disrobe and then, he stopped me. He… he told me… he wouldn’t share my bed as long as I didn’t want him to.”

If Sansa’s revelation about her non consummated marriage surprised Margaery, this one made her wondered if it was possible for her father to be the most intelligent man in the Seven Kingdoms after all. A man, widely known as one of the greatest whoremonger of the Realm, refused to bed Sansa Stark without her approval? What was going on in this stinking city? The impossible seemed to be only unlikely here.

“You can’t be serious,” Margaery gabbled. It was probably the first time in years since she had done so.

“I assure you, it’s the truth.” Sansa never looked as serious as now. “He went to sleep on a couch and left me alone for the whole night.”

Margaery still had a great deal in finding back her composure. What could that mean? Why did Lord Tyrion act this way? “How did he look when he told you this?” She needed every detail she could gather. She had to understand that. She had to understand why a man would refuse to bed his lovely wife when he had every right to do it in every possible way.

“Well, I would say he looked… sad… and ashamed. He wouldn’t even look at me, as if he was afraid to see me. He looked even more uneasy than me sometimes. And…” Sansa let her last sentence unfinished.

“And?” Margaery needed to know.

Suddenly Sansa giggled. Alright, things are really weird today. Weirder than anyone could imagine. “What’s so funny Sansa?”

It took a few seconds for Sansa to stop laughing. When she did, she still had some difficulties to articulate her sentences. “It’s just… something he told me… last night. He told me his father ordered him to consummate the marriage. When he stopped me from disrobing, he said…” Sansa cleared her throat. “He said that if his father wanted someone to get fucked, he knew where he could start.” Sansa started laughing again. It took a few seconds for Margaery in her state to understand what Sansa just told her, but when she did she burst into laughers just like her. Margaery suddenly wished she had been there to hear it. The son of the proud Tywin Lannister saying his father could go and get himself fucked. And to hear Sansa using such a language, even only to repeat someone else’s words, it was enough to make her month. They needed some time to gain their composure again. When they did Margaery had a theory why Lord Tyrion didn’t consummate the marriage.

“Perhaps that’s why he let you the choice.”

“What do you mean?” Sansa replied, her face still red from the laughs.
“Perhaps he simply wanted to disobey his father. I don’t know much about the dynamics between the Lannisters, but I know Lord Tywin doesn’t have very good relationships with his children, especially his youngest son. The proof is he gave him no recognition for his decisive role in the Battle of Blackwater. He even stripped him from all his powers and named him at the less desirable office on the small council. Perhaps Lord Tyrion was simply tired of receiving orders from his father. That plus the fact he respects you.”

“Respect me?” Sansa didn’t look quite sure of what Margaery was implying.

“Look, you told me he never mistreated you. I also heard a certain story about the Hand of the King calling the King a half-wit for beating an innocent girl before the whole court. And how he helped her to get back on her feet after that.” Sansa looked away. Perhaps Margaery shouldn’t have mentioned this. These were bad memories for her friend. She continued nonetheless. “Perhaps he’s fond of you and doesn’t want to cause more suffering than what his family already inflicted on you.”

“You think he’s fond of me?” Sansa still didn’t seem quite convinced.

“That wouldn’t surprise me.”

For a moment Margaery was close to being jealous of Sansa’s situation. She would like to have such a husband. Up to now, she had been married to a man who wasn’t interested in women, and now she was betrothed to a monster. She would be able to control him, sure, but she would never love him. And Joffrey would never love her. A chance. As long as she would distract him, act with him as if he was a king, she would control him. Margaery abandoned any wish for love very soon in her life. Her grandmother made her understand that love was beautiful, yes, but it could also be dangerous and cloud her judgement. If she was to find her place in the world, Margaery would have to ban such thoughts from her life. Anyway, marriages in nobility seldom were out of love, and the few ones who were didn’t prove any better than those made from interest. So Margaery forgot about it. She accepted she would never love a man in a way that would consume her and make her forget who she was. Instead, she had to use the love, or at least the attraction, men could feel for her to prevent them from crushing her. She would manage to be someone this way.

However, Margaery had found it very drastic to eradicate any form of love from her life. She kept the love for her family, as her grandmother did. But that wasn’t enough. She needed more. So she made good friends. People she could love in a non passionate way and whose death or misery wouldn’t break her. But she also decided to get close to the people, the smallfolk. She decided to help them. They would be the ones she would love unconditionally. She would care for them, walk among them, be a lady that would know them instead of staying hidden behind the four walls of a castle, singing and sewing and eating while her own people would live in misery. Her cousins didn’t entirely share her interest for the common people, but supported her and followed her, good friends as they were. Mira was among the few who shared Margaery’s concern for the smallfolk with all their heart and worked tirelessly to ease their sufferings. That was how Margaery became who she was. An ambitious woman whose final objective was to be queen (she held that from her grandmother), the most powerful woman in the Seven Kingdoms, but a queen that would win her title and keep it with sweet words, soft manipulation, friendship and love for the people (that last part came from her mother, the Lady Alerie). A queen everyone wanted. Highborn, intelligent, lovely, appreciated by the noblemen, loved by the smallfolk, good to everyone. A queen that would rule with love, that wouldn’t need fear for people to follow her, because they would want to follow her. And if rebellions threatened to appear, she would have the power of her family to protect her and bring back the peace everyone prayed for.

All this however left a bitter taste for Margaery. She had sacrificed the most beautiful feeling humans were capable of in order to reach her ambitions. She would love people (her father, her mother, her
brother, Mira, Sera, her numerous cousins, Sansa, perhaps Tommen, Joffrey’s brother, who was so kind), but she would never truly love someone. That thought made her sad. Though she didn’t regret her choice. Sansa didn’t make that choice in time, and she suffered from that. Perhaps if she had been engaged with Lord Tyrion before, she would have been able to find true happiness. Instead, she was betrothed to Joffrey, and now half her family were dead, and the other half would follow them very soon. Margaery wanted Sansa to be happy. Her husband seemed to be a good man, even more from what Margaery just learned. Sansa had a chance so few women had in the world: to find true love. Margaery felt obligated to help, for all the suffering the Stark girl had endured, and for herself. She wanted someone to have the life she refused to live a long time ago. And though Sansa was no longer betrothed to Loras, she still was a valuable piece in the politics of Westeros. She didn’t realize it, but she had the opportunity to become even more powerful than Margaery in time. Through her rights over the North once her brother would be dead, and through her husband. Sansa could have power and love at the same time, something many women would kill for. And that was why Margaery wanted to, and needed to have Sansa as a friend and an ally. But first, for that, she had to help Sansa realize the role she could play. It was time to make their meeting fruitful.

Margaery allowed a few moments to pass. Sansa was deep in her thoughts. “Perhaps you should also start to consider the opportunities this marriage may open for you.”

“What opportunities? I am a prisoner just as I was before. My husband himself told me before the wedding that to be his wife was some kind of prison.”

“Yes, it is,” Margaery conceded. “I will be some sort of a prisoner as well as soon as I’ll be married to Joffrey. Marriage is for life, so every marriage is some kind of prison. But we can manage to gain the trust and love of our gaoler so he may let us walk as freely as if he didn’t exist. And in your case, you seem to have fallen upon one that leaves the door of your cell along with most of the other doors of your prison open, if not all doors.”

“Not all doors. The exit of the prison is still sealed, and will always be,” Sansa said mournfully.

“Yes, you’re right. But still, you have more freedom than most of the women here in the Red Keep. Along with the possibility to hold much influence.”

“How can I hold any influence?” Sansa didn’t believe Margaery. She would have to explain it very carefully.

“How many children does Lord Tywin Lannister have?” The question seemed to surprise Sansa. It probably looked like a sudden change of topic in her eyes.

“He has three children. The Kingslayer, the Queen Regent, and my husband.” She said it as if it was obvious, which was.

“And who is Lord Tywin’s eldest son?”

“It’s Ser Jaime.” Sansa looked annoyed by Margaery’s questions. She didn’t realize where Margaery was leading her.

“Quite right. And Ser Jaime is either dead or lost somewhere in the Riverlands. And even if he succeeds in returning to the capital, he is the Commander of the Kingsguard. He vowed to take no lands and no wife, to hold no castle, and to father no children.” The last vow he may not have respected it though. “As for the Cersei, she is a woman. And Lord Tywin Lannister is the Lord of Casterly Rock and the Warden of the West. So when Tywin Lannister will die…”

Margaery let Sansa finished her sentence. “Tyrion will be Lord of Casterly Rock.”
“And you are his wife.” Margaery concluded her explanation with five little words.

Margaery was aware Sansa knew the rules of succession. She may have come to that conclusion on her own, but she had been so desperate when she learned she was going to marry the Imp that she probably never considered this. Sansa seemed to be lost in her thoughts. Margaery had hit the right point.

“I don’t want this.” Sansa’s answer left Margaery puzzled. “His family is in war against my own. They killed my father after promising him he would be allowed to take the black if he confessed his crimes. I can’t be the Lady of House Lannister.”

“This could be your best chance Sansa,” Margaery tried to explain. “You could rule the Westerlands with your husband and prevent another war like this one to happen. Don’t turn your back right now to this.” And you could ensure your son to be the Lord of Winterfell once he comes of age. But Margaery kept the last argument for her. She didn’t want to tell Sansa something that would let her believe her brother was done. It would break her.

Sansa remained silent for a very long time. She was obviously thinking about what the southern girl just told her. Finally she spoke. “That’s not something I can consider. Not when my family is in such a situation.”

That wasn’t the answer Margaery was hoping for. This one is stubborn. I’ll have to try again later, more subtly. “Very well. This is your decision. But don’t forget what I told you. You might want to consider it one day.”

“I won’t forget.” That was a small victory at least. The future queen would need it later. Sansa’s friendship could prove vital when the time would come, but even more if she decided to be more than a submissive wolf among lions.

“Let’s talk about something else now. Something not boring. You met my friend Mira. Did you get along with her?”

They spent the rest of the morning and most of the afternoon talking about everything and everyone while sewing. Colors returned to Sansa’s face and a smile found his way back to her lips. They spoke about Margaery’s cousins and handmaidens, the gossips of the Red Keep’s society, the weather, their needlework, the upcoming royal wedding (though Margaery didn’t talk about it very long, she was tired to hear about it all the time), the state of the city, the food that filled the markets again, and a rumour about some squire who managed to leave a brothel without paying for his time with three girls.

Chapter End Notes

I hope I depicted Margaery well enough.

Please review

Next chapter, Tyrion is back.
Chapter Notes

Tyrion is back, and he has a lot of thoughts in his big head.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

TYRION II

The numbers scrambled into the head of Tyrion Lannister, and that was a lot to say since his head was bigger than most. Did Littlefinger really find his way into his ledgers? They were written in such a way it was difficult to find the origin of an income and the reason of an expenditure. And the fact Baelish always wanted money to work instead of being buried in some chest made the task even more difficult for Tyrion since it made the writings even more complex.

Tyrion was no idiot in matters of money to be true. He told his father when he named him at the post that a whole life of outrageous wealth didn’t teach him much about managing money. It was true Tyrion could spend as he wanted since his father always gave him all the money he wanted. Tywin Lannister lacked generosity towards his children for everything but money. However, Tyrion was probably the only one among his father’s children who could hold the office of Master of Coin. Cersei would probably bring the realm to bankruptcy in a week after her nomination at such a post, if not worse, and Jaime would never do the work, books bored him to death. Tyrion, on the other hand, got a solid formation in finances from Maester Creylen at Casterly Rock in his youth. Since the Lannisters were so rich, they needed to be more than simple lords who ruled their subjects. They had to be bankers, investors, businessmen, even merchants from time to time. More important, they had to make sure gold keep its value, or else their wealth would melt away. The contents of their secret vaults deep into the foundations of the Rock wouldn’t have so much worth then. If they extracted too much gold, its value would decrease until people wouldn’t buy any more with a golden dragon than with a silver stag or a copper coin. That was what the maesters called a devaluation. Gold only has the value people believe it has, just like power resides where men believe it resides. That wasn’t much strange wealth and power were so close in the end as they looked so much alike.

Tyrion noted more names on a sheet on his right. They were names of merchants who borrowed money from the crown and failed to repay. Not a surprise since they were dead, executed by Joffrey before the Battle of Blackwater. Many of them had been part of a conspiracy to help Stannis enter the city during the battle, but others Joffrey killed them during his first days as king when he received petitioners and decided to have anyone who claimed King Robert owed them some money declared to be lying to the king and beheaded right away. Ned Stark’s sword was never used so unjustly than this day. Though for the conspiracy, Tyrion had some responsibility in the executions. They were so close of Stannis’s attack on King’s Landing and evidences were so indisputable that he had to sign their death sentence to prevent any possible betrayal when Stannis would land.

Tyrion never liked to order an execution. Even for some butcher dog like Janos Slynt. He preferred to exile them to the Wall or help them remind their place with a little visit to the black cells. Since his visit to the Wall and the news about a dead man trying to kill Jeor Mormont reached King’s Landing, Tyrion had tried to send them more recruits. He would empty the black cells as often as possible, make announcements about the Night’s Watch recruiting in the city, and offer a royal pardon for all debts and passed crimes to everyone who wished to go to the Wall. That wasn’t much, but that was
the best he could do since they had no men to spare back then. Now they could send men, but his father wouldn’t. The pleas for help from the Night’s Watch fell into the deaf ears of Tywin Lannister who didn’t give a damn if the wildlings crossed the Wall and ravaged the North. That would mean only one more enemy for Robb Stark and Balon Greyjoy. As for the White Walkers, Lord Tywin didn’t know about them and even if he was told, he would never believe it, rational as he was. Tyron was rational and believed what he saw. But he saw it. He saw it in the eyes full of wisdom of Maester Aemon (Aemon Targaryen to be true, Tyrion knew who the man was) and in the fear of the Lord Commander’s voice. Both men were rational too, gave their life to the Night’s Watch, knew more about the things beyond the Wall than everyone else, and had common sense. If Mormont said a dead man tried to kill him in his sleep, Tyrion believed him. Mormont was as honorable as Ned Stark and he wouldn’t lie about it. But his father would never believe it and Tyrion knew best than to warn his father about White Walkers, snarks and grumkins. He would do nothing and hope for the men of the Night’s Watch to do their duty and fight for a realm that didn’t care about them. Tyron wondered if what he was doing right now had any use if the dead marched on the Wall. The real fight could be there and here he sat, serving loyally his family in order to keep an ugly and uncomfortable iron chair. His friend Jon Snow could be dead right now, or fighting against the evils of the North while Tyrion sat there peacefully, counting coppers. Tyron wondered what the lad would think about his marriage with his sister.

When Tyron was done with listing the failing debtors, he looked back at the book where he recorded all the expenses for the royal wedding. They were filling ten pages up to now and Tyrion needed to add more every day. Lady Olenna seemed to use the fact she paid half the expenses as an excuse for spending thrice more. If it continued Tyron would have to sell the Red Keep in order to pay the royal wedding. He decided to take a pause and went to fill a cup of wine. Tyrion emptied his cup, his thoughts wandered to his wedding night. He had tried his best for the whole day to not think about it, but he needed to relax from his work for a moment, so couldn’t use it to occupy his thoughts. It had been quite different from his first wedding night, if that could be called so. His first wedding night had preceded his first marriage, but had been wonderful. And the two weeks that followed had been even better. Until his father put an end to it. Though still, Tyron had been the happiest man in the world for a fortnight thanks to his brother. He didn’t hold Jaime responsible for what happened later. It was their father who gave the order. Last night had been different. He was ready to do the deed. Or at least he thought so. He knew what his father was capable of, so it would be better for Sansa if they did it before Tywin Lannister forced them to with every mean necessary. They would only have to do it once, then Tyron would wait for Sansa to be ready to do it again. There would be no way for his father afterwards to tell if they performed their duties or not. A maidenhead only broke one time. Tyron drank during the feast, hoping it may help him forget what he would have done on the morning. But Tyron would have needed a lot of wine for that. He was so accustomed that he nearly was immune to its effects. He refused the bedding ceremony, wishing at least to make the act private. That would be better for both him and Sansa. When they retreated to their chambers however, his resolve faded. First when he was remembered the age of his wife, next when she began to disrobe. She was beautiful, but that wasn’t what he saw then. Another image took the place of Sansa. Something he had done so long ago came back to his mind. Something he told nobody about, not even his brother. Only him, his father and a few guards knew about this. He couldn’t do this. She was only a child. He stopped her and promised to not share her bed as long as she didn’t want, even if that meant forever, which was very possible. Tyron would rather go celibate for the rest of his life than rape an innocent girl on his father’s orders. He still didn’t know what to make of her reaction. She was obviously very surprised. How many men refuse to bed their wife on their wedding night without their approval? But was there something else on her face then? Tyron wondered if that was relief, happiness, incomprehension, or even
disappointment. Surely not the last one, no woman would want to take him into her bed unless she was a whore he paid. Well, except Shae. She refused to be paid since the Battle of Blackwater, so practically she was a whore no longer.

As Tyrion thought about that the door opened, and Shae entered. “My lion,” she said sweetly after she closed the door.

“Shae.” She was beautiful, as always. Whatever the way Shae would dress (if she dressed at all), she was stunning. Tyrion felt his member stretch in his breeches.

“You look lonely.” She walked in his direction, reached the place where he sat, leaned to give him a long and deep kiss. Oh, her mouth. Her beautiful lips. And her tongue. How long since he had her for the last time? Probably weeks. Shae had been so distant after his betrothal to Sansa. And there was so little time they could spend together since his father came back to King’s Landing. Most of the time they would meet in the dungeons where the dragon skulls were. It was a secret place where no one ever went. No one except Tyrion because of his passion of dragons. Shae also came a few times to his rooms, though he forbade her to do so several times. She never listened. Tyrion wanted her so badly. He brought his hands to her back, where her clothes let her skin bare. The beautiful foreign girl began to unlace his breeches as she had done so many times. Tyrion remembered something then.

“Stop!” He broke their embrace and brought her hands away. “We can’t do this, not now and not here.” If someone found them…

“You don’t have to worry. Podrick is standing guard before the door, he won’t let anyone enter.” She resumed her kissing. Tyrion wanted nothing than to lose himself in her, but there was too much risk.

“Podrick won’t be able to hold my father or my sister if they come.” He broke their embrace again. “And even if he could, they would hear something and have you killed the instant they know who you are. My father never makes idle threats.”

Shae didn’t look happy. Her smile and the pleasure in her face disappeared as quickly as she had appeared in the doorstep a moment ago. She kissed Tyrion lightly and stood straight before him, crossing her arms on her breasts.

“Alright. When then?” a look of defiance on her face. It was the same way she had looked and acted toward him when he tried to explain her he had no choice to marry Sansa. “We’re going to meet in the dungeons again in the middle of the night? Dragon skulls and the floor are very hard. It’s not very pleasant to fuck on this kind of surface repeatedly.”

Her eyes were dark, as always. But for anger more than because it was their natural color right now. Tyrion hated it when she looked at him this way. He didn’t hate her for that, but he hated the fact she looked at him as if he was some pile of shit. Couldn’t she understand the difficult situation he was in and that he was trying to protect her?

“I’m not sure if that will be possible any longer,” he answered. “I think my wife is going to wonder why I leave in the middle of the night if she notices it.”

“Oh, so you’re afraid that she discovers you’re fucking her handmaiden.” I should never have mentioned Sansa. “You fear she will think ill of you if she learns you’re cheating on her.” Shae’s tone was accusing. She still believed he was interested by Sansa. Tyrion had hoped the sheets would be proof enough of the opposite.
“I’m not afraid of Sansa’s reaction if she knew about us.” Well, to be honest, he was afraid, but not for the reasons Shae believed. “Anyway she already knows all the vile rumors about me, truths and lies all alike.” She had to, everyone knew it. From the Wall to Dorne, Tyrion had acquired quite a reputation. “But if she learns, what tells us she won’t let something slip about it while she talks to Lady Margaery or another of her handmaidens? We can’t take that risk.”

“Very well. I had some time for you, but since you’re tired of fucking me, I’ll find something more interesting to do.” She left without another word, leaving Tyrion where she found him. Podrick came inside.

“Do you need anything my lord?” Always the perfect squire (well, perfect in intentions and when it came to save Tyrion’s life, in the other matters it was questionable).

“No Podrick, leave me alone.”

“Yes, my lord.” Podrick left again to stand guard before the door as Tyrion had ordered him at the beginning of the day. He gave Bronn leave for the day since he wasn’t in the mood for the bawdy comments of the sellsword about his wedding night. Tyrion went back to his ledgers. What a break it had been. He worked until sunset, then left his solar to go back to his rooms. His rooms and his wife’s now.

As he walked his thoughts wandered to Shae again. He knew why she was angry at him. Tyrion told her once she was his and he was hers, and made her say the same words. Tyrion believed these words at this moment and still believed them. Though he had to admit his marriage was posing a serious problem. He put the cloak on Sansa’s shoulders, promising to protect her. But he also said the words to Sansa, before the High Septon and dozens of people. Tyrion didn’t believe in gods since what happened to his first wife, but his vows with Sansa still meant much more than the ones he made with Shae months ago. And to be honest, Tyrion didn’t want to shame Sansa. She was already considered the daughter of a traitor (which was very doubtful) only because her father tried to do what was right in his eyes, Joffrey had her beaten and humiliated on several occasions, she was nearly raped because of his nephew’s stupidity and cruelty during the riot, and now she was married with the Imp of Casterly Rock. How would she feel if she discovered her husband was disgracing her with her personal handmaiden? Perhaps she wouldn’t care, that was not as if she loved him, cared for him or even gave him any consideration. But still, he didn’t want to take the risk. She had suffered enough. And he had to ensure Shae’s safety. That wouldn’t be easy. How would he be able to hold his vows towards his wife and the same ones towards his lover? He still loved Shae. He began to understand how Jaime had been torn apart when he had to choose between the lives of hundreds of thousand innocent people he was sworn to protect, and the life of the king he was also sworn to protect. Tyrion would have to find a solution to this problem, but right now he had none.

He finally reached his apartments and pushed the door open. Sansa was already there, watching over the balcony. She turned to face him as he entered. “My lord,” she simply greeted him.

“My lady,” Tyrion answered, trying to smile. His wife averted her eyes from him. She was still scared of him. What a perfect marriage it’s going to be. Tyrion walked to the table and poured himself a cup of wine. “Do you want some my lady?”

“No thank you my lord, I’m not thirsty.” She was still averting his gaze. Tyrion sat and started to drink. Sansa turned her back again to watch at the outside. They stayed this way for a few minutes until Shae and another servant came with the supper. It was about time. Tyrion was hungry. Wine didn’t fill stomachs quite well. Sansa left the balcony and sat as far as she could from Tyrion at the table, but not to the farthest one. The farthest one was right before Tyrion and she would have to look at him each time she would lift her eyes from her plate, so she chose a position between the
opposite side of the table and Tyrion’s left. Sunset was hitting the back of her red hair, making it shine. While she served them Shae shot angry looks at Tyrion more than once. A lover who hates me and a wife who’s afraid of me. Thank you father. The handmaidens left and they ate the main course silently, Sansa keeping her eyes down all the time. When they were done and waited for the dessert, Tyrion tried to do some talk.

“How was your day Sansa?” he asked, trying to sound casual. Probably he failed, because she looked surprised that he talked.

“Very well, my lord. I spent most of the day talking with Lady Margaery.” She barely looked at him for a second.

“It seems the Rose still has some free time. I thought she would have none with the preparations for her marriage.”

“Lady Margaery always has time for her friends.” Her tone and her refusal to look at him clearly demonstrated she didn’t wish to pursue the conversation. Tyrion didn’t insist.

Luckily, they didn’t stay in an awkward silence for long since the servants chose this time to come back with desserts. Shae wasn’t with them this time, probably attending other duties. Sansa had an exclamation of joy when she saw the lemon cakes.

“It’s been so long since I hate some.” Tyrion had sent orders to the kitchen sooner in the day to bring some for supper. Sansa’s love for lemon cakes was well known through all the Red Keep. Tyrion had noticed there were none at their wedding, which was strange, so he hoped that might cheer her a little. The effect was there, but Tyrion decided not to tell her it was his idea. She would probably lose what little enthusiasm she had if she learned it. Tyrion preferred to see her happy because of something else than him than to see her miserable because of him. The moment was short however and Sansa soon finished the three cakes she had taken. The silence lingered again as Tyrion emptied his second glass of wine and filled a third one.

“Excuse me my lord, would you allow me to leave, I would like to visit the godswood?”

She was probably afraid he would get drunk, though for today she had nothing to fear about that. “No need to ask, you may leave.” She wasn’t a prisoner, but it was useless to tell her since she wouldn’t believe it. As she reached the door, Tyrion called her. “And Sansa, my name is Tyrion. You should get used to call me this way. We’re married, whether we like it or not.” He talked gently, trying to make her understand once more he hadn’t wanted this either.

“Forgive me, my l… Tyrion.” She corrected herself just in time.

“By the way,” he continued, “I will probably not be there when you come back. I still have work to do. I’ll only come back late in the night.” This way she would be able to fall asleep without his presence.

Sansa was looking at him intently now. Tyrion couldn’t decipher her expression. Finally she left with a faint my lord. She had already forgotten.

Tyrion went to the library to continue his work for a couple hours. At the end, he found some revenues of the crown that had no explanation at all at first sight, even less than the other ones. He would have to verify it, to see if these incomes were not another Baelish’s invention, as he had found some before. But he wouldn’t do it tonight, he needed to sleep.

He walked back to his chambers and entered silently, taking off his boots before he passed the
doorstep. That wouldn’t do to wake his wife. He closed the door silently and listened to her constant breathing. She seemed to be sleeping well. Tyrion undressed himself to put on his night clothes. No need for any decency, his wife was asleep. He then extinguished the few remaining lit candles and laid down on the couch, wrapping the red blanket over himself. As he did it he realized he didn’t put it on him last night. Could it be…? No, surely he had woken up during the night to take it and didn’t remember in the drunken state he had been. Though some part of him hoped it was the other explanation that was the real one. With these thoughts Tyrion Lannister fell into a short sleep.

Chapter End Notes

For those who would like Tyrion and Sansa to fall in love immediately (especially for the HOT consummation someone is hoping so much for), I’m sorry. It is only the first day of their marriage. They need some time.

Please review

Next Chapter : Tywin POV
Chapter Notes

Another Tywin POV chapter. I like to imagine what might be going on in his head and the conflicting thoughts he must have toward Tyrion.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

TYWIN II

The council meeting was long and tedious. The discussion turned essentially around the movement of most of the Stark host to the North. His daughter laughed, calling the young wolf a coward, to which Pycelle agreed fervently.

“Your Grace couldn’t have said better. Robb Stark is flying away, he knows he cannot defeat us.”

“I wouldn’t call a young man who managed to defeat the best sword in the Seven Kingdoms with an army half his size, lost no single battle and managed to get two kingdoms to proclaim him their king a coward. If Robb Stark is heading north, it’s because he has a plan to take back the advantage in the war.” Again, the dwarf pointed the stupidity of the Queen Regent’s words. Tywin would have said the same thing. Of course, the young wolf wasn’t fleeing away. And yes, he was preparing something.

“I have to agree with the words of our Master of Coins. My little birds tell me that Robb Stark is heading to the Twins to gain the support of Walder Frey by marrying his uncle, Lord Edmure Tully, to Roslin Frey.” What Varys said wasn’t news for Tywin, but for the other members of the small council it was. Now they knew.

“No need to care about it, the Freys won’t make any difference in this conflict. If they wish to join the rebels, very well, we’ll crush them as easily as we crushed Stannis. A broken bridge would be more fitting for their sigil afterwards.” Again his daughter spoke of things she knew nothing about. She thought herself ten times more clever than she was.

“Oh, really, and how do you suggest we do it?” the dwarf asked loudly, faking curiosity.

“We only have to send all our forces against him. Robb Stark will never win against our numbers.”

“It’s obvious you never followed an army in march, dear sister. An army as big as this one would be too difficult to maintain together with the supply problems. And it couldn’t live on the country since we already ravaged and plundered everything of value in the Riverlands. Robb Stark will soon have an army of some 20,000 men under his orders. Men who followed him into battle, with experience of the war, who believe in him since he won every battle he fought up to now. If we march from the south, he will stop us at Harrenhal. If we march from the west, he will stop us at Riverrun. His men are more accustomed to the weather of the Riverlands than us and they know the country better. And he lost no battle up to now, I’m quite sure he could continue this way for quite a time. Numbers didn’t seem to matter when our brother was defeated at the Whispering Woods.”

Cersei seemed taken aback by her brother’s words, but she regained her confidence in seconds.

“Then we send two armies against him from south and west. He cannot defeat both at the same time.
And even if he did, we will send other armies until he is defeated.” Tywin sighed internally. His daughter was now trying to win the argument with anything, even the stupidest notions.

“Then Robb Stark can slow down one of the army while he marches against the other and defeat it. Then he would turn against the remaining one that advanced too much into his territory. And the survivors would be hunted down by the Brotherhood without Banner. But how could you know that? While we were fighting you hid inside the Red Keep, pretending Robb Stark was no danger since he was only a child and losing two valuable hostages. And now that the last one we had is my wife, thanks to you, we have no way to make peace with Robb Stark eventually. And if Joffrey’s armies continue to lose against the rebel, I don’t think the Tyrells will stand on our side for long. Who would want to support a king unable to win a single battle?”

A huge silence fell into the room. No one had anything to reply to this. Cersei was fuming in her corner of the table, Pycelle was silent as stone, Varys was nodding silently as the Master of Coin spoke and Tywin wanted to smirk, though he didn’t. Tyrion had put Cersei back to her place, sparing Tywin the task to do it. Tyrion’s analysis of the situation was quite right, only he didn’t know what Tywin was preparing. No one knew here, not even Varys perhaps. But Tywin had to admit the halfman was very clever when it came to discuss about strategy and politics, as Tywin learned to his displeasure at the Green Fork. If Robb could win the Freys to his cause, he would be a danger again. He could even threaten Lannisport and Casterly Rock eventually, though that would be the last threat he would make. But he would never. Tywin saw to that. Some battles are won with swords and spears, others with quills and ravens.

“How long before the Stark host reaches the Twins?” he asked Varys, centering the discussion again on matters of importance.

“Two or three weeks depending on the weather. Autumn’s rains have begun, the army’s movements are slowed.”

“Very well. We’ll deal with the Freys and Robb Stark in time.” No one said anything against his word, as usual, though Tyrion looked about to say something for a time. But he didn’t. The other matters at hand included the fighting in the Riverlands where Randyll Tarly recently took Duskendale and Gregor Clegane was chasing the remnants of the northern forces from this battle. Then came financial matters. Tywin had ordered Tyrion to supervise the repairs on the docks and the Mud Gate, damaged by the attack of Stannis Baratheon. Tyrion hadn’t been able to repel the usurper when he attacked, so it was normal that Tywin put him in charge of the repairs from this battle.

“The works on the Mud Gate are nearly finished now,” the dwarf began, “but the repairs on the docks will take more time than planned. We still have squatters who come to sleep in the ruins every night and we discovered some structures in such a poor state that we had to destroy and rebuild them all over again. It seems Robert Baratheon didn’t make sure the docks were well maintained when he was in power.”

“Never mind that, Robert is dead, his son is king now,” stated Tywin. “How long before the docks are fully operational again?”

“Three months should be enough, unless we discover more surprises, which is very likely to happen. With all that the repairs have already cost twice what we expected first.”

“Then I guess it will be your duty to find the money to pay for that,” said Cersei on a patronizing tone.

“Very well, sweet sister. I plead your help in this case to use your great influence on our king to reduce the expenses of the royal wedding.”
The subject came again. Tyrion had been complaining about the cost of the wedding for weeks. Each time they faced some unforeseen situation that required money he would bring it back on the table. Cersei took part to the preparations so she was always the target in this case. Tywin was tired too from the extravagance of this wedding. They needed it to be splendid in order to show the power of House Lannister and House Tyrell, but it became so extravagant that soon they could empty half the vaults of Casterly Rock with the cost. But it was useless to come back on the subject every time.

“You should try instead to create new revenues for the crown, as Baelish did when he was Master of Coin,” he told the little man. “We will need more incomes when winter comes.”

“Alright father, I am open to suggestions. We cannot tax farms or trade with winter that is coming, to raise a poll tax on people will cause new riots, not to mention people of King’s Landing have no money to pay for it, and workshops are too few for their imposition to make any big difference.”

Tywin sighed inwardly at the stupidity of his son. There was a type of workshop he didn’t consider to tax of course, since he was the best client of these. “In this case it seems you will have to make some levy on brothels. Surely asking their customers to pay a copper every time they go to satisfy their urges won’t be too much.”

“Brothels? That’s possible. Strange there were no taxes on them before. Perhaps because our previous Master of Coin was the biggest brothel keeper of Westeros. But people will start saying the king is taxing pleasure now.” Tyrion was talking on a mocking tone. Tywin was annoyed of this. It reminded him someone else.

“Then do it, the matter is settled. And once the docks will be fully repaired, remember that you will have to see to the reconstruction of the royal fleet. Stannis stole most of it when he fled two years ago. Everyone leaves, the meeting is over.” People began to scatter around the table. “Not you,” he said to Tyrion as he grabbed his ledger. Tyrion placed it back on the table. “Sit.” Tyrion obeyed the order, not showing any emotion except disinterest. Another thing that annoyed Tywin with him. What he was about to tell him was of great importance. The two men he sent to guard and watch Tyrion and his bride on their wedding night had done their work well. They only heard a single thing through the doors during that night, probably when Tyrion spoke louder than usual. They didn’t hear a single sound, only a sole sentence. And Tywin wasn’t pleased when the men reported him they heard his son say “If my father wants someone to get fucked I know where he can start.” He was going to remind him of his duties. A whole week had passed since the wedding.

“So, beloved father, what is the reason for this little private chat we are about to have?” Tyrion spoke in a mocking tone, something Tywin hated. Every time he did it, it brought back bad memories. He was more than galled to see these expressions on Tyrion’s face.

“I received reports that the sheets collected on yours and your wife’s bed during the last week were unusually clean and white.” Surely the halfman facing him would understand what he implied with a head big as his.

“Well, that’s not surprising. My wife is very hygienic. It’s not because she comes from the North that Sansa doesn’t know how to remain presentable.”

That was more than annoying now. “You know very well what I am talking about. It’s been days since you were married to the Lady Sansa and up to now the two of you haven’t fulfilled your duties as husband and wife. I gave you the girl so that you may serve your family and offered you an opportunity to rule the North in the name of your son in the future. And you are wasting it.”

“Excuse me, beloved father, but I never asked for the North, I never asked for Sansa, and I never asked to be advised about the way I should deal with her.”
“I’m not advising about the way you should deal with the girl. I’m ordering you to do your duty to your family. The other aspects of your married life don’t concern me. You will do your duty to your family.”

“And if I refuse?” There was defiance in Tyrion’s eyes. If only he defied people for family, but instead his defiance was against House Lannister.

“There are ways to bring you to do the deed. And if not I can very well order an annulment for your marriage.” Tywin said it in his own casual way to make people understand he wouldn’t hesitate.

“Oh, Sansa would be so happy if you did it. Sadly our High Septon doesn’t really have his head on this kind of things right now. Perhaps if he did we could send her back to her family and make peace with Robb Stark before we lose another army.”

“Robb Stark will be dealt with very soon. As I told you before the days of the young wolf are numbered.”

“And may I ask how you plan to defeat a man who crushed and captured your eldest son and fooled you at the Green Fork? He may fool you again as far as I know.”

Tyrion’s insolence was unnerving. Tywin discarded the subject. He had no reason to share his plans with his Master of Coin. “Robb Stark will be dealt with. Some battles are won with swords and spears, others with quills and ravens. As for your marriage, since there will be no annulment you would do well to perform before I choose the other option.” Tyrion looked back at him with anger in his eyes. Again Tywin saw it. Two faces from two dead people on this dwarf face. He hated it.

“Now go. And you would do well to act before I decide to wait no more.” He dismissed Tyrion this way. Tyrion’s face didn’t change as he rose from his seat and left the table. After a few steps however, he stopped and turned back to face the man who raised him.

“I’m wondering father, did you treat your wife the same way that you want me to treat mine? As a brood mare?”

*How dare you? You killed her and you dare to speak of her in my presence? You who murdered her to humiliate me and my House?* Tywin was close to explosion, even though he didn’t show it. It didn’t happen very often, but Tyrion seemed to relish to make him uncomfortable and more. He was tired of this face, of his expressions that brought back so much memory each time he saw them.

“Go.” Tywin said it on a tone that let no place to discussion. He wouldn’t give an answer to this walking embarrassment to House Lannister. Tyrion left. Tywin went back to his study. He had work to do.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Bronn POV
Welcome into Bronn's mind.

This chapter is quite short in comparison to the others, but I didn't have so much to write about Bronn. His character isn't as profound as many others. All the same, I think it's quite interesting to see things from his perspective.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The sellsword sat in front of the desk, clipping his nails as the friend who paid him so well worked on ledgers as usual. He had become very boring since he entered his new functions, complaining about debts and wedding expenses from the beginning to the end of every day. The realm really was close to bankruptcy if his words were true, though he didn’t lack money to pay Bronn. The sellsword could be reassured on that, as long as Tyrion would live, he would be handsomely paid. That, plus the fact the dwarf was very funny, was very convincing for protecting his life, which these last times wasn’t a very hard task.

Though in fact the little man was quite less funny since he learned he was to get married, something Bronn couldn’t understand. Especially when the name of the wife was Sansa Stark. Bronn would jump on the opportunity if he was offered such a match, though he knew perfectly that would never happen. His friend, on the other hand, didn’t enjoy it a single second. What a waste.

“Perhaps you could take a break,” Bronn suggested. “It’s been hours now since your eyes left these books for the last time.”

“I’m afraid for now I can’t. I must find more money for the royal wedding and I discovered a few days ago the tax on whoring isn’t to bring as much income as we thought.”

“Ah yeah, the dwarf’s penny. I was very surprised when I discovered I had to pay it two days ago. The cost of my visits to brothels will increase thanks to you.”

“It was my father’s idea, but of course I’m the one to take the blame since I introduced it under his orders. Anyway it’s only a few pennies for each pass and considering how much I pay you now, you have nothing to complain about.”

“I’m not complaining about how much you pay me. I’m complaining about how much you make me pay.”

“Very well, if I pay these few pennies for you, will you shut up?”

“On this matter? Yes. Why isn’t it bringing as much money as you thought?”

“Because it so happens that Baelish decided to invest the money of the Crown in his beginnings as Master of Coin, when chests were not yet emptied by Robert. You’ll never guess where he invested it.”
“Oh, I see. The brothels are making less money.”

“And so the Crown as a consequence,” Tyrion confirmed. Bronn wondered if it changed things to know that he could be paying for the royal wedding by visiting a brothel. Well, since he would attend the wedding as a knight, it meant he was paying for some of the food he would eat this day. “Time for a break. And a cup of wine.” Tyrion rose from his seat and came to the table where Bronn sat, pouring himself a cup of wine.

“I thought you had no time for a break,” the sellsword pointed out.

“Now I have.” The dwarf took a good swallow. “Much better.”

“Perhaps you should accompany me tonight. I paid for two girls in advance for the whole night. If I’m in a good mood, I could let you have Marei or Dancy, the one of your choice.”

“I’m a married man now. Brothels are over for me. And anyway Shae wouldn’t like it.” He said gloomily.

“Come on. Don’t tell me you’re giving up the little joys of life for her. She’s a whore. She will understand. As for your wife, you’re not bedding her, the whole city knows it now, so you shouldn’t bother about it.” A servant told Bronn the other night about it, though he already knew.

“You can keep Marei and Dancy, I’m not in the mood for them. They wouldn’t like my company.”

“They don’t need to like it, as long as they are paid. Alright, I’ll fuck them both twice, the second time for you.” They both fell into silence for some time. Finally Bronn said what he thought. “You should send for Shae tonight. Meet her in a discrete place, no need to be the dungeons. How much has it been since you had a woman for the last time?”

Tyrion seemed to consider his cup for some time, thinking. “Two months probably.” He took another gulp.

“Then you’re in need.” Bronn said it with a smirk.

“Shae is not well disposed towards me right now. I would have more chance to end up with her dagger in me than with my cock in her if I asked her.”

Bonn knew it. The girl took the news of Tyrion’s marriage very bad. She should have known it would happen one day. Bronn enjoyed Tyrion’s company, but he knew he didn’t belong to the same world than him. Shae didn’t seem to realize it. One day or another, Tyrion would have to set her aside. “She loves you too much. You should get rid of her.”

“What do you mean?” Tyrion was incredulous.

“You should send her away. Before your father or your sister finds her. And in order to bed your wife finally.”

Tyrion dropped his eyes at his cup. “Shae will never accept to leave. Every time I talk about a ship or anything that is related to leaving she accuses me of wishing she would be gone. It would be easier if she decided to leave by herself, but that’s not something I would like.”

“You don’t want to bed your wife, and Shae refuses to fuck you because you married the girl she serves. The solution to this problem is quite obvious.” Bronn liked Shae. He wouldn’t like it if she died, so Tyrion should make her leave before it was too late. Or perhaps even marry her to Bronn, the sellsword wouldn’t complain about that. But he wouldn’t. That’s what happened when you fell
in love. Bronn remembered himself to never fall in love.

“I don’t even refuse to bed my wife because of this. Well, not only because of this. Anyway, the problem isn’t Shae who refuses to fuck me. The problem is I’m not the one to seek her.”

Brons stood quite confused for a moment. Then he thought he understood. “Wait. Are you telling me she came to you and you refused her?” Tyrion made a face that indicated a positive answer. “Okay, now I really don’t understand. She came to you. Why refuse? Don’t tell me it’s because you’re married?”

This time Tyrion looked at him very seriously. Bronn couldn’t believe it. “So, you refuse to bed your wife because of Shae, and you refuse to bed Shae because of your wife.” Bronn still couldn’t believe he was saying that of Tyrion Lannister. But the way Tyrion looked at his goblet didn’t allow any doubt. “You are really the strangest halfman I have ever met.”

“Only the strangest halfman? I thought you were going to say the strangest man.”

Brons grinned. “No, you’re not, I saw too many strange men in my life. Surely one was weirdest than you. I hope you’re not really serious.” The green eyes were as serious as they ever were. Bronn sighed, discouraged. “You’re in deep shit. We have a tool between our legs and it’s not made to remain idle. It will get rusty if not used.”

“Then I’ll use my hand. And I survived a few months without using it after my father ended my first wedding, so I shall survive for now.” The Imp emptied his cup, seemingly exasperated. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I’ll try to find more money for this wedding before my father revokes me and names a Master of Coin to who he’ll give all the money he wants.”

“I’m glad my father died a long time ago.” Bronn raised just like the little man and looked at one of the books on his desk. It was no ledger for the finances, but some work from an Archmaester Adam. An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations. Only by the title the book seemed boring.

“Go to Marei and Dancy, Pod can protect me for the rest of the day,” Tyrion said suddenly. He stopped a moment before he added something. “And fuck Dancy for me.”

“I thought you were married.”

“The vows don’t forbid me from dreaming of fucking another woman. And even less to ask a friend to fuck her in my stead.”

“Oh yeah, I forgot we were friends. Very well, you’ll pay for Dancy.”

“Forget what I said. I already increased your wages a few minutes ago.”

“Then I’ll fuck them for myself.”

With a grin, Bronn left Tyrion’s solar. He was going to enjoy a very good night. Two of the best whores in King’s Landing for him and him alone. Too bad the little man didn’t follow. If he plans to go celibate for the rest of his life, he should have stayed at the Wall when he visited it. As Bronn walked outside the Red Keep, he reflected once again how lucky he was to have never fallen in love.

However, he also wondered why the little man refused to bed the Stark girl. The girl was quite a beauty, she competed with Shae and even outshined her. Tyrion admitted it was partially because of Shae, but not only that. Bronn remembered their discussion before his marriage. She is a child, the dwarf had said. That couldn’t be the reason. Tyrion was sixteen when he wed for the first time, so
there were good chances the whore had been younger. Especially since Tyrion revealed to Bronn later that the girl's maidenhead was intact when he entered her. She was probably sixteen or fifteen, considering Tyrion said he never had a girl as young as his actual wife. No, the age couldn’t be the reason. There was something else. Something Bronn couldn’t understand. Well, if his little friend refused to bed her, that wasn’t the sellsword’s problem. He was paid to kill people who bothered Tyrion, not to worry about his personal life. He reached the brothel and nothing during the whole night could remind him of his duties as sellsword.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Shae POV
Shae II

Chapter Notes

Shae returns. We see the evolution of the relationship between Tyrion and Sansa from her eyes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Shae II

The spread of food was copious, as always. And so many people were still starving outside the walls of the Red Keep. If the future queen really wanted to do so much for the poor of the city, she should order the kitchens to put less in the plates of the noble men and women who resided here. She should also abandon the idea of seventy-seven courses for her wedding. As always, Shae was in bad mood as she took the tray of food for Tyrion’s and Sansa’s supper.

It was two weeks now since they were married and Shae hated it no less to serve their meals. At least there was only one per day. There were only two times where Shae would see them together: the morning when they awoke (though most of the time Tyrion was gone to work before Sansa left her bed) and the evening for supper. This last moment, they always were together. Tyrion told her last week he had to keep an impression of common life between him and Sansa. It didn’t do much good since everyone knew now they didn’t consummate their marriage. Each morning Shae feared the moment to remove the sheets from Sansa’s bed. For now, they were white as snow. And the scarce times Shae had seen Tyrion and Sansa awake at the same time, her lover always laid on the couch. From what she glimpsed, the suppers were no moment either for Tyrion and Sansa to look a functional match. They barely spoke when Shae was present. Of course, Shae was never there for the whole meal, only when it was time bring courses and take empty dishes.

She should be happy about it. The marriage wasn’t functioning obviously. Good thing for Tyrion, in time he would surely come back to her. And yet, she always wondered what happened when she wasn’t there. Shae was a whore, so she was well aware there were ways for men to satisfy their needs with their wife without entering her. Tyrion had performed them sometimes with her. She knew it would be very unlikely, Sansa’s behavior would have shown it, but she couldn’t get this idea out of her head. The thought of Sansa and Tyrion together made her sick, angry and desperate at the same time. She couldn’t lose Tyrion. As much as she resented him for marrying the poor girl, she still loved him.

It was more difficult now to be Sansa’s handmaiden. Shae loved the girl, would give her life for her, but to serve her was hard since her marriage to the man she loved. The hardest moments was when she had her irrational thoughts that Sansa might begin to have some liking for Tyrion. That was stupid, Shae knew Sansa would never like Tyrion, even less love him, but still there were times… Sansa always talked unemotionally of her husband, calling him her husband only because she had to, but a few times Shae caught what looked like a smile or the beginning of some laughing while she talked of something funny about him. She also believed Sansa was more cautious about her appearance for dinners. These little details unnerved her and she had to remember herself each time it occurred that it wasn’t real, that Sansa only did it because she had to. The most difficult moment had been last week, when they were near the docks, playing the game of imagining what a ship was carrying and where it was going. Suddenly Sansa started to talk about her family. Shae was the only
one to who she dared to speak about them. She was worried about her brother and her mother, but also hopeful since they were close to the Twins where her uncle would marry Lord Walder Frey’s daughter. Perhaps her brother still had a chance to win the war. She seemed to believe it, or at least she wished to believe it. Shae was happy for her, of course. If her family could win, Sansa would leave King’s Landing and Tyrion. But Shae’s happiness turned sour when Sansa told her Tyrion believed her brother still had a chance to win the war.

Sansa also seemed to have accepted her situation. She still wasn’t happy about her marriage, but Shae had the impression she didn’t feel as uncomfortable with it anymore. Perhaps it was natural. Shae had come to accept her condition as a whore, so why Sansa wouldn’t get used to her marriage, especially in its actual shape. It wasn’t as if Tyrion was asking a lot from her. They only spent time together for the evening meal, and didn’t share the same bed. But that also made Shae angry. She felt that Tyrion cared about Sansa. But Shae knew Sansa would never love Tyrion, nor appreciate him. Never.

Shae was very close to their chambers now. She cleared her mind. Tyrion could feel what he wanted for Sansa (he was a man after all), but Sansa would never return these feelings in any positive way. He would come back to Shae once he would realize it, perhaps even run away with her. Shae entered the room.

Sansa was alone, practicing her needlework as she did most of the day these times. When Shae entered, she rose and greeted her warmly. “Shae! I’m glad to see you.”

“Thank you, my lady. I brought your supper.”

“Good.” Sansa sat, but didn’t touch her food. “Do you know where Tyrion is?”

As always a wave of anger spread through Shae. She didn’t know if she preferred Sansa to call Tyrion by his name or more formally. “I don’t know. I didn’t see your lord husband.” Shae didn’t like to call Tyrion this way when talking to Sansa, but she didn’t have much choice. She couldn’t call him with the pretty nickname she gave him in Sansa’s presence.

“I will wait.” Sansa was dutiful as always. She never ate before Tyrion arrived. Shae would have preferred that she started to eat right now, perhaps quick enough to be done with supper when Tyrion would arrive, but it was a hollow wish. Sansa would never do that. Her courtesies were her only defense here.

Shae stayed with Sansa as they waited for Tyrion. The waiting lasted for half an hour when finally her lion showed up.

“What took you so long?” Shae exclaimed before she could hold her words.

“Shae!” Sansa reprimanded her, as always when she spoke when she shouldn’t. “I’m sorry my lord, it’s just we’ve been waiting for a long time.”

“No offense taken.” He looked at his lover with an expression she couldn’t decipher. Was it anger? Rebuke? Forgiveness? “I’m sorry to be late, urgent business of Master of Coin. I get the impression that I’m working even more than when I was Hand of the King.” He sat at the opposite side of the table where Sansa was and felt the chicken with a finger. “You should have started without me. It’s cold now.”

“I am to wait for you, my lord,” Sansa answered. Shae was used to this type of answers now, Sansa had to do it in order to survive, but she hated to hear her speak this way to Tyrion. She would like Sansa to shout at Tyrion instead.
“First, it’s Tyrion. Second, you don’t need my permission to eat. Next time I’m late, begin without me.”

“If it pleases my lord.” Shae saw that Tyrion was exasperated by the hollow answers Sansa gave him. Good thing. Sansa turned her attention towards her. “Shae, prepare my things for the evening. It’s a little cold out there, I’ll need a warm cloak.”

Shae began to prepare Sansa’s clothes for her visit to the godswood. She took all her time. She wanted to know what really happened during supper. Both of them were first focused on their plates, not daring to talk. To Shae’s surprise, it was Sansa who finally broke the silence.

“Do you have any more news about my brother’s movements?” The question was addressed to Tyrion.

“Not really. He’s not very far from the Twins now I guess. A week or more and he will reach it. And then your uncle will get married.”

“I don’t understand why it takes them so much time. We covered this distance in two weeks when I came to King’s Landing.”

“It was still summer. Winter is coming now, your family’s words have never been so right. Autumn rains have begun and they must leave the Kingsroad after some time, so the march is slowed. They must get through a lot of mud.”

“Arya would like it.” Shae looked up at Sansa. The girl was looking at the wall on her left, remembering her time at Winterfell. A time she regretted so much, Shae knew it. “Everytime it would rain she would run outside and come back all dirty. Sometimes it was me who had to help her getting clean again. I hated it.”

A silence lingered for a few seconds, until Tyrion broke it. “I talked to your sister when we came at Winterfell.” Shae saw Sansa turn her face in Tyrion’s direction. “She asked me if I really was an imp.” Tyrion made a little smile while Sansa allowed a little giggle to escape her mouth. But she turned back serious very quickly.

“I’m sorry, my lord. My sister never learned to behave like a lady.”

“To be honest it was refreshing. Most of the people call me “Imp” because they hate me or look down at me. Your sister was only curious. There was no ill thoughts with her.”

“If I may, my lord, what did you answer her?”

“You’re allowed to ask it, Sansa. I told her I was an imp for sure, that I walked on rainbows to bring back gold sacks from the sky and that was why the Lannisters were so rich.” Another giggle went from Sansa. “Sadly, she didn’t believe me and called me a liar.”

Shae was beginning to feel excluded, and exasperated as well from hearing Tyrion and Sansa exchange japes. It was with her Tyrion should be laughing. But her thoughts were interrupted by Sansa’s voice.

“It doesn’t matter anyway. Arya is dead.” Sansa’s mood had turned dark so quickly, Shae was shocked. Sansa’s voice showed no sign of emotion. She hid again behind her armor of courtesies.

“I wouldn’t say that so quickly.”

“What do you mean?” Now Sansa seemed puzzled. That wasn’t the answer she was waiting from
Tyrion probably. Shae’s lion straightened himself.

“Well, I only talked with your sister a few minutes, but from what I saw of her while I was at Winterfell, the things your brother Jon told me when I visited the Wall and the things I learned from the people of the Red Keep, if there’s someone in your family who looked like a wolf, physically and psychologically, it was your sister. I heard that she disappeared often when she was here in King’s Landing and that people would find her dressed and messy in such a way they would mistake her for a boy from Flea Bottom. If someone could survive anywhere amongst your kin, I would bet on her. And I wouldn’t bet right now that she is dead.”

From where Shae stood, Sansa seemed to listen very closely to what Tyrion was saying. “Do you think she’s alive?” There was hope and uncertainty in her voice.

“I think she could be.” Shae didn’t like it. Her lion was looking at his wife with the same sincere eyes he had for her so often.

One of the other handmaidens entered suddenly the room with the dessert plates. After a moment, Sansa turned to Shae, a reproachful look on her face. “Shae, you should help.” The lorathi woman muttered a quick apology and went to take the empty plates from the table. Without realizing it, Shae had stood still, not finishing the task Sansa gave her. She had been immersed by Tyrion and Sansa’s conversation. She brought back the dirty dishes with the other servant who needed help. After she closed the door behind her, she heard Sansa and Tyrion talking again, though she couldn’t understand what they were saying. She went to the kitchens hands full, then came back empty handed with the other servant. When they entered, Tyrion and Sansa were done with the sweet. The other handmaiden took charge alone to bring back the dishes.

“You know,” Tyrion was saying as she entered the room, “I could write to Castleblack and ask for some news from your brother.”

Sansa hesitated, but gave an answer nonetheless. “Jon? I don’t think it would be appropriate. The members of my family are traitors.”

Tyrion sighed loudly. “The Night’s Watch takes no part in the realm’s quarrels. And anyway, your brother is not even a Stark officially, he’s a Snow.”

“I thank you, but no. I was never very close to him anyway.” Shae could perceive regrets in Sansa’s voice.

“All right. But if you ever want, you only have to ask.” Tyrion raised from his seat and went to the couch where he sat, taking one of his books at the same time.

“Are you going to work lately again?”

“No, if I cast my eyes again on these ledgers tonight my head might explode. And with its side that would make a huge explosion.” Shae perceived again a little laugh that Sansa let escape. She hated it. “I’m probably going to read the whole night to relax. And perhaps my books will teach me something that might help me to pay for the royal wedding.”

“What are you reading?” Now was irritated that Sansa faked interest in Tyrion’s reading.

“The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money by Archmaester Maynard. I don’t think you would like it, there are no knights or ladies in distress or charming princes in this.”

“I don’t believe in it anymore.” Again Sansa’s voice as bitter. “Shae, bring my cloak. I would like you to accompany me tonight.” After she was covered, Sansa went to the door. But before she left,
she said “Good night Tyrion.” As she left with her mistress, Shae saw a stunned look on Tyrion’s face. That was probably the first time Sansa called him by his name when he didn’t ask her to. That made Shae furious.

They kept silent as they wandered through the corridors of the Red Keep until they finally reached the godswood. There Sansa suddenly asked a question. “What do you think of him? Tyrion I mean.”

Shae had a hard time to not answer too roughly. “I don’t know my lady. He’s a dwarf.” It felt good to call him this way.

“Yes I know, but still, that’s not really what bothers me the most. He’s a Lannister but… I don’t know. He looks different from the rest of his family.”

Shae knew what Sansa was talking about. The other Lannisters Shae met were horrible. The times Tyrion talked about his family, the only good words he had were for his brother, who Shae didn’t know, and his two dead uncles. His father was a ruthless and cruel man who would hang her if he discovered she was Tyrion’s lover, his sister a lying bitch and a whore in all but name, his cousin Lancel an arrogant ass-kisser, his remaining uncle a man whose ideas were always the same than his brother. Tyrion also had several other cousins and an aunt whom he didn’t talk a lot about. Shae knew he appreciated a lot the bastard daughter of his uncle Gerion. He once told Shae she would love her. But Shae doubted she would ever meet the girl.

“Don’t trust anybody. Life is safer that way.” That was what she told Sansa after the riot. It seemed so long ago now. So much had happened since.

“Tyrion refused to leave with her and married the girl who Shae emptied the chamber pot. Gods were cruel if they existed, and so Shae had no intention to pray to them. And yet, if they were cruel, perhaps they would grant her something. Shae had nothing to lose. So in her head she said a prayer to the old gods, as unbelieving as she was.

**Make the marriage between Tyrion and Sansa a disaster. They don’t belong together. I don’t care if you make him come back to me afterwards. I will take care of that myself. Destroy anything that could exist between them and make sure Sansa hates him. She must not love him.**

With everything that happened this evening, Shae feared Sansa may begin to appreciate Tyrion, then like him, and finally fall in love with him. As Shae did before. She wouldn’t let that happen. Tyrion was hers. And she was his.
Please review

Next chapter: Sansa POV (she is back)
Sansa II

Chapter Notes

So, Sansa is back. I enjoyed very much to write this one.

And Varys is in it, playing a role that was undertook by a character in the books who doesn't appear in the show. Too bad, I liked this guy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

SANSA II

It was a beautiful day. Sansa had put on a simple but gorgeous gown, one that was grey, the color of her family. Shae was brushing her hair, braiding it in the northern way so that it may all fall behind her shoulders. Sansa was looking at her reflection in the glass, hoping it would show nothing inappropriate. She didn’t want to look bad in any way for today.

As Shae took care of her hair, Sansa’s mind wandered to the last month. Her first month of marriage. If it could be called a marriage. She guessed it was, even though it lacked a lot of things she believed a marriage should be made of. She remembered how desperate she was when Tyrion announced they were going to marry. Tyrion’s attempts to explain to her he didn’t wish it either didn’t help, and Margaery’s words barely allowed her to see things from a better view. Sansa didn’t want to be married to a Lannister, even less to have children with him. *I don’t want to have children with Tyrion.*

The first week had been laborious. Tyrion’s attempts at supper to speak with her were pointless. What did he want her to tell him? He never mistreated her, of course, he was much less horrible than most of his family, but he still was a Lannister. The family who killed her father, who fought her brother. Afraid of what she should say, she hid behind her courtesies as always. She remained a little bird, always singing the same song. That irritated her husband who always abandoned after two or three questions. But what was the most distressing were the nights. Tyrion swore he wouldn’t share her bed as long as she didn’t want, but she didn’t want to believe him. Many people once made promises to her and most of the time they didn’t respect them. So the first night she waited, unable to sleep. She didn’t want to sleep. She would rather be awaken when he would come to claim his rights on her. She didn’t believe he would refuse to bed her forever and go celibate. That seemed so unlikely from a man with nocturnal activities such as his.

She remained awaken this very night, but acted as if she was sleeping, opening her eyes only enough to see him through the dim light of the moon and the remaining candles. She nearly jumped when the door opened silently, but she stayed calm, controlling her breath so she would look asleep. Tyrion had walked to the couch and then had started to disrobe. Sansa never saw a naked man before. That was so improper. The rhythm of her heart accelerated in a second. It was pounding. *He’s going to do it. All his promises, they are only words. He will force me to do it.* Such had been her thoughts then.

But to her great surprise he did nothing. He only put on other clothes for the night and laid on the couch, just like on their wedding night.

It was the same thing each night. Tyrion came lately, Sansa thought he would do the deed and he
didn’t. And each time she would think he would consummate the marriage the next night. On the fourth night, Sansa was tired of looking away when he took off his clothes. One day or another he would ask her to perform her duties as his wife, so it was better to know how he looked under his garments before. So she looked at him and got for the first time a sight of a naked man. Well, not entirely naked, he never pulled off his breeches. But still, that was something new for Sansa. She couldn’t see much details in the dim light, but it was still enough for her to see something. He wasn’t slender like all the Lannisters seemed to be, nor big, but he seemed to have a few muscles. Sansa found it strange for a man who spent his days reading and writing. Perhaps it was only his small frame that gave Sansa this impression. He always turned his back to her. Sansa found he wasn’t as ugly as he seemed to be this way in the dark. Good. I only have to ask him to stay back to me and in the dark as we do it. That was what Sansa thought at this moment.

After a week of waiting for him each night and seeing him undress, Sansa decided he would keep his word for now. She needed more sleep. So she calmed and allowed herself to have peaceful nights. Up to now, it didn’t prove to be a mistake. Tyrion never touched her, she was still a maiden and she slept well most of the nights. Sometimes she would wake up after a bad dream and find Tyrion already left for his duties as Master of Coin or reading. He didn’t seem to sleep much. There was a dream that particularly haunted her. The same dream she did on her wedding night, where her family was present and she was marrying Ser Loras Tyrell. And the bard who always told her the same thing. Life is a song. And yours is just about to begin. She hated it. The dream reminded her of things she couldn’t have anymore. But it kept coming, always the same, so often that she could now remind every detail of it. It came every night during the first week, every two or three days now.

However, despite Sansa’s unhappiness for her marriage, she had come to find some balance in it. Her only real contacts with Tyrion were for the evening meal. She would spend the rest of the day praying in the godswood, at the sept, doing needlework or reading. Sometimes she would go to spend time with Margaery, but her friend was more and more occupied with the preparations for her wedding, so she had much less time to offer to Sansa. She would have liked to spend more time with Lady Mira, she was a Northerner after all, to know her better, but as Margaery’s handmaiden she was as occupied as her mistress and it wouldn’t do for Sansa either to forge a close friendship with another lady’s servant. There was Shae, but she had to carry out her duties first. And strangely Shae was more distant with her lately. Sansa didn’t know why.

What made the situation much more bearable was that she didn’t despise or fear her time with Tyrion anymore. After she accepted he wouldn’t bed her in the near future, Sansa decided she could be more opened with him. What facilitated her task was that he began to bring her news of her family during the second week. Tyrion told her that he was only informing her about the progress of the war anyway, that she didn’t have to ask him anything about her family so it wouldn’t look as if she worried about them. She had to admit she felt grateful for that. This way she was informed of any event Joffrey or Cersei could use to disturb her eventually. Tyrion also started to tell her how he thought the war was going and which side was at an advantage. He sincerely seemed to believe his brother wasn’t yet defeated and could still hold a long time against his father, perhaps even take back the advantage in the war if he won another battle. Sansa wanted to believe it, though she didn’t say it. Strangely, she thought Tyrion really believed what he told her. After Lancel Lannister lied before the court that her brother slaughtered an entire army with dark magic and wolves, Tyrion had come to tell her what really happened during the Battle of Oxcross. He also had told her then that her marriage with Joffrey would never take place with everything that happened between their families and that he would send her away as soon as her brother would bend the knee. She hadn’t believed him at this moment, but now she thought he had been telling her the truth. His behaviour didn’t show in any way that it had been his will to marry her.

To be honest, Sansa enjoyed her rare time with her husband now. She was alone for such a long time during the day that their discussion during supper were now the most interesting moments of the day.
Between the news he brought her, his jokes on his family and his complaints about the realm’s finances and the cost of the royal wedding, it nearly became a pleasant moment. Sansa didn’t laugh at his jokes on Cersei, Joffrey and his father, nor on any of the other members of the government, but sometimes she allowed herself to smile at them and to laugh internally. She couldn’t mock the Lannister family openly, but no one could blame her when her husband did it. Sometimes she would say Tyrion wasn’t to mock the king or the queen, but then he would make another jape on it. He knew Sansa didn’t mean what she said. It was some sort of a game. Tyrion laughing at everyone while Sansa, still wearing her armor, would falsely defend them, when most of the time she agreed with Tyrion’s comments. It was refreshing to hear someone mock and point out every flaw of the people who caused so much pain to her family. And when Tyrion would mock himself (and he did it a lot), Sansa couldn’t help but laugh, even if she only did it a little. After a few times, she had understood there was nothing to fear to laugh from someone’s joke on himself.

Sansa had come to appreciate Tyrion’s company. Sometimes he really seemed to care about her and to wish to help her. It was very possible he was sincere, he had helped her more than once before. But she didn’t want to become too much close to him. It could turn bad. She kept her distance. She still couldn’t trust him, but it didn’t forbid her to enjoy the time spent with him. She needed someone to talk to, even if it was only about trivial things. There were worse choices than her husband for that.

But today was a special day. She and Tyrion would take a walk together in the gardens. Perhaps she shouldn’t feel as if it was so special, but her days had become so dull that she relished the idea to simply walk and talk with someone. Tyrion told her it was only to show the other people their marriage wasn’t inert. And they needed to show it since everyone knew they slept in separate beds. Well, not really separate beds since Tyrion was sleeping on a couch. Sansa wondered if it was comfortable. One time she thought perhaps she should allow him to sleep in the same bed than her, but she didn’t feel comfortable about the idea of him in her bed, even if it was only for sleeping and they wore nightclothes. She didn’t trust him about it. Not yet.

She decided however to prepare herself the best she could. She had to show she tried to be the most beautiful woman for her husband. People had to believe it. And it didn’t bother her so much to do it for her husband anyway, it wasn’t as if he didn’t deserve it in some way. Sansa’s state was much better since she was married. Joffrey hadn’t dared to bother her a single time since the wedding feast. Perhaps the gelding threat had some dissuasive effect finally. Even Cersei stayed a little farther from Sansa. And Tywin Lannister had never bothered her before and didn’t change his habits. Perhaps her husband was for something in that. She had to be grateful for that at least.

Shae finally put down the brush on the table before Sansa. She was done with her hair. Sansa then raised for Shae to adjust her gown the best way possible. Shae tightened the laces so much the first time that Sansa grunted. “Shae, let me some place to breath.”

“Sorry my lady.” Shae didn’t look very sincere in her apology. Sansa wondered what she had done for her handmaiden to become so cold with her in the last days.

Shae readjusted the gown more properly and Sansa felt comfortable this way. As she finished, the door opened and Podrick went inside the room. Sansa liked Podrick. He was so shy. He always flushed when she looked at him and always was very kind. She found it hard to believe he was of the same family than Ser Ilyn Payne. People in Tyrion’s service weren’t bad. Even his sellsword’s personal guard, Bronn, was funny most of the time… if we could appreciate his humor, which wasn’t always the case. Still, he was better than Meryn Trant or Boros Blount.

“My lady,” said the boy as he looked at his feet. “Lord Tyrion is waiting for you at the gardens.”
“Thank you Podrick.” She granted him a smile, which turned the squire’s head red as a tomato.

As Sansa went to leave the room, Shae called her. “Do you want me to come, my lady?”

Sansa didn’t need Shae, but agreed all the same. “Yes, you may.” Her handmaiden followed her. With the dark mood Shae had towards her recently, Sansa thought it was better to do something for her. She didn’t want to lose one of the few friends she had here.

When they reached the entrance of the gardens Tyrion was there, talking with Lord Varys. They turned in Sansa’s direction as she arrived with Shae. “My lady, you’re beautiful today,” Tyrion greeted her.

“Thank you, my lord.” She turned towards the Master of Whispererers. “Lord Varys,” she said, courteous as always. Courtesies are a lady’s armor.

“Lady Sansa.” The eunuch bowed his head, speaking with his soft voice. “It is a pleasure to see you again. But I don’t want to disturb you and your husband. I wish you a good day.” He bowed deeply again and walked away.

Sansa didn’t know what to make of the man. She was wary of him. He seemed so mysterious. Strangely some of his ways reminded her of Lord Baelish. He never did anything against her, but never helped her either. She only remembered that he said perhaps there was wisdom with her words when she pleaded for her father’s life before Joffrey. But he never lifted a finger when her father was arrested or beheaded, nor when she was beaten by Joffrey’s Kingsguards. There was however one thing that troubled her most of all. It was the discussion she had with him at her wedding.

When Sansa had left the dais where she stood with Tyrion during the feast, vexed by his drunken behaviour, Lord Varys had intercepted her. He complimented and congratulated her for her marriage, saying he was sure she would be happy and have many children with her husband. Sansa had hidden behind her courtesies, saying she hoped she wouldn’t disappoint or shame Lord Tyrion, considering she came from a family of traitors. It was easy for her to sing this song now, she had done it for such a long time. However, the next words of the bald man surprised her. She still recalled the entire conversation.

“I know this isn’t the marriage you wanted, my lady.” His expression had turned apologetic, sad. “You don’t have to deny it nor to confirm it, I know this is the truth. I am not the Master of Whisperers for nothing. We cannot be happy when we marry someone whose family is in war against our own. And I know you wanted to marry Ser Loras. But I think you deserve the truth.” He had made a small pause before continuing. “You wouldn’t have been happy with Ser Loras, I’m afraid. We must not always judge people by their appearances or even the way they act publicly. Lord Tyrion may not seem to be quite a good match, especially right now.” He had given a mixed look in Tyrion’s direction at this time. Sansa didn’t have to turn her head, she knew what the man meant. “But, in your situation, I think it may probably be the best thing that could happen to you. Lord Tyrion is never going to hurt you, nor to let anyone hurt you, and he will do everything into his power to make you happy, however difficult it may be. He is a bigger man than he seems. A very small man can cast a very large shadow.”

Sansa hadn’t known how to answer it. She had only thanked Lord Varys and taken leave of him, climbing the stairs. She had been deep into her thoughts about what he said as she walked away, but then Joffrey appeared from nowhere, threatening to rape her on her wedding night, and she forgot everything. Now however, she wondered if Lord Varys had been sincere when he told her Tyrion would be a good husband. She thought about everything that happened since they were married. Perhaps Lord Varys wasn’t entirely wrong. Tyrion didn’t prove to be a bad husband up to now.
“So, my lady, are you ready?” Tyrion’s words got her out of her reflections.

“Yes, my lord.”

“Time to make a show of us in front of the whole nobility of Westeros,” Tyrion said as they started to walk into the gardens. Sansa had to laugh about it. It was true they were quite an odd pair. She was probably two feet taller than Tyrion. And her husband wasn’t good looking as her. Though when she thought about it again, she had to admit perhaps she had found Tyrion ugly more because he was a Lannister and a dwarf. She had to admit Margaery was right about one thing: his scar made him more handsome.

They walked silently through the gardens, not talking very much. They enjoyed the fresh air of the afternoon. Sansa caught a few people staring at them with disapproval or smirks. She didn’t care about it anymore. She had time to get used to it ever since the war began, and she would rather face people laughing at her in her back than Joffrey’s wrath for whatever petty reason he could find. At one moment however, there were two men who passed beside them. She heard them laughing when they were behind. From their clothes, they seemed to be from the Westerlands. Sansa acted as if they didn’t exist, but Tyrion started to mutter something.

“Ser Eldrick Sarsfield and Lord Desmond Crakehall. Ser Eldrick Sarsfield and Lord Desmond Crakehall.” It was the names of the two men.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“I have a list.”

For a moment Sansa was afraid. “A list of people you mean to kill?” Was she married to a man who would murder people for so few?

“For laughing at me? Do I look like Joffrey to you?” Tyrion looked half insulted and half amused. Sansa relaxed. “No, death seems a bit extreme. Fear of death, on the other hand…”

“You should learn to ignore them.” It was useless to remember everyone who laughed at you when you couldn’t get a revenge on them. That was a vain hope. The worse ones always lived.

“My lady, people have been laughing at me far longer than they’ve been laughing at you. I’m the Halfman, the Demon Monkey, the Imp.”

“You’re a Lannister. I am the disgraced daughter of the traitor Ned Stark.”

“The disgraced daughter and the Demon Monkey. We’re perfect for each other.”

Sansa had to chuckle. It was true. What a joke their marriage was, and yet it seemed gods conspired to bring two people mocked by everyone together. It was better to laugh at it than to pity it. Though she also reflected what Tyrion said was true. He was no traitor, he held an important position in the government, but people were mocking him all the same. They would never do it openly in Lord Tywin’s presence, the Hand of the King didn’t seem to be one that would allow one of his children, as much as he hated him, to be mocked publicly in front of him. Otherwise he wouldn’t have started a war for a son he despised. People laughed at Sansa since her family were branded traitors, but before she was respected by everyone as the eldest daughter of the Warden of the North. Tyrion was mocked ever since he was born. And he wasn’t even mocked because of his actions or his family’s doings, but because of what he looked like. Something he never chose. Sansa felt a pang in her heart for Tyrion at this moment. Perhaps she should make a list too, only to subtly mock the people who laughed at her when the moment was appropriate. That could be funny.
“So, how should we punish them?” she asked to her husband on a fake serious tone.

“Who? Whom?”

“Ser Eldrick Sarsfield and Lord Desmond Crakehall.”

“Ah. I could speak to Lord Varys and learn their perversions. Anyone named Desmond Crakehall must be a pervert.” He didn’t look much more serious than her.

“I hear that you’re a pervert.”

“I am the Imp. I have certain standards to maintain.” Sansa chuckled again. As always, he was laughing at himself. But she had a better idea to punish the two men. Something she experienced in Winterfell thanks to Arya. She went to a bench, sat to be at Tyrion’s level and began to speak on a conspiratorial tone.

“Or we could sheep shift Lord Desmond’s bed.” Tyrion looked perplexed. Good, he won’t know what I’m about to suggest. “You cut a little hole in his mattress and you stuff sheep dung inside. Then you sew up the hole and make his bed again. His room will stink, but he won’t know where it’s coming from.” That was very unladylike, just like Sansa’s sister. Sansa knew she would never do that, but it was funny to imagine she would do it.

“Lady Sansa!” her husband exclaimed with a false indignant voice. After a month, she knew when Tyrion was being serious and when he wasn’t.

“My sister used to do that when she was angry with me. And she was always angry with me.” She didn’t see anything evil about telling this to Tyrion. That’s not as if she was giving any sensitive information about her family to a Lannister. She still didn’t trust him, but it didn’t mean she couldn’t enjoy his company or laugh with him about unimportant things. It was tiring to be always reserved and silent.

“Why sheepshift?” He didn’t seem to understand what she meant.

Leaning forward to speak very lowly, she said “That’s the vulgar word for dung.” She found it odd that Tyrion wouldn’t know what it meant. He had such a crude language, Sansa had to get used to it since their wedding.

Tyrion seemed uncomfortable suddenly. He even seemed to glance at Shae for an instant, which meant a lot. Tyrion wasn’t in very good terms with Sansa’s handmaiden and could never remember her name. “My lady…” He was hesitant, but also smiling, as if something was amiss in all that. For a man who didn’t care about using vulgar words…

“Well, you asked me.”

Tyrion’s squire appeared on their left at this moment, running.

“My lord, my lady. Your father has called a meeting of the small council.” Sansa wouldn’t have thought a month ago that she would regret not spend more time with Tyrion, but right now she did.

“Oh, this means bad news probably.” Tyrion turned to her. “I’m sorry my lady, the Hand is calling me.” He really looked sorry. As was Sansa. “Sheila?” Sansa had to sigh again. No matter how many times he would hear it, Tyrion never remembered Shae’s name.

“Shae.” Her handmaiden responded in an even darker mood than usual when Tyrion made that
“Could you accompany back Lady Sansa to her chambers. You too Pod, I think I can find my way the Tower of the Hand alone.” He turned to Sansa once again. “I’ll come back for supper. It shouldn’t be too long.” Sansa hoped so too. She smiled at her husband and raised from the bench. She left in one direction with Shae and Podrick while Tyrion took the other one. At least, there will still be the supper. Perhaps I can make it last longer than usual. It was a beautiful day and she didn’t want Tywin Lannister to ruin it with politics or finances.

When they got back to her chambers Sansa sent Shae and Podrick away. Both surely had duties somewhere else anyway. She wanted to be alone until Tyrion came back. She went to his desk and looked at the books on it. A week ago Sansa had started to read some books of her husband. There were so much that she had the impression she had more choice than when she was at Winterfell. Sansa liked to read. In fact, among her brothers and sister, she was the one would could read and write the better. She remembered all the hours she spent reading stories about knights and beautiful ladies. Then she would wait for her friend Jeyne Poole to finish her own book. Jeyne always read slower than her. Sometimes Sansa would find some passage of a story so marvellous that she talked about it immediately to her friend. Jeyne was always angry about that because she wasn’t yet there and Sansa had stolen her the joy of reading it. The thought made Sansa sad. She hadn’t seen her friend for so long. Her father was killed along with the rest of her father’s household when he was arrested. Jeyne was probably dead now, killed with everyone else when Winterfell was burnt by the ironborn. And to think Jeyne once had eyes for Theon… Sansa chased the memory. She didn’t want to be sad, not today.

She looked at the book Tyrion had read two weeks ago. It was a book on economics written by Archmaester Maynard. At the first page the author claimed to be born Jon Keynes. Sansa had never heard of a House Keynes before. A few days ago she had only read a page she randomly chose and decided she wouldn’t like the reading. It talked of things she couldn’t understand, something called a “liquidity trap.” Sansa always was the best in their studies with master Luwin, but when it came to numbers and ledgers she couldn’t manage it. Perhaps because she thought it to be useless and boring. Writing could help her for love letters, reading for reading the same letters, singing to please other people, needlework to show other people how she could make beautiful things, but how would she impress anyone with numbers? Arya always was better than her with them. There was no art in numbers. Now she thought perhaps she had been wrong. Singing, needlework, dancing, dressing, writing and reading seemed rather useless here in King’s Landing. She should have been taught politics, to be prepared to the real world like Margaery. And seeing how the finances of the realm were exhausting Tyrion, numbers didn’t seem as useless as before. She only learned to be a perfect lady. How stupid she had been, to imagine life was a song. How useful what I have learned has been.

Tyrion didn’t read much fairy tales, his books were all about serious subjects, but to be honest Sansa was no more in the mood for her ancient passions. Instead she chose a book she had started yesterday. Dragons, Wyrms, and Wyverns: Their Unnatural History. It was quite fascinating to learn about fantastic things that disappeared long ago. She sat on the bed and began to read. She hadn’t read for more than five minutes when the door opened and Margaery erupted into the room.

“Margaery!” Sansa was so glad to see her again. It had been more than a week since the last time they spoke.

“Sansa.” There was something strange in the way her friend looked at her. She walked quickly toward Sansa and strongly hugged her. “Sansa, I’m so sorry.”

Sansa broke her embrace. “Sorry about what?” She didn’t understand.
Margaery looked at her with big eyes. “You don’t know?” Her friend deeply sighed. “I thought Tyrion would have told you.”

“Tell me about what?” There was no sense to what Margaery was saying. She acted as if something terrible had happened.

“Please sit Sansa. I must tell you something.” Sansa sat on the bed again, feeling uneasy. What could have happened for Margaery to be so troubled? Margaery sat on her left. Her face was full of sadness. She took some time before she began to speak. “Sansa, you knew your uncle Edmure was supposed to marry the daughter of Lord Frey?”

“Yes, Tyrion told me weeks ago. Did something happen? Was the marriage aborted?” If it was the case, that was very bad news. This marriage was the last chance for her brother if he wanted to win the war.

“No, the marriage took place.” Sansa felt relieved for a time. But then, what had Margaery in such a state? “But it was a trap.”

In a few sentences Margaery told her what happened. And Sansa’s world collapsed.

Chapter End Notes

So, I guess everyone knows what Margaery told Sansa. Sorry for those who hoped Robb and Catelyn Stark would survive. As I wrote at the beginning of my fic, my story follows the show until an event near Joffrey's wedding changes the whole story.

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
Chapter Notes

This chapter may seem not very imaginative, but it was very important for my fic to have it. It is very important for Tyrion's psychological development. And it is one of my favorite scenes in Game of Thrones.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

TYRION III

To say that Tyrion was in a bad mood when he entered the small council chamber would be an euphemism. He had a good time with Sansa finally, and his father chose this moment to summon him for gods know why. He hoped that wouldn’t be too long. As he reached his seat, he noticed Joffrey was present. That was quite strange since Joffrey shared perfectly the disdain of his so-called father for the small council business.

Joffrey seemed excited as Tyrion ever saw before. “Killed a few puppies today?” he asked Mad King the Second.

“Show him. Come on, show him,” Joffrey ordered to Grand Maester Pycelle, jumping from one foot to another.

Pycelle took a rolled parchment in front of him and handed it with a shaking hand to Tyrion, but let it drop on the floor. “Oh, apologies, my lord. Old fingers.” I should have let you rot in the black cells.

Tyrion was in no state to be patient with the mockery of the old dying man. He only wanted to go back to his chambers and spend the rest of the day with his wife, since his time with her was pleasant now. He grabbed impatiently the scroll and read the content aloud.

“Roslin caught a fine fat trout. Her brothers gave her a pair of wolf pelts for her wedding. Signed Walder Frey.” Was it why his father summoned him? To read bad jokes from the Lord of the Crossing? “Is that bad poetry or is it supposed to mean something.”

“Robb Stark is dead. And his bitch mother.” Joffrey sneered as he said it. Tyrion on his side was numb all of a sudden. Robb and Catelyn Stark, dead? How was it possible? And then he understood. A pair of wolf pelts. Damn Freys! His father was looking at him very seriously. In an instant Tyrion knew what had happened.

“Write back to Lord Frey. Thank him for his service and command him to send Robb Stark’s head. I’m going to serve it to Sansa at my wedding feast.”

“Your Grace, Lady Sansa is your aunt by marriage,” Varys quickly pointed out before Tyrion could say anything. Anger was rising in him.

“A joke. Joffrey did not mean it.” Tyrion didn’t believe the sweet words of his sister a single moment. Her little monster meant it more than he ever meant anything in his life. And his nephew’s next words only confirmed it.
“Yes, I did. I’m going to have it served to Sansa at my wedding feast.”

“No.” It was more than Tyrion could support. The stupid king whose ass he once saved turned his head in his direction when Tyrion interjected. “She is no longer yours to torment.”

“Everyone is mine to torment.” Joffrey walked in his direction and stood before him, towering his uncle. If he was trying to intimidate Tyrion it didn’t work. Joffrey had nothing in common with his grandfather. “You’d do well to remember that, you little monster.”

*You should look at yourself. If there’s a monster in this room you are the perfect candidate.* “Oh, I’m a monster. Perhaps you should speak to me more softly, then. Monsters are dangerous and just now kings are dying like flies.” Tyrion said it while staring at Joffrey directly in his eyes. Perhaps he shouldn’t have said it, but for now he couldn’t care less. He was more than happy to tell Joffrey who he really was. And to show him he had no fear of him.

Joffrey was taken aback by his words. Last time Tyrion saw him in this state was when he threatened to geld him at his own wedding. He should have done it back then. Joffrey stared stupidly at him, then in his grandfather’s direction, than again at him, as if he couldn’t believe what he just heard. Of course he couldn’t believe it. Tyrion’s sister had filled Joffrey’s head with foolish ideas, such as he could do everything he wanted since he was the king and no one could question him. Tyrion was the only one who managed and had the courage (or the stupidity, they were probably the same here) to confuse Joffrey this way.

“I could have your tongue out for saying that.” Joffrey pointed his index at Tyrion on a menacing tone. But Tyrion didn’t care. If Joffrey wanted his tongue, he could try. If he took it, Tyrion would take much more from him, and that would be for the good of the realm. Anyway Joffrey would never dare to try anything against his uncle. He had no guts for this. His sister was looking with fear at her son, unable to control him as usual. Pycelle looked as shocked as the king, his father stared impassively at him and Varys looked afraid of what might happen next. Perhaps he really was afraid for Tyrion now, if their friendship was real.

“Let him make his threats. Hmm? He’s a bitter little man.” His sister was failing to subdue her son, as always. And as if it was necessary, the lickspitter on Tyrion’s left chose that moment to make Joffrey even worse.

“Lord Tyrion should apologize immediately. Unacceptable, disrespectful, and in very bad taste.”

“I am the king!” As if no one knew it already. “I will punish you.” Joffrey could look ominous, but Tyrion knew that he was no more than a dog barking into a cage.

“Any man who must say “I am the king” is no true king.” His father finally spoke. On that Tyrion couldn’t more agree with him. “I’ll make sure you understand that when I’ve won your war for you.”

“My father won the real war. He killed Prince Rhaegar. He took the crown while you hid under Casterly Rock!” Joffrey was screaming now, making great moves with his arms. And he couldn’t have said something worse for him. You never talked this way to Tywin Lannister.

Joffrey seemed to realize it at the moment the words came out. Cersei stared at her son, her face between disapproval and fear. Pycelle looked as unbelieving from what was happening as when Tyrion threatened the king. Varys was looking at the king as if he was the most stupid person in the world. And Tyrion looked at his father, quite interested to see how he would react.

Lord Tywin stared icily at his grandson, anger boiling behind his eyes. Joffrey tried to gain back his composure. “The king is tired. See him to his chambers.”
Cersei didn’t have to be asked a second time. She immediately rose to bring her little monster to bed. “Come along.”

“I’m not tired.” Joffrey was speaking in a low voice. He wanted to look powerful, but before the Hand he was nothing more than a screaming boy.

“We have so much to celebrate. A wedding to plan. You must rest.” Cersei took the king by the hand to lead him away.

“Grand Maester, perhaps some essence of nightshade to help him sleep.” Yes, and with some luck he will accidentally give him too much and the realm will get rid of another king. And this time from the one he should. His father was the one to give the orders in this room, it was obvious to everyone. Everyone but Joffrey.

“I’m not tired!” Mad King the Second tried a last attempt to use an authority he didn’t have. Tyrion’s father was nearly smiling at the boy’s stupidity and powerlessness now. Joffrey reluctantly accepted to follow his mother. That had been funny finally. Tyrion appreciated to see his repulsive nephew being put back into place by someone else than him. He knew however it wasn’t the end. Tyrion knew the look in his father’s face when Joffrey called him a coward. Tywin Lannister would give a lesson to his grandson for that later, when he would have thought about something appropriate to remember him who he was.

Pycelle left shortly after, taking his scrolls with him. Then Varys followed. As Tyrion left quietly his seat, his father called him. “Not you.” He didn’t know what he would hate the most: stay for a conversation with his father on a topic he guessed quite easily, or go back to his rooms and face Sansa.

“You just sent the most powerful man in Westeros to bed without his supper.” He feigned indignation while he said it.

“You’re a fool if you believe he’s the most powerful man in Westeros,” his father answered on a more than serious tone.

“A treasonous statement. Joffrey is king.”

“You really think a crown gives you power?” You should say it to Cersei. She believes it.

“No.” Tyrion sat. He was going to get confirmation of what he was already sure. “I think armies give you power. Robb Stark had one, never lost a battle, and you defeated him all the same.” His father was confirming what Tyrion said with soft sound from his voice. “Oh, I know. Walder Frey gets all the credit. Or the blame, I suppose, depending on your allegiance. Walder Frey is many things, but a brave man? No. He never would have risked such an action if he didn’t have certain assurances.”

“Which he got from me. Do you disapprove?” His father was smiling more than ever, which wasn’t much, as Tyrion slowly outlined his role in the slaughtering. His father confirmed his thoughts as casually as if they were talking about weather.

“I’m all for cheating. This is war. But to slaughter them at a wedding…”

“Explain to me why it is more noble to kill ten thousand men in battle than a dozen at dinner?”

“So that’s why you did it? To save lives?” His father didn’t care about the victims of a war, unless he thought it would be bad for House Lannister.

“To end the war. To protect the family. Do you want to write a song for the dead Starks? Go ahead,
write one.” Perhaps that’s not such a bad idea. A song to remember the butchery my father was responsible of. It would do well to play it along with the Rains of Castamere. “I’m in this world a little while longer to defend the Lannisters, to defend my blood.”

“The northerners will never forget.” Tyrion was more than serious as he warned his father.

“Good. Let them remember what happens when they march on the south.”

His father began to gather the documents before him. Tyrion couldn’t believe his father was so naïve. To think the northerners would never raise again because they would be afraid? He didn’t know the people of the North. Tyrion did. He had visited the North when the royal party had come to Winterfell. He had seen how were the northerners. Proud, fierce, honorable, loyal, hard people who knew the rigor of winter. And attached to the Starks. There must always be a Stark in Winterfell. Since the legendary time of Brandon the Builder, more than eight thousand years ago, the Starks had ruled the North as Kings in the North, then as Wardens of the North after the Targaryen conquest. The family was respected, even loved by all the northerners. They would never forgive what the Lannisters had done at the Twins. One day or another, the south would be weak, and then they would revolt again. And if they were defeated, they would wait until another occasion presented itself. It was going to be an unending succession of uprisings and civil wars. His father had destroyed any hope for a lasting peace in the Seven Kingdoms for the next centuries. And he didn’t realize it. He had slaughtered the last surviving members of an eight thousand years-old house. Well, there was one who was still alive, but she was no longer a Stark. She was a Lannister.

“All the Stark men are dead,” began his father. “Winterfell is a ruin. Roose Bolton will be named Warden of the North until your son by Sansa comes of age.” As he rose, Tywin Lannister added a last sentence for his son. “I believe you still have some work to do on that score.”

“Do you think she’ll open her legs for me after I tell her how we murdered her mother and brother?” Tyrion was standing before his father now, full of anger. The last surviving members of his wife’s family, his mother-in-law and brother-in-law had just been slained, and the man behind it was telling him to put a son into his wife.

“One way or another, you will get that girl pregnant.”

“I will not rape her.” Tyrion made it clear, staring directly in his father’s eyes. The Lord of Casterly Rock wouldn’t force him to rape his wife. Not again. His father seemed to understand what he meant.

“Shall I explain to you in one easy lesson how the world works?”

“Use small words. I’m not as bright as you.” His father ignored the jape.

“The house that puts family first will always defeat the one that puts the whims and wishes of its sons and daughters first.” Tyrion looked to the ceiling, to look as if he was considering his father’s words. He had heard this type of lesson from him more than once. “A good man does everything in his power to better his family’s position regardless of his own selfish desires.”

Tyrion nearly laughed at the last words. Regardless of his own selfish desires. If Tyrion really followed his selfish desires, Sansa wouldn’t be a maiden anymore, she would probably already have a son in her womb, and Stannis Baratheon would be sitting on the Iron Throne since Tyrion would never have come to King’s Landing on his father’s orders. Tyrion desired Sansa, but that was no reason to cause her more suffering than she already endured. And if Tyrion bed her without her consent, then he would be a monster as Joffrey called him a few minutes ago. A whore was willing to take you into her bed as long as you paid her. Sansa wasn’t. She was his wife. He had sworn to
protect her when he put the cloak on her shoulders. Even from himself.

“Does that amuse you?” his father asked him when he saw Tyrion’s sniggering.

“No, it’s a very good lesson. Only it’s easy for you to preach utter devotion to family when you’re making all the decisions.”

“Easy for me, is it?”

“When have you ever done something that wasn’t in your interest but solely for the benefit of the family?” His father’s dedication to House Lannister was the one thing no one ever questioned. Tell me a single time you acted against your interest for House Lannister? You probably don’t know what it is.

“The day that you were born.” The answer let Tyrion bewildered. “I wanted to carry you into the sea and let the waves wash you away. Instead, I let you live. And I brought you up as my son.” Tyrion had never seen his father so emotive. Never so close to shed tears if he could. “Because you’re a Lannister.” And he left his son there, frozen.

Through the years Tyrion had developed defenses against the attacks of the others against him, including from the other members of his family. But right now, they were useless. He had never been so hurt by his father. Tyrion had lost what little love he had for him after what happened to his first wife. Despite this, he had always wished to impress his father, to prove him he was worthy of the name of the Lannisters, worthy to be his heir and to lead their house after his death. Tyrion had craved for his approval. Now he knew he had been stupid all along. His father never loved nor wanted him. And he would never. He might use Tyrion as long as he needed him, like a tool, but he would never have for him the same affection he had for Jaime or Cersei, faint as it was.

Tyrion stood there a long time, lost in his thoughts, reliving every moment of his life where he had tried to make his father proud of him, each time without success. Now he knew he didn’t have to wish anything good from his father in the future. After some time, he realized his father’s words had made him forgotten something much more important. Sansa. I have to tell her. That wasn’t something he looked forward to, but he had no choice. She was his wife. He owed her this. And it would be better if he told her before Cersei or Joffrey could. The task wasn’t more pleasant for all that. Slowly he walked out of the room and went down the long stairs of the Tower of the Hand. As he walked, he thought how Sansa had looked happy during the day. After a month he finally had succeeded to break her shell, not entirely but still. She was smiling, laughing, enjoying life once again it seemed. She had even hoped her brother could win the war and free her. Tyrion wouldn’t have been unhappy for her if it had happened. He would have regretted it, since she would leave him and he began to enjoy the time he spent with her. And he was a Lannister. He would have to fight her family, maybe personally. Now he had to crush all her hopes because of the butchery his father organized… for the good of House Lannister. And Sansa was a Lannister.

He had no choice. He couldn’t hide the truth from her. He wished he could delay the revelation, to allow her a complete day of happiness at least. But he couldn’t. His family had slaughtered hers. What kind of husband would he be if he enjoyed his time with her when he didn’t deserve it.

He finally reached the door of their chambers. He knew she was on the other side, perhaps waiting for him. Tyrion collected all the courage he had in his small body and pushed the door. Sansa was sitting on the edge of the window, looking at the outside, the sunshine making her hair more red than ever. He couldn’t see her face. She was more beautiful than ever this way.

With a lump in the throat, Tyrion called after her. “Sansa.” She turned her head towards him. Her eyes were red as her hair and tears were rolling on her cheeks. She knew. There was only hatred in
her eyes for him. Tyrion never thought such a look from someone could be so painful. At this moment, his wife looked very much like her mother. It was as if Catelyn Stark was looking down on him. Sansa averted her eyes from him after a moment.

There was nothing Tyrion could do. He turned around and left the room. As he left the room, Tyrion remembered how he had always been proud to be a Lannister. But right now he wasn’t.

*What have we done?*

Chapter End Notes

If you disagree with my way to see Tyrion's thoughts during this scene, feel free to insult me in your comments.

Please review

Next chapter: Shae
Shae III

Chapter Notes

A short chapter with Shae and her reaction after the Red Wedding.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

SHAE III

Shae left the chambers of her mistress very quietly. She had come back from the kitchens after bringing the plates still full. Three days had passed since the news of what people called the “Red Wedding” had reached the capital. And for three days Sansa barely ate something. Dishes came out and in the kitchen the same. More wasted food. But she could barely blame Sansa for that.

Shae never had a real family, so she couldn’t really know what Sansa was feeling right now. But she remembered how she felt when she thought Tyrion’s life was in danger. What Sansa felt had to be worse than her own distress in these times. Shae tried to be there for Sansa, but she wasn’t of very much help in this situation. She didn’t know what to tell her. Now Sansa had sent her away, wishing to be alone, as she had wanted so often for three days.

Shae decided to pay a visit to Tyrion. It was time of the midday meal. Perhaps Shae could make people believe she was only helping Tyrion’s squire on Sansa’s orders. As if Sansa would do something for her husband now. Shae loathed the thought of their marriage as always, but strangely she didn’t enjoy the fact Tyrion and Sansa didn’t get along well anymore. Wasn’t it what Shae desired? What she even asked to the old gods in her false prayer? Probably, but not this way. She was more sure than ever now that if gods existed, they were not benevolent.

Shae entered Tyrion’s solar without a knock. He was sitting at his study, bent over ledgers as always, eating at the same time. “Not yet, I’m not done with the food.” Anger boiled into Shae. He didn’t even look at her.

“Do you think I came here for the dishes?”

Tyrion raised his eyes upon her. “What are you doing here? I told you you can’t.” Shae stared at him with a reprimanding look, arms crossed on her chest. “Sorry, I thought it was Pod.” She relaxed a little bit, but not much.

“Your wife asked me to help your squire since she doesn’t require my services.”

“I doubt she would ask that from you right now. But that’s a good excuse for coming. Wine?” Shae nodded and her lion filled a cup for her. She took it and drank. She didn’t know this vintage, but it was good. Wine was wine.

“How are you, my lion?” She was concerned about Tyrion. He didn’t really seem in a better mood than Sansa. She hated that Tyrion was sad because of his wife’s sadness, but she couldn’t help but worry about him.

“Well, my family slaughtered people at a wedding, breaking the guest rights, I discovered my father wanted to kill me the day I was born, my wife hates me because my family murdered hers, and my
lover hates me because I wed someone else.”

Shae nearly laughed about it. She would have liked to fuck her lion for they would forget everything for a few moments, but in fact she didn’t really want to do it. And she knew Tyrion wouldn’t want. He never wanted now. They stayed silent for a good time.

“How is she?” Tyrion finally broke the silence.

“Her whole family was butchered. How do you think she is?”

“Not well, of course. I’m not stupid.” Tyrion didn’t seem outraged by her answer. His voice was low and full of regrets. It didn’t help Shae to feel any better towards him.

“Then you shouldn’t ask if you already know the answer.” Shae’s cup was empty now. She put back the cup on his desk. “Do you want me to leave?”

Tyrion wasn’t even looking at her. “People could ask questions.”

Shae knew what it meant. She went to the door and, without a gaze for her lover, left as she said “Have a good day, my lion.”

Shae walked away and went to the gardens. She had nothing to do for now. No one wanted her presence. She found a quite isolated spot where only a few people came and looked at the Blackwater Bay. Ships were sailing. There weren’t many, but more than before the Tyrells made their alliance with the Lannisters. She knew Tyrion was supervising repairs on the docks and that there should be much more ships if they were in good state.

Shae wondered what she did for being in her situation. The man she loved was married to a girl ten years younger than her. And even now the girl in question hated him, he seemed less attracted to Shae than ever. She knew Tyrion enough to understand why in some way. First he was lustful, and Shae always doubted she would be enough forever. But even more, her lion had a soft spot in his heart for dwarfs, bastards, cripples and broken things. Sansa was a broken thing while Shae was none of these. Everything Shae didn’t have, Sansa had it. And everything Shae had, Sansa had it better. Name, youth, innocence, beauty, high birth, tenderness, manners, even a maidenhead. Shae had lost her own a long time ago. How painful it had been and in such a horrible way. Would she have suffered so much to lose it to her lion? She would never know the answer.

“When did you come to this strange country?” Varys’s voice startled her.

He always came to you when you expected him the less. But Shae wasn’t upset of the man’s presence. She considered him a friend and he considered her a friend too. Both came from the East and were lowborn. Varys understood Shae in a way Tyrion would never understand her because he went through the same difficulties than her to get where he was. With him Shae could say everything she thought or felt. Things she would never share with her lion. And she had spied on Tyrion at her arrival in King’s Landing for the man, or rather observed him. After some time, it was no spying at all. Varys and Shae both were Tyrion’s friends. Shae only brought him information on her lover because she believed Varys was trying to help the two of them. It was thanks to him if she hadn’t been discovered yet and that she had some private time with Tyrion before his marriage. Varys was protecting her lion, though in the way he spoke sometimes, there wasn’t much difference between spying on him and protecting him.

“When I was thirteen,” she answered.

“You were only a child.”
“I stopped being a child when I was nine. My mother made sure of that.” She looked again at the bay, memories of her parents coming back. What a family they had been for her. She thought she had found a true family after she realized her love for Tyrion, but now it seemed to be slipping under her fingers.

“You’ve been a good influence on our mutual friend, you know. He used to drink from sundown to sunup, visit three brothels a night, gamble away his father’s money. Now it’s just the drinking.”

Shae had to smile to the eunuch’s observation. Perhaps it was true, in some way. “And now I’m his wife’s servant. I brush her hair and clip her nails and empty her chamber pot.”

“She is a sweet young thing. None of this is her fault.”

Shae turned to face Varys. Did he really think she was unaware of that? “I love that girl. I would kill for her. Do you think that makes it easier for me?”

“No, I expect not.” He couldn’t be more right.

Shae turned again to gaze at the sea, expressing her frustration aloud. “She’s young and she’s beautiful and highborn.”

“We break bread with them, but that doesn’t make us family. We’ve learned their language, but we’ll never be their countrymen.” Shae wished she didn’t believe what Varys was telling her, but in her heart she knew it was true. “If you let yourself believe that a foreign girl with no name could spend her life with the son of Tywin Lannister…”

“I have a name.” Shae faced the bald man once again. He dared to say she was nobody.

“You have one name. As do I. Here only the family name matters.” He looked really regretful. Shae had the impression he was trying to tell her something. She liked the man, but couldn’t he speak more clearly?

“What do you want from me, Lord Varys?”

The eunuch looked around him. Shae knew they were alone. He approached her and put a pouch in her hand. “Diamonds. I’d tell you to beware carrying so much wealth, but you know how to protect yourself. Get on one of those ships. Sail for Pentos or Lys or Myr. You can buy a house with these diamonds, a very large house. Hire servants. Start a new life, a good life, far from here.” Shae had to smile to what he was telling her. That was the kind of offer she would have accepted right away not long ago. Varys was waving his hands at her. “The mysterious foreign beauty. You’ll have suitors lining up.”

Does he take me for a whore? I am no whore. Not anymore. “Why do you want me to leave?”

Varys’s voice and behaviour were solemn, as if he was making an official speech. “Tyrion Lannister is one of the few people alive who could make this country a better place. He has the mind for it, he has the will, he has the right last name. And you… you are a complication.” His face then turned serious. Serious and sad. “I know you love him. And I know it’s true love not bought by gold and silver. I’m not asking you to leave him for money. I’m asking you to leave because your presence in the capital endangers him. This will be your home, my lady. Find a true home somewhere far from here… while there’s still time.” Varys started to walk away.

“Lord Varys.” As the eunuch turned back to face, she threw the pouch at his feet. Anger was rising in her. “If he wants me to leave, he can tell me himself.” She was the one to walk away this time, not looking at the bald man a single more time. Shae had thought he was a friend. And yet he had come
to her, trying to persuade her to leave with soft words and diamonds, as if she was a whore. She was no whore. She was the lover of Tyrion Lannister. Her lion could try to use the Spider to have her leave the city by her own will, but she wouldn’t. She would never leave. It was her home, the place where the man she loved was. No matter what would happen she would stay, as much as it could mean a danger for her and him. They had said the words. Maybe for everyone else Sansa was Tyrion’s wife, but Shae knew the truth. She was his real wife.

*I’m his, and he is mine.*

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
Chapter Notes

The Red Wedding aftermath continues.

And what do you think Tyrion is doing when he feels bad?

He drinks.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

TYRION IV

It was almost night. Tyrion was sitting with his squire, Pod, initiating him to drinking. He had initiated him to whoring not long ago, it was time for another sin now. Tyrion drank deeply and quickly. Sansa was off with Shae to the godswood for hours, so they had all their time. Perhaps she was praying for his death. The boy barely managed to follow, but he did. He always did what Tyrion ordered him. If he ordered his squire to jump from the battlements of the Red Keep into the bay, he would probably do it. Not that Tyrion would order him to do so. He liked the boy. And he didn’t see how useful such an order could be.

Tyrion reflected on the last three days as he got drunk. It had been some time since he was drunk for good. The last time was during his wedding. He had drunk in hope to forget the events of his wedding night next day, but finally it had proved useless. Except for keeping his head when he threatened his nephew. The so-called king who rejoiced so much at the idea of his mother-in-law and brother-in-law’s deaths. Tyrion felt bad for them. He didn’t know why. The boy was insulting when he received him at Winterfell, a sword before him to show Tyrion there was no hospitality for him. And Lady Stark arrested him on the word of a brothel keeper and it started a war that led to the death of all her family but her eldest daughter. Tyrion couldn’t believe how stupid the Starks were in the name of honor. Ned Stark supporting against all odds Stannis Baratheon, a man despised by most of the people and loved by none? And his refusal of Renly’s help? Or warning his sister that he knew about her children? What a fool he was. If Ned Stark had accepted to be Regent of the realm, he could have kept Joffrey in check. The war between the Lannisters and the Tullys would only have been an accident for the beginning of a new reign.

And what about Catelyn Stark? She started the war with his arrest. And what was her idea to bring him to her half-mad sister and her sickly nephew who had less brain than Joffrey? And Robb Stark, who lost his war in the bedchamber. And by beheading one of his most important bannerman. Pride and honor. Sometimes you had to accept to bend the knee to people you hated if you wanted to survive. Sansa had understood this. She had learned to hold her tongue and to do what was asked for her. And she lived. Tyrion was admiring her for that ever since her beating before the court. He could never have done it in her stead.

Tyrion knew he was being unfair to blame the Starks for their own deaths. Joffrey and Cersei were far more responsible for this war than Ned Stark who only tried to do something he believed was right. The man wasn’t interested in power, which was more than rare in the Seven Kingdoms. He would have made a good regent if the City Watch and this butcher Janos Slynt hadn’t betrayed him. Not to mention Baelish’s role in this. And it was his father who organized the Red Wedding. What a hypocrite he was to blame the Starks because he had petty problems with Sansa. And to say he had
made a deal with Catelyn Stark to send her Sansa and Arya if she gave him back his brother. A Lannister always pays his debts, but it was difficult to pay debts to dead people. The best thing he could do now was to protect Sansa. Here is how I fulfill our deal Lady Stark. I marry your daughter in order to protect her against the people who had your husband, your son and you killed.

They emptied cup after cup, a handmaiden bringing them more wine and taking back the empty jugs. Podrick was struggling more and more to follow Tyrion, but he wouldn’t give him a second of rest. He had to remember his first drinking time. With some luck people would talk about his drinking performance as well as the other one very soon. All that thanks to Tyrion Lannister.

As he swallowed the rest of his goblet, Pod wasn’t able to finish his own. “Keep up.” It was an order. He didn’t wait for the boy to empty the rest of it and filled both their cups again.

“I don’t think I can, my lord.” Obviously he believed he couldn’t take anymore. So Tyrion had every reason in the world to encourage him even more. The more drunk you got the first time the better.

“It’s not easy being drunk all the time. Everyone would do it if it were easy.” Pod looked droopy. He should wait to see how he would feel next morning.

“Leave.” His dear sister appeared from the balcony, as always clad in the red of House Lannister. As Pod left, Tyrion wondered if the boy was relieved. His sister had ruined the first drinking night of his squire as she always ruined everything. “So, enjoying married life?” With a smile, she served herself a cup of Tyrion’s wine. “An unhappy wife is a wine merchant’s best friend.”

“She doesn’t deserve this.” And he thought drinking would help him to forget his problems for a time. He should have known Cersei would prevent it. To make him suffer, one way or another, was something she enjoyed.

“Deserve? Be careful with that. Start trying to work out who deserves what and before long you’ll spend the rest of your days weeping for each and every person in the world.”

“There’s nothing worse than a late-blooming philosopher.” Light chuckles escaped from his sister’s lips. He didn’t like it. That meant she had something behind her head. “Will you be facing your marriage to Ser Loras with the same philosophical spirit?”

“I won’t be marrying Ser Loras.”

“I seem to remember saying something similar about my own marriage.”

“You’re not me.” Cersei would marry Ser Loras whatever she did. Tyrion knew it. They could fight between brother and sister, but against their father they were powerless. “You want to make things better for Sansa? Give her a child.”

Tyrion almost laughed at the stupidity of the suggestion. Cersei was never good at this game, but now she reached a peak. She didn’t care at all for Sansa. Did she really think he didn’t know the true reason of her suggestion? “So you can tell father it was you who finally talked me into it?”

“So she can have some happiness in her life.”

“You have children. How happy would you say you are?”

“Not very.” His sister took a great inspiration before she pronounced these two little words. Tyrion rarely saw this reaction with her, but he knew that when it happened it meant Cersei didn’t play anymore. And her answer demonstrated it very well since it was undermining the suggestion she did right away. “But if it weren’t for my children, I’d have thrown myself from the highest window in
the Red Keep. They’re the reason I’m alive.”

“Even Joffrey?”

“Even Joffrey.” She turned on her right, looking outside. Tyrion knew now that for a rare moment his sister was being honest. Talking about her children were the only moments where she was vulnerable and sincere. The only moments Tyrion saw her drop her mask of pride and smugness. The only moment Tyrion felt she was his sister. “He was all I had once. Before Myrcella was born. I used to spend hours looking at him. His wisps of hair. His tiny little hands and feet. He was such a jolly little fellow.” Tyrion could hear the emotion and the happiness of his sister as she talked of her son. The proof of her one redeeming quality: her love for her children.

Tyrion could understand. He loved Tommen and Myrcella dearly. As for Joffrey, despite all his hatred for his eldest nephew, he couldn’t really believe that one day he would cause him permanent harm. He was still family, and family was more important than anything for a Lannister. All the three children of Tywin Lannister understood that at least. He remembered how he felt when he sent Myrcella to Dorne. It hurt him to see his niece and Tommen cry for being separated. But he had to do it, for their own safety and for the family. Tyrion wondered how Myrcella was now in Dorne. Did she like it? Was she happy? Doran Martell was a good man as far as he knew and he never heard anything bad about his son Trystane. He hoped she could blossom, far away from the bad influence of her mother and her eldest brother. Seeing the way Cersei’s education turned Joffrey into a new Mad King, he probably did the right thing for his niece. But still, he had felt like shit to take a daughter from her mother. As he had taken Sansa forever from her own when he married her.

“You always hear the terrible ones were terrible babies. “We should have known. Even then we should have known.” It’s nonsense. Whenever he was with me, he was happy.” Tyrion half listened to her, lost in his own thoughts just like his sister. “And no one can take that away from me, not even Joffrey… how it feels to have someone. Someone of your own.”

It was one of the rare moments Tyrion had some sympathy for his sister. However horrible she was, she was still a mother. Tyrion’s life had been a hell ever since he came into the world, but Cersei had her hardships too. The Mad King refused to marry her to Rhaegar Targaryen, the last of the dragons, a man every girl in the Seven Kingdoms wanted to marry. And Cersei seemed to have loved him from what little Tyrion heard afterwards. She had stayed shut in her rooms for days apparently when she had discovered there would be no marriage. And she married a man who loved a dead woman over her and humiliated her with his excessive whoring. Tyrion wondered how Sansa would feel if he had continued to whore after their wedding. Probably no better than Cersei had felt. He realized how easy it was to be Robert Baratheon in these circumstances, to not care about the ones you were bound. But he couldn’t act like Robert. He couldn’t resolve himself to make Sansa even worse than she was now. Even if it destroyed his relationship with Shae he couldn’t. He couldn’t.

His sister was now sitting next to him and they both observed a deep silence, lost in their own thoughts. That was what happened when they were truly a brother and a sister. Tyrion broke it as he often did in these situations. “How long does it go on?” How long did they all have to suffer and make people suffer?

“Until we’ve dealt with all our enemies.” The answer of his sister didn’t make him feel better.

“Every time we deal with an enemy, we create two more.”

“Then I suppose it will go on for quite a long time.” Tyrion knew she was right. He also realized the sister he cared for was gone and the Queen Regent was there again. “Give Sansa a child. If you really care for her, that’s the best thing you can do.” And she left on this.
Tyrion started to drink again after his sister departed. But he drank slowly. He didn’t have the heart to get drunk again. He was thinking about what Cersei had told him. He didn’t know if it was his sister or the Queen Regent who was talking when she told him to give Sansa a child. Perhaps the Queen Regent influenced by his sister, which was quite surprising since most of the time it would be the sister who acted following the command of the Queen. Would children make Sansa’s miserable life better? How could he know? He never had children. Once he had hoped, the first time he was married, but the hope seemed foolish now. Sansa would never accept him after the way her family died.

As he thought so the doors opened. He tried to not look as his wife and Shae entered. The two women who despised him the most in the world. Sansa didn’t look at him a single second. Who could blame her? Him? Shae went to his side, looking down at him, half angry half sad. Tyron knew what it meant.

He left their chambers. It wouldn’t do for him to be present while Sansa dressed in her clothes for the night. He went to the library and tried to lose his mind in books he never read before. It proved to be as ineffective as the wine. And he couldn’t go to brothels or ask Shae anymore, so he had no choice but to brood. He remembered the walk. How far away it seemed to be now. As if it had taken place in another world. Finally, after a few hours, Tyrion decided he could try to sleep a little.

When Tyrion went back into his chambers, his boots out of his feet as usual to make the less noise he could, he heard the same sound he had heard these last three nights. His wife was sobbing, her back turned on him. Each night Tyrion wanted to comfort her, to tell her he was there for her, that he had nothing to do with this and was only here to protect her. But he couldn’t. She would probably slapped him. Or, more probably, she would run away from him, never looking at him even a moment. The man who destroyed her life.

He changed his clothes as he always did, his back in her direction, and stretched on the couch. She wasn’t looking toward him so why try to hide? He looked one last time at his wife who continued to weep. Cersei was wrong. Lannister children would never make things better for Sansa. As always, there was nothing he could do. He slept maybe two hours before he got up and spent another day working, as far as he could be from his wife.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked my exploration on the brother-sister relationship between Tyrion and Cersei, however ambivalent it is.

Please review

Next chapter: a new character POV (It's a surprise.)
Chapter Notes

For the first time in my story, we leave King's Landing and take a long walk by the Kingsroad to meet my second favorite character in Game of Thrones.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The pain in his back and his right leg were blinding. Jon passed out many times during the week that followed his return to Castleblack. He had been frozen to death, barely able to articulate words. His physical condition was now improving, but his mental condition was not. It was only getting worse on this side. Two days after his return, Ser Alliser Thorne, acting Commander in the absence and now the death of Lord Commander Mormont, had paid him a visit to tell him he would question him as soon as he was able to walk again and probably hang him over the Wall for treason. In his state, Jon had been unable to tell anything about the wildling army marching on Castleblack to anybody. No one knew and he couldn’t tell for a while as weak as he was. And now that he was barely strong enough to talk about it, he didn’t know if he wanted. Ser Alliser had announced him during his visit that his two little brothers were dead, burnt by Theon Greyjoy, that Winterfell had been sacked and burnt by the ironborn and that Robb and Lady Stark had been killed at something called the Red Wedding.

Right now there was nothing else Jon could think about. His family. Bran and Rickon, little boys, were savagely assassinated by Theon Greyjoy. Jon had never liked him, but he had been their father’s ward. And his brother Robb, who he grew with, playing, learning, fighting, riding, laughing with him. He even was sad for Lady Catelyn. She never considered him as a son, looked at him with disapproval each time he would do something better than Robb. She always refused to be a mother to him, but she was still the mother of his brothers and sisters, and the wife of his father. Now they were all dead. That was the only thing he could think about.

Well, not the only thing. He thought about Ygritte. Her red hair, kissed by fire, her blue eyes, her beautiful body as they made love in the cave. He had betrayed her. He was thrice a turncloak. He betrayed the Night’s Watch by walking with the wildlings, he betrayed Mance Rayder, a good man who trusted him, and he betrayed the woman he loved. He said he would never betray her. And yet he did. The pain in his back and his legs remembered him of that all time. He had loved her and still loved her. And now he was going to fight against her. What would he do if they met on the battlefield? He could never kill her.

Ygritte reminded him so much of his sister Arya, the only one among his sisters and brothers who had the Stark’s looks like him. He remembered how he would ruffle her hair. And Needle, the little sword he gave her before he left Winterfell. Where was she? Still a hostage in King’s Landing? He had no idea. No more than for Sansa. Ser Alliser and Maester Aemon told him nothing about them. He would have to know very soon. They could be his only surviving kin. So much had happened while he was absent. How was it possible? Jon’s family had lost. They were dead now, or prisoners. And him, what would he do? His duty, as his father always did. He would respect his vows, be the
watcher on the wall, the shield that guards the realm of men. The War of the Five Kings may be over, he didn’t know yet, but their war against the wildlings was only beginning. And after that they would fight against the White Walkers and the dead men. They weren’t ready. They didn’t have enough men or enough supplies. Would any of the kings send them help? Jon doubted that.

His thoughts lingered over this for a week. But one day, as he felt a little better, Sam came to bring him his meal for midday.

“Sam.” His voice was tired. He still hadn’t much force.

“Jon.” Sam was smiling. It was good to see his friend again. “How do you feel?”

“As a man who got three arrows in his back. Except one was in the leg.”

Sam chuckled. “Maester Aemon said you would recover entirely within two weeks.”

That made two more weeks before Ser Alliser would hang him. But now he had other things to be concerned with.

“Sam, Ser Alliser told me Robb was killed. And his mother too. How?” He didn’t know the details of this Red Wedding, but from the name it couldn’t be a wedding that ended well.

Sam’s face dropped. “Perhaps you should rest. You’re still very weak. You barely manage to speak.”

It was true it was an ordeal for Jon to speak, but he had to know. He wouldn’t let Sam go until he knew everything. “I’m strong enough to talk. Tell me. What happened?”

Sam looked at him with sorry eyes. He told him everything. How the war had gone while they were north of the Wall. The first victories of his brother. His bannermen proclaiming him King in the North. Robb’s wedding. The struggles between the Baratheon pretenders. Renly’s death. The Battle of Blackwater. The alliance between the Lannisters and the Tyrells. The rebellion of the Iron Islands and their raids on the north. Winterfell taken by Theon Greyjoy who was afterwards betrayed by his own men. The beheading of Rickard Karstark by Robb and the loss of half his forces. And finally the Red Wedding. His brother was betrayed by his own lieutenant, stabbed by Roose Bolton in the heart. His wife, pregnant, murdered before his own eyes, stabbed in her tummy a dozen times. Lady Stark, her throat cut to the bone after killing Walder Frey’s wife. His brother’s host slaughtered by Freys and Boltons. Now Roose Bolton was Warden of the North. Jon couldn’t believe it. But he would weep later.

“What about Bran and Rickon? How did they die? Ser Alliser only said Theon burnt them.” Sam seemed hesitant now. He looked away. “Sam?”

“I told no one. It happened at the Nightfort. Me and Gilly we passed by it to come back.”

“You and Gilly?” Jon didn’t understand. And then he remembered. The girl from Craster’s Keep. “Craster’s wife? You brought her with you?”

“I had no choice, Jon. When Karl and the others mutinied, I had to save her. So we traveled to the Wall with her baby. For now she works here. I killed a White Walker.”

Jon was startled by this. “What? How?”

“With dragonglass. The dagger I had on me. It was coming for her baby.”
Jon remembered what he saw Craster do in the forest last year. Dragonglass could kill White Walkers? Then they would need a lot of it. “That’s what happened at the Nightfort? The White Walker passed through the Wall?” If the dead crossed the Wall, everything was over.

“No.” Sam straightened and then a smile appeared on his face. “We met Bran there. He was with his direwolf and Hodor. Two other children were with them, they said they were Jojen and Meera Reed.” Bran? How was it possible? “I didn’t know that he was believed to be dead, but it was him, I’m sure of that. How many cripple boys travel with a direwolf and a giant who can only say one word?”

Jon’s heart was beating quickly. Bran was alive. Then Rickon could well be alive too. They were burnt. Of course, Theon surely burnt two boys and made people believe they were Bran and Rickon. Both of them were surely alive, one for sure. He was with Jojen and Meera Reed? They were probably the children of Howland Reed, his father’s friend. Wait! What were they doing at the Nightfort?

“Sam, where is Bran now?”

Again the face of his friend dropped. “I’m sorry, I tried to convince them to come to Castleblack, but they refused. They said they had to go north of the Wall in order to find a three-eyed raven. It doesn’t make much sense but I couldn’t force them to follow me and Gilly. I left them some dragonglass before they crossed.”

Jon’s sudden happiness went down. Bran went north of the Wall to find a three-eyed raven? That was nonsense. But Sam wouldn’t lie to him. And if he did, he would have invented some better lie, one that Jon would believe. “What about Rickon? Was he with them? Did they tell you anything about him?”

“No, sorry. They said nothing. As I told you, I didn’t know they were believed dead at this moment. I didn’t think about asking them about that.”

Jon knew nothing of Rickon’s fate. Yet, he knew Bran was still alive not long ago, even if now he was heading north. Where would he go? The Antler River? The Frostfangs? The Haunted Forest? There was no way to know. And there was hope for Rickon too. He relaxed. It was still good news. A few minutes ago he thought all his brothers were dead, now he knew one and maybe two were alive. Now he had to know about his sisters.

“Do you know what happened to my sisters? Sansa and Arya? They were in King’s Landing when my father was executed.” He hoped they were still alive and well. Surely they were. King’s Landing didn’t fall to Stannis Baratheon, so they couldn’t have died in a battle. Though he could be sure of nothing. The Lannisters beheaded his father. Why wouldn’t they do the same with one of his sisters? Or both?

“Well, your sister Arya… no one knows where she is.”

Jon was confused. “What do you mean? Tell me.”

Sam looked sad again. “We didn’t receive a lot of news from the capital, they barely sent us anything recently. Only a few officers of the City Watch who were exiled and a few criminals as always. But… there is no news of your sister. She disappeared not long after your father’s death. No one knows where she is or even if she is alive. It seems the Lannisters tried to hide it for some time, but people learned the truth after some time. We don’t know for sure she is dead. She could still be alive.” Arya was nowhere to be found? Where could she be? His friend probably added the last sentences with the hope of not getting Jon too desperate. But Jon wasn’t. He remembered his time at
Winterfell. Arya could find places to hide very easily and they would need hours to find her. She could still be alive somewhere, hiding. Jon wondered if she still had Needle.

“It’s all right. We don’t know what happened to her yet. What about Sansa?”

Now Sam’s face looked very weird. It was as if he didn’t know how to behave. “Well, I don’t know what you will think of it. She’s still alive and in King’s Landing, but…” Sam hesitated. He hesitated for a very long time. Jon grew impatient. Sansa was alive but what?

“Sam, by the old gods tell me.”

“She’s married.”

For a moment stared at Sam unbelieving. Married? Sansa? Gods, no, she had married Joffrey. “I thought King Joffrey would annul their betrothal with the war against my family.”

“Joffrey?” Sam seemed surprised. “No, Joffrey set her aside, he’s going to marry a Tyrell. No, she was wed to a Lannister. I talked with the other brothers here, and they told me you knew him. That he came to visit the Wall when you arrived. Some even said he was your friend.”

Now Jon was really staring at Sam unbelieving. There was only one Lannister that he considered a friend and only one who ever came to the Wall. But that couldn’t be. “The Imp? Tyrion?” Sam nodded his head.

For a moment Jon stared at the wall before him blankly. Sansa and Tyrion? Married? He didn’t know if he should laugh or cry. That sounded so unreal. His sister Sansa, who dreamed of marrying a handsome and courageous knight like in the stories she loved so much, married Tyrion Lannister, a dwarf? Jon still didn’t know how to react.

“I should leave now.” Sam interrupted his thoughts. “Maester Aemon needs me for other tasks. I’ll come back later.” Sam smiled at him as he left.

Jon had days to think about what he just learned. Robb and Lady Catelyn had been slaughtered at the Twins. His two youngest brothers were believed dead, but one was alive for sure and the other may be too. Arya disappeared and there was no way to know if she was alive or dead. And Sansa had married his friend, Tyrion. But now he began to understand more the meaning of this. His sister had been forced to enter the Lannister family. Everyone believed she was the last Stark alive, so she was officially the heir to Winterfell, or what was left of it. They only used her to get Winterfell. How did she feel right now? She was married in the family that slaughtered theirs. Of all his relatives, Sansa always was the one who liked Jon the less. Jon didn’t think she hated him, she never was evil with him. But she had been very close to her mother. She had looked up at Jon and called him bastard as soon as she learned the word. She wasn’t like her mother, she had no resentment towards him, but she never considered him the same way she considered Robb, Bran, Rickon or even Arya. In her eyes Jon was probably her brother, but a bastard brother still. He wasn’t the son of her mother.

He wondered how she felt with Tyrion. He had considered the little man his friend. Without him, Jon would have died the first day he spent at the Wall. It was strange how he had humbled Jon and helped him the same way. He made him understood he would have to accept to be treated as something inferior because of his birth, but that he could also use it. He also made Jon realize how lucky he had been despite his lower birth. He had been marginalized at Winterfell, but still he had a better life than most of the people. That was strange to receive such lessons from a man who looked so arrogant at first sight. In time he had come to like the Lannister. He still remembered when he came to the top of the Wall and pissed on the other side. Jon had missed him a few times. He even talked about him to Ygritte once. Both were favored outcasts of this world. He wondered how he
treated Sansa. He hoped he hadn’t misjudged the little man he had considered as a friend. He was a Lannister after all and his family was in war with Jon’s kin. Who knew what Sansa could suffer right now? Especially from a man twice her age, half her height, renowned as a whoremonger and whose family destroyed hers.

He needed a rest. That was too much to think about now. But suddenly Jon burst into laughs. And he immediately regretted it. His back made him suffer again. It was already difficult to talk and to eat, so to laugh? But still, he couldn’t resist it. His sister Sansa was married to Tyrion the dwarf. That was so… weird. Unbelievable. He knew he shouldn’t laugh. Who knew what Sansa could be passing through right now? All the same, when he imagined his little friend standing in a sept with his tall sister, saying their vows, he couldn’t help it. While he laughed and felt pain from that, he hoped Tyrion was the good man he thought he was when he stayed at the Wall.

Chapter End Notes

It wasn't an essential chapter, but I wanted to imagine Jon's reaction when he would learn the marriage between Tyrion and Sansa. I hope you like it. Furthermore, there will be place for Jon later in the story. He will have a role to play. This is a prelude to the part he will take.

Please review

Next chapter: Margaery.
And we enter season 4. The change is approaching.
Margaery II

Chapter Notes

We go back into Margaery’s mind, and we begin to follow closely another character.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

MARGAERY II

Two weeks! Margaery couldn’t believe it. Two weeks had passed since her last conversation with Sansa, a very short conversation when she told Sansa about her family's death. The preparations for the royal wedding began to exhaust her beyond measure. She was very eager to celebrate her fantastic wedding and to become the queen, but did it have to take so much time of her days? She should have tried to be there for Sansa. She needed a friend more than ever. She also needed Margaery’s advice more than ever. Margaery remembered the way she reacted to her mother’s and brother’s deaths. That was still heartbreaking for the Tyrell girl two weeks later.

At least she managed to have some time with her today. She would break her fast with Sansa. She had sent her a word about it yesterday. That was the best moment she could find with her overloaded schedule. Mira was braiding her hair. Margaery had dismissed Sera and the others, wishing to be alone with her friend. Mira hid her emotions very well, but Margaery could feel her distress. Her brother Rodrik and her father were at the Twins when the Red Wedding happened and didn’t survive. The rest of her family was still alive at Ironrath, for now. However, Mira told her there could be problems with another house, the Whitehills, sworn bannermen of the Boltons and inveterate enemies of her family. Margaery hoped nothing would happen to Mira’s family. She would pray for her this morning. There wasn’t much more she could do.

When Mira was done with her hair, Margaery was ready to visit Sansa. Mira stood close to the window, silent and discreet more than she usually was. She mourned her losses without sharing her burden with anyone else.

“You can take the day for yourself if you want, Mira.” Margaery could at least grant her this.

“Thank you, my lady. But I don’t think it would help me in any way. It would be better if I stayed occupied.” Mira knew obviously her mistress wanted to be kind to her, but she would do her duty nonetheless. She was a true northerner. No wonder her family had followed the Starks for so long.

“Very well. Clean the room and then go find Sera and the others to help them.” Mira nodded and quietly started her tasks. Margaery left her and walked in the direction where Sansa’s quarters were. She left the Maidenvault where her family and their retinue resided. As she approached her friend’s apartments and turned a corner, she bumped into a very short person. It was Lord Tyrion.

“Sorry, Lady Margaery. I didn’t see you coming. My wife is waiting for you. Try to give her some good time. I don’t seem to be the one for that recently.” He walked away, holding a very large book under his arm. Margaery knew her grandmother was giving him a few headaches with her marriage to Joffrey. To be Master of Coin seemed to be involving a lot of work and very few recognition.
Margaery looked at the little man as he walked away, trying to assess him. She didn’t know much about Lord Tyrion. And these last times she didn’t really have the time to get more information on him. She knew he was a renowned whoremonger and drunkard. People called him the Imp. She heard he would always bet large sums of money when his brother jousted. Rumors were telling he was the ugliest man in the Seven Kingdoms, even a monster. Some even pretended he was missing a nose.

When she looked at him, she couldn’t really see a monster. If there was a monster she saw ever since she came into King’s Landing, it was her betrothed. But it was a monster she could control, so she wasn’t really afraid. He wasn’t ugly either. Of course, his size didn’t work out in his favor very well, but if he had been taller, no one would really find him repulsive. As for the missing nose, it was only a scar that spread from a corner of his head to another. Her brother Loras had told her that he saw him during the Battle of Blackwater, laying on the ground, his head covered by blood. That proved he had courage at least. And if the stories of what he said to the king publicly were true, he also seemed to have a sharp tongue and some sort of bravery. And from what Sansa told her up to now, he never mistreated her. All things considered, he seemed to be quite a good man. If he was the king, it wouldn’t bother Margaery very much to marry him. Especially if he was as experienced as it was said.

She finally turned her heels and went to Sansa’s chambers. Her friend was already sitting at the table with a large spread of food before her. From the look of it she hadn’t eaten anything.

“Sansa.”

“Margaery.” The Stark girl smiled, but it was obviously a forced smile, and a very little one.

“May we begin?” Margaery asked as she sat next to her. The red haired girl nodded in approval.

Margaery began to serve herself. Sansa picked some food too but didn’t eat much. All the while a handmaiden with tanned skin and black hair was emptying Sansa’s chamber pot and putting clean sheets on her bed. Margaery felt the gaze of this woman on her while she ate. Margaery didn’t like it. She could be a spy. For who? There was no way to know for now, but it would be better to take no chance.

“I would have liked to enjoy a moment alone with you, Sansa.”

Her friend took some time to understand what she meant. “Shae, please leave us.”

Margaery had the very strange impression that the handmaiden was giving her a gloomy look as she left the room. If she was a spy, she didn’t know how to go unnoticed. The two girls were now alone.

“How are you?” Margaery was really concerned about her friend. After two weeks, she barely ate. The future queen had the impression Sansa was thinner than she had ever been, which wasn’t good considering Sansa was already very slender when Margaery had met her the first time.

“I’m fine, thank you.” That wasn’t convincing. Her voice was low, barely more than a whisper.

“I’m sorry I didn’t visit you for so long. I have so much things to care about these last days, I nearly have no time for myself.”

“Then you should take it for yourself.” She wanted no company.

“Sansa, I know how it must be difficult for you right now…”

“No, you don’t.” Sansa interrupted her abruptly, raising her voice. “You have lost no one. Has your
father been beheaded before you by your betrothed after he promised you mercy? Have you two little brothers who were burnt alive by a man you knew all your life? Was your brother Loras stabbed in the heart? Was his head chopped off his body and replaced by an animal’s one? Was the throat of your mother cut to the bone? Are you married to a man whose family murdered yours?” Her voice got stronger and louder as she enumerated the tragedies that had befallen on her family. But in the end it broke and tears began to flow on her cheeks. When Sansa was done she burst into sobs.

Margaery put an affectionate hand on her shoulder. That was so much different from Mira, but Sansa had lost much more than Margaery’s handmaiden. “You’re right. I don’t know how I would feel if I suddenly lost Loras, my parents and my grandparents.” She had lost Renly in fact, but hadn’t loved him. She only married him in the hope she would become queen. Margaery had lost no one she really cared about. But she knew that if it happened she couldn’t allow herself to stay in Sansa’s actual state. “Listen. I’m your friend, you remember? It’s more than difficult, I can see it, but you cannot weep like this for your family forever.”

“Why? I have nothing left to do. Nothing left to hope.”

“Yes, you have.” Margaery knew that what she would say now was sensitive and that Sansa could react very badly to her words, but she had to try for her friend’s future. For the sake of both of them. Margaery would need Sansa as an ally eventually, and Sansa could be no ally if she didn’t see the world as it was. “We are women, Sansa. The only way for us to survive in this world and to have a good life is to rely on our male relatives. And you still have one.”

Sansa sneered. It was much less than the worst Margaery expected. “His family murdered mine. I will never rely on him.”

“You know what I think, Sansa.” She spoke on a more commanding tone. “I think he has nothing to do with it. He looks ashamed by what his family has done, he has bad relationships with his father and his sister, he obviously hates Joffrey, and he never caused you any harm. You may hate him because of what his family has done, but he may be your only chance now. Your only chance to have a happy life, to live, and to make sure your family’s home doesn’t fall in the hands of the men who murdered them.” Margaery wasn’t entirely sure if what she said was true. After all, Lord Tyrion could have known about his father’s plans, but right now Sansa needed to hear that.

“I will NEVER EVER give him anything. He is a Lannister. I don’t care about my home, it is only ruins now. I will not allow the Lannisters or him to use me to get their dirty golden hands on the North. I will never forgive them. I will never forgive him.” Margaery lowered her head, discouraged and sad. Sansa couldn’t see the possibilities she had to avenge her family and even to restore it when it would be time. She wished she could do more, but for now Sansa was as stubborn as her grandmother’s tongue was sharp. She would hear nothing of what Margaery had to say.

Margaery rose from her seat. “I have duties to attend to. I’m sorry to leave.” She looked at the tray of food, almost untouched. “You should eat. Have a good day.” There were so much people hungry in the city. Sansa couldn’t let herself starve to death. Margaery rubbed the shoulder of the Stark girl a last time as a sign of support and left. She hoped she could convince Sansa later. She should have spent more time with her after her marriage with Tyrion. Her influence on her would have been far greater.

Later in the morning, Margaery attended the service in the Royal Sept. After the ceremony, she was accosted by the Queen Regent. Soon, Margaery would be queen in her stead.

“Hi Margaery. How is my future daughter-in-law and sister?”
Margaery had to careful with the way she would answer. She knew it ever since Sansa’s wedding. *If you ever call me sister again I’ll have you strangled in your sleep.* “I’m fine, Your Grace. I really appreciate your concern for me.”

“Yes, I’m a lot concerned for you. As a queen I have so many enemies, in this city and outside it. I fear you may have some too.”

“Again I thank you. But you don’t have to worry. I can take care of myself. And your son is very provident towards me.”

“We can never be too provident. Even in our closest circle of friends, there can be traitors, people who would be ready to do anything against us for money, honors, titles, ascent… or family.”

Margaery didn’t like the way this conversation turned. She could feel Cersei bringing her somewhere she wouldn’t like, as she did with the Rains of Castamere. “If there is anything that may pose a threat to me or your son Your Grace, I promise you I will tell you.” She hoped it would end the discussion. She was wrong.

“I’m afraid I can’t only rely on that. Sometimes friendship, or even love, can blind us. That’s why we need the others to look after us. And who is better to look after us than our family. We are family now, aren’t we?”

Margaery knew there was only one possible answer. With her usual smile she gave it. “Of course, Your Grace. I am not yet married to Joffrey, but we are so close that we can already consider ourselves as a family before the wedding.”

“I was sure you were thinking the same. Then it is my duty to warn you against a member of your own retinue. She may not seem a danger at first sight, I heard you considered her as one your closest friend. And yet, until very recently, the family of this northern girl was fighting for an usurper.”

Now Margaery knew what Cersei was talking about. “She is the most loyal of my servants and has been away from the North for many years. There is no doubt about her loyalty to my beloved Joffrey or to the Crown.”

“I know you think so. And that’s what I’m afraid of. I would like to speak with her this afternoon. Bring her to me in a few hours so we may speak together in the Throne Room. That will be an excellent opportunity for her to swear publicly her fealty to my son. And to apologize too.”

“Of course, your Grace.” Margaery had no other choice. This audience could put her and her friend into trouble, but there was no way escaping it. Though she wondered what Mira should apologize for. It wasn’t as if she fought against Joffrey. After Cersei was gone, she called for Sera. “Find Mira and tell her to wait for me in her chambers at the end of the afternoon. Tell her nothing else. I’ll explain everything to her myself.”

“Yes, my lady.” Sera went away to perform her task. After Mira, Sera was her handmaiden Margaery liked the most. She was a bastard, but her mother had been Margaery’s grandmother handmaiden for a very long time. They had given her the family name Durwell, an unimportant house whose main branch disappeared two centuries ago, a perfect fraud. She was loyal, but could act stupid and talked too much sometimes. Margaery couldn’t confide in her as she could with Mira.

Hours later, after spending more time preparing the wedding (now was the time to select bards and artists that would sing, a very long task since they had to listen to hundreds of them) and a quick meal, Margaery went to the rooms of her favourite handmaiden with Sera and opened the door without a knock. She didn’t need to do it for seeing Mira, her handmaiden received her no matter the
time. She was sitting on a bench. She rose up as soon as Margaery entered.

“Lady Margaery. You’re early.”

“I was hoping there would be time for us to talk. Come, there’s something we must discuss.” Mira followed her without a question, as always. As they walked in the corridors, Margaery started to speak. “From the day you arrived in Highgarden, I’ve thought of you more as a friend than as my handmaiden. A dear friend, in fact.”

“Thank you, my lady.” Mira really seemed to appreciate what she was telling her. It relieved Margaery after her difficult breakfast with Sansa.

“And you know how I feel about what’s happened to your family. I feel your pain as if it were my own. What you’ve suffered is beyond imagining. And your poor family as well.”

“You’re very kind, my lady.”

“Of course, Mira. But you must not despair. We will get through this together.” She took Mira’s hands into her own. The difficult part was coming. “You must understand, there are limits to what I can say. Especially here in King’s Landing, now that I am to be queen. To have a handmaiden from the North whose family fought for Robb Stark... It raises questions at a time I can least afford. Cersei herself cornered me this morning outside the Royal Sept. She mentioned ‘the northern girl’ in my service, and she painted you a traitor. She was very pleased with herself. Her face was full of mirth as she said it.” Margaery had stopped now to look at Mira in her eyes.

“I’m not a traitor.” She could see Mira was insulted by the accusation. She could understand. Her family was very similar to Sansa’s. Honor was more important than everything to her and she would defend it and the one of her family whatever happened. That made Mira her best handmaiden, but it could also cause her problems in the actual circumstances.

“Of course not. It’s only an excuse to torment you, and by extension, me.” They started to walk again. “She demands an audience. She wants an apology of some sort. For what, I don’t know, but… She’s waiting for us now and I promised I would bring you to her. I wouldn’t ask it of you if it were not important.” Margaery could order Mira to come, but she preferred to ask. Anyway she knew Mira would do it. It was better to ask when you knew the person would accept.

“I’ll do as you ask, my lady.”

“I knew I could trust you. Humor her. Tell her what she wants to hear.”

They finally arrived before the doors of the Throne Room. Two guards were guarding it and they were close.

“See if the Queen Regent is ready to receive us,” she ordered Sera. The brown haired girl slipped through the door and went inside, leaving Margaery and Mira alone with the two guards.

Margaery reflected about Sera. She had seemed less happy than usual these last times. She was quite excited about the royal wedding, but ever since the Red Wedding she had turned less joyful. She and Mira were friends of course, but Margaery could feel it wasn’t the only reason. She had sent Sera and her other handmaids away many times recently to spend time alone with Mira, and Margery spared Mira of many demanding duties after the tragedy. At least she had tried, Mira refused most of the time. She worked even more dutifully than before if it was possible. Even so, Sera probably felt excluded and thought Margaery favoured Mira over her.

That wasn’t quite untrue. After Mira had arrived in Highgarden, she quickly replaced Sera as her
favourite handmaiden. Margaery was already closer to her than Sera before the Red Wedding, but it
seemed even more obvious now. Margaery regretted it. Sera was her friend and she really wanted to
help her. She would find her a good husband to marry one day. She would never be haunted by her
bastard origin anymore after that and would take the name of her husband. Margaery would probably
arrange for that after her own wedding with Joffrey. She wondered if Mira would want to wed soon.
She was of an age for that, very beautiful, a perfect mix of the Reach and the North, and the eldest
daughter of a rich and respected family. However, recent events may make a marriage with a
Forrester less attractive for many. Anyway, her mother would have something to say about that.
Margaery could probably first take care of Sera. And if things went bad for Mira’s family, her
influence as queen should be enough to find her a suitable man who would guarantee her safety.

Margaery realized the guards were looking at them, so she grabbed Mira’s arm and drew her
backwards. “You’ll be fine. I know you will. You may feel one thing, but you must say another.”
That was very important. Mira was used to the games of Highgarden, but not of King’s Landing, and
these ones were much more dangerous. Hopefully her friend would adapt to it as quickly as she
adapted to the Reach.

Sera came back at this moment. “Good luck.” On this encouragement, Mira and Margaery looked at
one another and entered. There was some apprehension in the eyes of her handmaiden. As they
advanced, Margaery turned towards her one last time.

“You can do this.” That would be verified very soon. Cersei was waiting for them near the Iron
Throne, along with Lord Tyrion.

Chapter End Notes

Mira's story will take more place in the following chapters.

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
Tyrion was tired. He had another very long day behind him. Between the royal wedding (as always), the repairs on the docks and the preparations he had to make for the construction of the new royal fleet, he didn’t have an instant to rest. And now his sister had called him to attend court with her this afternoon. Joffrey had been quickly bored by petitioners at the very beginning of his reign, so it had fallen on Cersei, then on him when he was acting Hand of the King, and finally to his father when he returned. But his father seemed to have better things to do than holding court today and he allowed Cersei to take it on her. And his beloved sister had asked him to assist her. There weren’t many petitioners since people had learned the hard way how asking something from Joffrey could end their life prematurely. Soon it was over but his sister insisted for him to stay. She said it would be very interesting and that it concerned him.

As they waited, she asked him about the royal fleet. Tyrion was only considering the way to acquire materials for now since docks were still on repair. “For now, the biggest problem is the wood. We need to find a supplier who can give it to us in high quantity and quality. Sadly, that’s not very easy. Ironwood would be the best solution, but since the people who produce it were fighting with the Starks, I don’t think they will give us very much quite soon. Though strangely, I’ve received a letter from two merchants who claim to have a shipment of ironwood to sell. Where they got it, I’m not sure, but I’ll meet them to see what they have to offer.” He explained it to Cersei with an indifferent voice, knowing very well his sister didn’t care about any detail like these. She would make a very bad Master of Coin. But it helped to spend time to explain these things, along with drinking, which he did as well in this moment.

“I think I have a solution for you to this problem. It will be here at any moment.”

“Then I hope this solution arrives very quickly. Time is money, especially when you are Master of Coin.”

It was at this moment that a young woman presented herself before them. She was brown of eyes and hair and wore clothes of the people of the Reach. Her features were round and she was quite pretty. Her behavior showed that she wasn’t a great lady, but not of low birth either. “Lord Tyrion. Your Grace. Lady Margaery is there and would like a moment of your time.”

“Did she bring what I required from her?” According to the way Cersei was asking, it seemed what Tyrion was there for would finally happen.

“Yes, your Grace. She is with Lady Margaery.”

“Very well. Let them come.”
The girl walked away. Tyrion now knew she was one of the numerous handmaidens Margaery Tyrell had brought with her from the Reach.

“So, could you tell me what this is all about before I see the surprise you prepared for me?” he asked his sister.

“That wouldn’t be a surprise if I told you now. Anyway, here they are. Let’s sit.”

Tyrion went back to his chair and looked at the two women walking in their direction. On the left was Lady Margaery, beautiful as ever. Nos as much as Sansa or Shae, but still. Following her two feet behind was another young woman. She was wearing clothes of the Reach, but her face was more rectangular than round to the opposite of Margaery and the handmaiden that had come before. Her hair was black and her skin very white. She didn’t lack beauty neither. She walked with insurance, but seemed to observe an attitude of obedience. Tyrion could detect some uncertainty in her face as she approached, but she stood straight. There was pride in this one, Tyrion realized.

“Ah, Lady Margaery. Aren’t you looking lovely this evening?” Tyrion hoped her breakfast with Sansa had gone well.

“Lord Tyrion. Your Grace… With your permission, allow me to introduce Lady Mira of House Forrester.”

So that was it. She was the northern servant in service of Lady Margaery Tyrion heard about. And a member of the family who bested everyone at the manufacturing of ironwood items. Now he understood why Cersei brought her here. Well, at least he knew a part of the reason. The Forresters had fought for Robb Stark. She probably wanted to humiliate Margaery. And Tyrion perhaps too. That was a way to show the Northerners weren’t recommendable and to target him and Sansa the same way. And to laugh at him for his problems finding ironwood.

The girl approached and knelt before the throne. “Your Grace.”

Perhaps Tyrion ought to help the girl. He had met Lord Forrester many years ago. It was a good man and he had died at the Twins. This girl was surely his daughter. She was another victim of his family’s crimes.

“The girl knows her courtesies. Impressive. You may rise.” Cersei was pleased with that. She liked when someone was obedient and easy to manipulate.

“House Forrester is a northern house loyal to the king,” Margaery declared solemnly.

“Are they?”

“I beg your pardon, your Grace…?”

“I wasn’t talking to you. I want to hear from the girl. Is your family loyal to the king?”

“Perhaps you should ask the new lord Forrester.” Tyrion intervened. It was useless to ask such questions to this girl. She didn’t take decisions for her family, just like Sansa. Cersei seemed to not understand this, like her son. That was one of her little and boring games again. Tyrion wondered what age the new lord of Ironrath was. He had heard he was only a child.

“He’s not here, is he? She is. The girl can speak for her house.” Good. And afterwards what? Will you arrest her for being loyal to her family? As if she posed a threat.

“Yes, your Grace. To the one true king.” Cersei was clearly displeased by the answer Lady Mira
gave her. That wasn’t the one she was expecting.

Tyrion on the other side started to find the discussion interesting. He even believed he glimpsed an invisible smile on the girl’s lips. “The one true king. Yet she didn’t say which. The girl is clever.”

“She only meant…” began Lady Margaery, but Cersei cut her immediately.

“I don’t care what she meant. I care what she said. I won’t stand for impertinence from a girl of the North.”

“If you would give her the chance to explain…” but the Rose of Highgarden was interrupted again by the Queen Regent.

“Perhaps she can explain why the Forresters have been loyal bannermen to House Stark for centuries? A house of traitors.”

“They were the Wardens of the North. We all served at the pleasure of the king.” This handmaiden clearly didn’t need her mistress to speak in her stead. Tyrion liked her way to give answers that irritated Cersei while not giving her a reason to reprimand her.

“Clever girl,” he pointed out again.

“Perhaps too clever for her own good.” Tyrion could feel Cersei’s growing impatience in her voice. She didn’t think a simple handmaiden could play with her questions this way. “And she would have us believe she didn’t know which king she served. Is your house willing to swear fealty to your new liege lord, Roose Bolton?”

“He is the Warden of the North, your Grace.” And again, the Queen Regent is put into check by a little girl.

“He is. And I the Queen Regent and Tyrion the Master of Coin.” A pinch of anger began to appear in his sister’s voice.

“The girl has a remarkable talent for answering questions while in fact saying nothing at all,” Tyrion commented. Lady Mira turned lightly her head towards him and Tyrion glimpsed the invisible smile again.

“Old allegiances are not easily abandoned,” Cersei continued, “but now that the war is over we must look to rebuild and forge new alliances. There are ships and shields to be built and Joffrey will need a steady supply of ironwood for his armies. I’m told there are others who would happily serve that purpose, but I trust we can rely on House Forrester?”

“Forrester ironwood does seem rather… unique.” Tyrion conceded it. Cersei was now standing tall. Probably she was trying to gain back the advantage by seeming taller than everyone else on the steps.

“To our mutual benefit, your Grace,” said the girl. She wasn’t going to give away what belonged to her family, Tyrion could feel it.

“And at the pleasure of your king. It would be a shame to see it fall into the hands of another house. I imagine you’d do almost anything to prevent that from happening, wouldn’t you. Ask any Lannister and they’d do whatever was necessary to save Casterly Rock. It would be unfortunate to see another house lay claim to what’s yours.” Cersei did her little speech as she turned towards the Iron Throne. She was trying to get somewhere. Tyrion hoped she would get there very quickly.
“There are limits, your Grace.”

“Perhaps. But not if your house faces potential ruin.” Cersei turned around to face their guests.

Tyrion grew impatient now. Couldn’t his sister get to her point now? He spoke. “What would you have the girl do, Cersei? It’s not as if she fought beside the Starks. Wielding a battle axe for the northern army.”

“It raises an interesting question, I suppose. Can we truly blame those who end up on the wrong side of the war? Our dear Margaery here was betrothed to Renly Baratheon on the false assumption that he would one day rule the Seven Kingdoms. Can we fault her for her mistake? Should she be held accountable?” Now that was where Cersei wanted to go. She only wanted to humiliate the future queen through an easy target. Though for now the northern girl didn’t prove to be an easy target. Her next answer proved it.

“I won’t judge her, your Grace. I wasn’t there. I didn’t face her decisions.”

“Aren’t you a delightful girl? If only one could flit through life without ever holding an opinion of their own.” Cersei didn’t like the girl. It was obvious now. She despised her, probably considering she wasn’t courageous enough to answer her directly and fall into her traps. She was making the same mistake with that Northerner than with Sansa.

“It there’s a point to this, I hope you find it quickly,” Tyrion said. He appreciated the answers of the girl, but not the petty games without end of his sister.

“Loyalty can be such a hard thing to define.” Cersei started again with another long speech. “This city alone is filled with all sorts of ambitious opportunists looking to reinvent themselves, pretending to be something they’re not. Who knows what lurks within their hearts? You are a girl from the North, here in service to Lady Margaery. One can only assume her interests are yours. Yet loyalty to a king… that must be absolute. Beyond question. And if your loyalties were to become conflicted between your king and the very person whom you serve, what would you do then?”

Now that would be interesting. What would the girl answer? Would she manage to return Cersei’s question against herself again?

“I’m sure she would…” started Lady Margaery.

“Let the girl answer the question. Go on.” Cersei interrupted Margaery again. She wouldn’t let her future daughter-in-law intervene, it was quite obvious.

“My loyalties would never conflict, your Grace.” Lady Mira didn’t give the answer Cersei was looking for again.

This time Cersei let her rage go out. “That’s a coward’s answer. I will not have my time wasted by a northern girl who thinks she can play games. Who do you choose?” She was now only two feet away from Lady Mira, on the same floor. She was still taller than the handmaiden, but less than if she had been on the steps. She was looking directly into the eyes of the girl. From where Tyrion sat, Lady Mira’s gaze showed no emotion. But she took her time before answering the question. And the answer couldn’t have displeased Cersei more.

Mira Forrester took a great inspiration. “Your Grace, Lady Margaery is betrothed to the king. Her interests and those of the king are the same. Through my loyalty to her, I am loyal to the king.” She made a pause. “I am loyal to Lady Margaery.” The last sentence was pronounced firmly as the first ones had been said on a nearly innocent tone. The handmaiden also looked straight at Cersei’s face.
as she gave her answer. With her last words her eyes showed clearly she was speaking very seriously.

Cersei was fuming now. A handmaiden had deprived her of a little amusement towards Lady Margaery. The other people present were murmuring. “Clearly your handmaiden does not have her priorities straight.” Cersei managed to keep some of her composure. But Tyrion knew she wouldn’t forget the humiliation Mira Forrester inflicted her.

“She is a threat to the Crown, isn’t she? The most dangerous handmaiden in all of King’s Landing.” Tyrion said that on a mocking tone. All the better to laugh of his sister’s failure while the injury was still fresh.

“I’m not quite sure what to make of her. Not surprising I suppose for a northern girl. But not very encouraging either. I’d like a word with you, if I may?” Cersei finally asked to Lady Margaery.

“Of course, your Grace.” The Queen Regent and the future queen left together. Tyrion was now alone with the northern girl.

He looked at her and observed her again. Not to know better her physical attributes, but thinking about what he just witnessed. The girl was very clever and brave. She beat Cersei at her own game, and that took both wits and courage. She had defended the honor of Lady Margaery without a single hesitation, but also defended the honor of her house. She was quite the opposite of Sansa, who always said what Joffrey and Cersei wanted to hear from her. She had survived this way, but this one seemed able to survive without speaking against her kin. No wonder she was Lady Margaery’s handmaiden. She knew how to behave at court. And yet, she wasn’t as highborn as her mistress. She could attract attention with that, and her position could make her vulnerable.

Perhaps Tyrion could help her. And she could help him. He needed ironwood. And she may need allies if she was to survive this way in King’s Landing. Her father had been a good man and she seemed to be made of the same stuff than him. And he ought to try to make the consequences of his father’s doing less terrible. He had a very good idea suddenly.

“I’ll walk you out.” He stood up from his seat and went down the steps toward her. “This may come as a surprise, but I met your father once. At the Tourney at Lannisport. Even then he didn’t trust Roose Bolton. We only spoke briefly, but your father struck me as an honourable man. You have my condolences for his loss. These would be trying times for your family even under the best of circumstances.”

“Thank you, Lord Tyrion. That’s very kind of you to say.” She really seemed sad when he talked to her about her father. She loved him, that was certain. At least he could apologize to this girl. Quite the opposite of Sansa. She granted him a visible smile this time.

They started to walk over the door. “You were brave to declare your loyalty to Lady Margaery. No doubt she was pleased, but Cersei… She will not soon forget what you said. It was quite the first impression. I of course found it very entertaining.”

“I did it for Lady Margaery.” She’s loyal this one, for sure. That’s quite impressive. To risk her life merely for her mistress’s honor.

“As you should. And of course she has your best interests at heart. My sister and I have our differences. She takes great pleasures in her little charades, I take mine in thwarting them. We must find our amusements where we can. She threatened to give your ironwood to another house. It is the Master of Coin who decides such matters. The Crown needs boats. Boats needs wood. And I speak for the Crown in this regard. Not her.”
“What are you suggesting?” She wasn’t jumping to conclusions. That meant she was cautious. That was good.

“I suppose the Crown could be persuaded to secure ironwood from House Forrester. Lady Margaery might not look favorably on such an alliance. And it would infuriate Cersei. Although what would be amusing for me might prove rather dangerous for you. And your house. Are you willing to risk that? It may be far too dangerous. In fact, forget I even suggested such a thing.” The girl was in a dangerous situation. She had to know what could happen if she tried to play the game of thrones. Tyrion wouldn’t put her at risk against her will. His family already caused enough harm to the North.

“I’m sorry, Lord Tyrion. But it’s a risk I cannot afford.” She was cautious. Time would tell if she was wise.

“I admire your discretion. Now if you’ll excuse me, I promised Sansa I would join her for dinner tonight. Three beautiful bottles of Dornish wine await my arrival. The mere thought of them makes me thirsty already.” Much more than the thought of eating with Sansa. That will be a very silent supper. No wonder I relish so much for wine.

As Tyrion walked away from her, she dropped one last sentence. “I hope we meet again.”

He turned toward her. “Nothing would make Cersei happier, I’m sure. Until then be careful. This is not the North. King’s Landing can be a nest of vipers to the uninitiated.” Tyrion walked away for good this time.

She was keeping all her options open. Tyrion hoped everything would turn out well for her. But he knew they would meet again. If she didn’t come to him, he would come to her.

As he expected, the supper with Sansa was miserable. She never looked at him. It was even worse than at the beginning of their marriage. She barely touched her food as she did so often now. Tyrion was concerned about her, but he knew she wouldn’t listen to him. Wine helped him, and the only time he talked was when he offered her some of it. She nodded silently and Tyrion poured her a cup. She drank it, showing nothing that could help Tyrion to know if she liked it or not. Perhaps she didn’t even taste it. At the end she left without a word, probably to pray to the godswood again. And as always, Tyrion worked late in the night. When he came back she wasn’t sobbing. But he heard her sobbing later in the night, like all nights. And again, there was nothing Tyrion could do.

Chapter End Notes

So, I changed the answer Mira gave to the last question of Cersei. The choices in Telltale Game are always shorts answers and I wanted something more rich. And I like to have Cersei beaten at her own traps and humiliated in the best way possible.

Please review

Next Chapter: Tyrion again
“You’re famous for fucking half of Westeros. You just arrived at the capital after two weeks of bad roads, where would you go?” Tyrion asked to Bronn.

“I’d probably go to sleep, but I’m getting old.”

Tyrion saddled his horse along with Bronn and Podrick. They had to find the Red Viper before he caused any trouble. The news that Oberyn Martell had come for the royal wedding instead of his brother Doran unsettled Tyrion. They had to find their guest before someone died. And Tyrion knew the kind of place where they would find him. The only problem was, the only thing in King’s Landing that was more common than this type of place was soil. They had to visit many brothels before they could find the good one. By chance, a Dornishman wasn’t hard to notice in the capital. They met people who gave them indications of the man’s whereabouts. Finally they found him in one of the many establishments of Lord Baelish. They had one chance on two for Oberyn Martell to be in one of Littlefinger’s brothel, since Littlefinger owned half the brothels in town.

The brothel was now held by a man named Olyvar in Baelish’s absence. They entered it without problem. Bronn accompanied him inside. He would need him if things went wrong, and they would surely go wrong. The moment they entered they heard someone screaming. It seemed they were too late. The other customers didn’t have much trouble to tell them where the only Dornishman to visit this brothel was.

They went into the room they were directed to. “Prince Oberyn, forgive the intrusion. We heard there might be… trouble.” Tyrion probably didn’t really need to say the last word since a dagger left the hand of a screaming man at the moment he and Bronn entered. Prince Oberyn was holding the dagger and put it back into his scabbard as the man with the perforated fist and another one left the room. A woman, a Dornishwoman quite obviously, was also standing into the room.

“Apologies, my love,” the prince told her. She and the Red Viper kissed passionately, ignoring Tyrion and Bronn.

Uncomfortable with the situation, it took some time for Tyrion before he spoke. Even he and Shae
had more restraint when Bronn was there. “I’m here to welcome you to the capital.”

Finally they broke reluctantly their embrace, but both stayed grabbed at each other. “Ellaria Sand, my paramour. The king’s own Uncle Imp. Tyrion, son of Tywin Lannister.”

Tyrion could see there was no love for the Lannisters in this one. It was much more than contempt with this one. “If there’s anything I can do to make your stay at King’s Landing…”

“What are you? His hired killer?”

The question was for Bronn. “It started that way, aye. Now I’m a knight.”

“How did that come to pass?”

“Killed the right people, I suppose.”

The Red Viper began to laugh after a moment. He and Bronn had more in common than with the other westerosi noblemen. “We’ll need a few more girls. Girls, yes?”

Bronn was probably more than eager to accept the offer, but Tyrion wasn’t. He slightly shook his head.

“You don’t partake?” Oberyn Martell seemed more than surprised by his refusal.

“Oh, I partook. Now I’m married.” The words sounded strange as he said it. Tyrion would never have believed he would say this someday. He didn’t know why, or for who, but he said them. The most surprising for him was his words were honest. The Red Viper was looking at him as if he was some kind of animal he had never seen before. “Prince Oberyn, if I may, a word in private?”

The Dornishman wasn’t pleased by Tyrion’s demand, but he let go his paramour nonetheless. He and Tyrion walked outside the brothel as Bronn stayed behind, enjoying the girls the prince ordered for them.

“Seems I visited the Lannister brothel by mistake,” Oberyn said as they went in the streets.

“Oh, they take all kinds.”

“Even Dornishmen.”

Even imps, Tyrion wanted to add. “The king is very grateful that you traveled all this way for his wedding.”

“Let us speak truth here. Joffrey is insulted. I am only the second son after all.”

“Well, speaking as a fellow second son, I have grown rather used to being the family insult.” The prince chuckled, but Tyrion didn’t know if it was honest. “Why did you come to King’s Landing, Prince Oberyn?”

“I was invited to the royal wedding.”

“I thought we were speaking truth.”

“The last time I was in the capital was many years ago. Another wedding. My sister Elia and Rheagar Targaryen, the Last Dragon. My sister loved him. She bore his children. Swaddled them, rocked them, fed them at her own breast. Elia wouldn’t let the wet nurse touch them.” By the way the Dornishman spoke, it was obvious it was a sad memory for him. Tyrion couldn’t pretend to love
his sister the same way Oberyn loved his own. “And beautiful, noble Rhaegar Targaryen left her for
another woman. That started a war and the war ended right here when your father’s army took the
city.”

Tyrion knew what was coming. He knew what his father had done when he took King’s Landing.
Everyone knew. And right now that wasn’t something Tyrion wanted to be reminded of. He already
had enough on his consciousness with Sansa’s family. “I wasn’t actually present.”

Prince Oberyn didn’t wait for him to finish before he continued. “They butchered those children. My
nephew and niece. Carved them up and wrapped them in Lannister cloaks. And my sister, you know
what they did to her?” Tyrion had lowered his head. With his hand Oberyn Martell rose it back. “I’m
asking you a question.” Tyrion didn’t like the look on Prince Oberyn’s face. There was no more
sadness, only wrath.

“I’ve heard rumors.”

“So have I. The one I keep hearing is that Gregor Clegane the Mountain raped Elia and split her in
half with his great sword.”

“I wasn’t there. I don’t know what happened.”

“If the Mountain killed my sister, your father gave the order. Tell your father I’m here. And tell him
the Lannisters aren’t the only ones who pay their debts.”

Prince Oberyn Martell walked away back to the brothel with a diabolical smile. The omens from this
weren’t good. Tyrion would have to warn his father about this to prevent someone of the family to
be killed. He returned to the Red Keep alone, leaving Bronn to his pleasures.

While he walked, Tyrion realized he didn’t really want to speak to his father about all this. To be
honest he couldn’t blame Prince Oberyn’s lust for Lannister blood. But he didn’t want Lannister
blood to be spilled all the same, though many would see it as good payment for all the other family’s
blood the Lannisters spilled over the last decades. His father was respected, but also hated by most of
the people in the Seven Kingdoms. Lord Tywin Lannister didn’t care about it, as long as people
feared and respected him.

His father always claimed to do everything for family. If that was what it meant to care for his family,
Tyrion wasn’t very eager to follow his father’s example. He wondered what family really meant for
the Lord of Casterly Rock. He didn’t care very much about his children, who were his family.
Tyrion, Cersei and Jaime were all unhappy about their life. If that was the result for sacrificing
everything to the family… Tyrion was malcontent. Oberyn Martell had put even more burdens on his
mind when he already had too much. Tyrion had eaten in advance to welcome the dornish guests,
but he knew Sansa would be taking her midday meal now.

He had ordered Shae and her other handmaidens to bring her to the gardens at the same time. Sansa
barely left their rooms now. Shae told him that she spent all her days in their chambers and left only
to pray in the godswood the evening. It was probably because Tyrion was present during their
suppers and she wanted to escape him as soon as it was possible once they were done eating. Tyrion
was really concerned about her health now. It was a month now since her brother and her mother
were killed and she still barely ate anything. He hoped the fresh air might help her and give her back
some appetite. He was disabused when he arrived at the place where she was.

Shae and another handmaiden were present. There was a lot of food before her and on a table to her
right, but as always it was untouched. Shae was now offering her lemon cakes, and even that Sansa
refused. She refused her favourite pastry. Tyrion wondered if there was any solution to this. Sansa
couldn’t hold forever like this.

Shae was begging Sansa to eat when Tyrion arrived. “You love lemon cakes. Tell her she needs to eat.” She had noticed Tyrion’s presence and seemed discouraged.

“My lady, you do need to eat.”

“I don’t want to eat.” Sansa’s answer wasn’t encouraging. Her eyes were hollow, without life. All the contrary of the girl he had seen right before the news of the Red Wedding reached them.

“If I could have a moment alone with my wife.” Tyrion addressed his wish to Shae and the other servant. He thought her name was Brella. She left immediately, but Shae stayed behind, reluctant to leave obviously. Tyrion made her understand with a little move of his head that he needed to be alone with Sansa. He hoped she would understand it was only to help Sansa, nothing more.

Shae finally left, remembering him the situation at the same time. “She needs to eat.” As always she was angry after him each time he spent time with his wife. But Tyrion had no choice on this. He couldn’t try to help Sansa with Shae around. He wouldn’t be able to speak freely.

Tyrion sat next to Sansa and laid a hand on hers. She was still starring in front of her, her face without expression. “I can’t let you starve. I swore to protect you.” She pulled her hand from Tyrion’s almost immediately, still looking away. “My lady, I am your husband. Let me help you.”

“How can you help me?” There was only contempt in her voice, but at least she was talking to him.

“I don’t know, but I can try.” He had to try. He couldn’t allow Sansa to starve herself to death.

“I lie awake all night staring at the canopy thinking about how they died.”

“I could get you essence of nightshade to help you sleep.” He knew that wouldn’t solve much problems, but he couldn’t think about anything else to help her right now.

“How do you know what they did to my brother?” Like with Oberyn Martell, he had to lower the eyes. He knew all too well the details of the horrible things the Freys had done to the Starks after the slaughtering. He hadn’t told Sansa in the hope she would never learn about it, but it hadn’t mattered. She probably heard it from someone else, perhaps from Joffrey himself, or only by listening to the discussions in the Red Keep. “How they sowed his direwolf’s head onto his body? And my mother. They say they cut her throat to the bone and threw her body in the river.”

Tyrion couldn’t support it anymore. He couldn’t do as if his family had done nothing wrong. Sansa was his wife, and his father had destroyed all that remained to her in the most horrible way. He finally allowed some of his deepest thoughts to go out. “What happened to your family what a terrible crime. I didn’t know your brother. He seemed like a good man, but I didn’t know him. Your mother, on the other hand, I admired her. She wanted to have me executed, but I admired her.” He grinned a little while saying the latter, but turned back seriously very quickly. “She was a strong woman. And she was fierce when it came to protecting her children.”

He didn’t know if that would help her to feel better, but it couldn’t be worse than hearing the horrible lies spoken against the victims of the Red Wedding at court. “Sansa,” he called after her. For the first time in many weeks, she looked at him. “Your mother would want you to carry on. You know it’s true.” As soon as he said it, she averted her eyes once again and rose up from her seat.

“Will you pardon me, my lord? I’d like to visit the godswood.”

“Of course. Of course. Prayer can be helpful, I hear.”
“I don’t pray anymore.” The affirmation left him mingled. “It’s the only place I can go where people don’t talk to me.” She turned her heels and left.

Tyrion didn’t believe in gods, but Sansa always had. It saddened him to see she had abandoned her faith, the gods of her father even more. Tyrion had tried to help her, but he had failed, as he expected. Right now he would have done anything to support the girl, but again there was nothing he could do. He walked away and while he was walking the names of all the people whose deaths were caused by his family, directly or indirectly, came to his mind.


Only one of them deserved to die.

Chapter End Notes

I found it interesting to imagine what were Tyrion's thoughts and feelings at this moment. Being remembered by Oberyn about the slaughtering of the Targaryen children, then not long after about the horrible things that happened at the Red Wedding because of his father. As the producers of the show said in "Season 4: Inside the Episode #1", Oberyn and Tyrion have a lot in common, including their fellings about the Lannisters.

Please review

Next chapter: Shae
Shae IV

Chapter Notes

OK, that's a very short one, even shorter than Bronn's chapter. There will be more stuff in the following chapters. In fact, I have quite a few long chapters that are coming.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

SHAE IV

Shae was waiting in Tyrion’s chambers, her clothes removed. She only wore her light under-silk, which were more smallclothes since there was nothing else under. She laid on the bed, her long legs naked and stretched in a very seductive way. It was always in a way like this one she would welcome Tyrion when he came to her and that it ended with them fucking each other. This time however she used her most enthralling position. It would work for sure. It had been months since she and Tyrion had any time together. They both needed to think about something else and Shae knew no better way for that. When something troubled them, men always looked for something to distract them, and from her experience, Shae knew they always turned toward this solution in these times. And Tyrion was no exception to that.

She wanted him. She missed her lion, the one whom she spent so many beautiful moments before. She missed the man she loved. He spent more time with his crying wife than with his love and Shae was tired of it. Tyrion should stay away from Sansa while Shae tried to comfort her. He should come to her secretly during the night. In the dungeons, the gardens, a corridor, Flea Bottom, outside the city… Shae didn’t care. She wanted to have him again. She wanted everything to be as they were before this stupid wedding. She wanted to escape with him, to sail away to the other side of the world where no one of his family could find them and where they could live happily until they died. She wanted him to look at her as he had before the Battle of Blackwater and when she visited him after he was wounded. She loved him. Sansa did not and would never love him. And yet the poor girl was the one to receive the gazes full of affection that Shae loved so much in Tyrion. How unfair it was. She doesn’t want you and she will never want you. I love you. I am your true wife. I am yours and you are mine. She wanted to scream it so that her lion would hear and understand he had nothing to get from his child wife.

She waited. What could take him so long? As if he could accomplish anything by talking to Sansa. Unless they were doing something else… Anger boiled in Shae as the mere thought of Tyrion and Sansa together crossed her mind. But she went back to reality once more. Sansa would never give herself to Tyrion after the tragedy of her family. Shae relaxed. Sansa was only a child. She wasn’t interested in Tyrion. Surely she hated him now. And she didn’t have Shae’s talents to please men. Shae knew Tyrion needed this kind of things from a woman. Sansa couldn’t give to Tyrion what Shae could. Shae had decided to wait in the bed Tyrion and Sansa were supposed to share for this reason. She could offer to Tyrion his wedding night, here, in the bed where it was supposed to happen. After that, Tyrion would never discard her again. She had some satisfaction in doing it in Sansa’s bed, she had to admit it. She liked the girl, but it wasn’t as if she was taking anything from her. Sansa didn’t want Tyrion and she wanted nothing of this bed. Shae wanted it on the other hand.
Finally Tyrion entered the room. She noticed some gap of time between the moment he opened the
door and the moment he advanced in the room, as if he was afraid to come in. He shouldn’t be
afraid. She wasn’t going to hurt him. When he arrived close to the table, she caught his attention with
a very enticing voice. “My lion.”

Tyrion turned towards her. “What are you doing?”

That wasn’t the answer she wanted. No worry. She continued with the same voice, stretching on her
chest to let the curve of her breasts and more visible. “What does it look like I’m doing? Come here.”

“How many times have I told you? You can’t visit me here.” He nearly sounded angry as he walked
toward her. But she knew he wasn’t. Deep inside he wanted to spend time with her.

“I know. I know. We have come to a dangerous place. Have you forgotten me? Do you know how
long it’s been?”

“Of course I haven’t forgotten.” She knew it.

“I want you. Don’t you want me?” She made her voice even more seductive and tried to kiss him.
But he fell back.

“Things are a bit tense right now.”

“What things?” She tried again to unlace his doublet, but he stopped her hand.

“My nephew the king wants to murder me. My wife hates me because my father murdered her
family. Oberyn Martell wants to murder everyone whose last name is Lannister.” He raised his
fingers as he enumerated his problems. Shae caught his fist and folded the fingers one by one, until
only the thumb remained.

“You need to relax.” She said it very sweetly and sucked his thumb. Then she lifted up the fine silk
of her undergarment and brought her lover’s thumb into her cunt, up where her mound was. It felt so
good, after so much time. “Don’t you want to relax?” As she asked she approached her lips of her
lover’s. He was backing up, so she pressed forward. It was when he abruptly removed his thumb. He
was looking beside her.

“What’s wrong?” She grew impatient. Didn’t he want her? He should. How long was it since the last
time he fucked her? Was it because he was seeing other women? Or even Sansa? She swelled of
anger.

“I told you. It’s not a good time.”

“It’s never a good time. You have your child bride now.” She walked away from him and the bed,
grabbing her handmaiden’s dress at the same time. That was poor clothes. Sansa always wore
beautiful gowns made of the finest fabrics.

“Shae.” He was calling after her, but now Shae was too angry to listen to him. She hostilely turned
her back to him while she pulled back her dress.

“Do you love her?”

“Love her? I barely know her. She’s a child. She despises me.”

“That’s not an answer.”
“Of course I don’t love her.” His tone wasn’t very convincing.

“You tried to ship me away.” It was time for her to confront him about that.

“Ship you away?”

“Give me diamonds and make me disappear.” She turned toward him as she put back her bracelets around her wrists and her ring. She nearly wanted to throw them to his face. Tyrion had offered them to her a long time ago. She wondered if he ever offered any jewel to Sansa. Surely he had, and the girl probably never wore them, but she was sure they were made of better stuff and more valuable than her own.

“What in the world are you talking about?” He dared to act as if he didn’t know. He and Varys were friends.

“If you want me to leave, just say it.” He didn’t answer. “SAY IT!” This time she yelled.

“Shhhh. I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Shae was more than exasperated by his false denials. He wasn’t honest with her. He lied about his feelings for Sansa. He lied about his feelings for her. He lied about the fact he wanted her to leave. He lied to her about everything when Shae told him the truth about everything. “You want me to stay?”

She had her answer with the look he gave her. It confirmed everything she suspected. She grabbed her sandals and left the room, making as much noise as she could. She didn’t care if someone heard them. He would know how angry she was after him.

How could she have been so stupid to fall in love with him? To believe everything he told her? He was no different from the other men. Once they were bored with her, they set her aside for another woman they found more interesting. And Tyrion had only needed a child for that.

And yet Shae couldn’t help but love him. He was still beautiful in her eyes and she was a whore no more. She wouldn’t go back to this life. She had a life here, with him. She would get him back, no matter the cost.

He’s mine, and I’m his.

With these thoughts she walked to the servant’s rooms, still angry but determined to do anything that would be necessary to get Tyrion back.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
Sansa III

Chapter Notes

Sansa is back after an absence of eight chapters. She starts a very interesting evolution from this moment.

For those who may find it long before my fic change from the show, I'm sorry. I have to admit I find it long myself. The change begins next week.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sansa III

*Your mother would want you to carry on. You know it's true.*

The words were pounding in her head. They came again and again, no matter how many times she would try to drive them out. It was like that ever since she had entered the godswood. She wanted to be alone.

*Your mother would want you to carry on. You know it's true.*

She had finally decided to pray. What she told Tyrion wasn’t entirely true. She still prayed in the godswood, but not all the time she spent there as before. And she wasn’t asking anything from the gods anymore. She was questioning them now, to understand why her family was slaughtered while the evil ones lived. Why was there no justice in this world? She tried to understand and she failed. She was alone, abandoned, a lone wolf in a lion’s den.

*Your mother would want you to carry on. You know it's true.*

She remembered how she had felt when Margaery told her what had happened at the Twins. How she hadn’t believed it first. She thought the wedding of her uncle would allow her brother to take back the advantage in the war. When finally she had realized that Margaery was telling her the truth, she had nearly fallen on the floor. She would have if her friend hadn’t held her. After some time, Sansa had asked Margaery to leave. She wanted to be alone. When her husband had entered their chamber, the hatred she felt for him at this moment couldn’t be described. And she had wanted him to suffer, to know how much she hated him when she looked at him.

*Your mother would want you to carry on. You know it's true.*

The next weeks had been an ordeal. She had crossed Joffrey once as she walked the corridors and with the way he talked to her, the details he gave her about the death of her mother and Robb, her armor of courtesies nearly cracked. After that she never left her rooms except for her evening visits of the godswood. She did nothing all day, only thinking about everybody she had lost.

*Your mother would want you to carry on. You know it's true.*

All her relatives were dead. Her half-brother Jon might be still alive at the Wall, but he was at the other side of the world and she didn’t know if she could really consider him family. They didn’t
share the same mother. He was a bastard. Her true family was all gone now. Her mother. Her father. Robb. Arya. Bran. Rickon. Lady. All of them.

_Your mother would want you to carry on. You know it’s true._

The dreams didn’t help her. The rare times she managed to fall asleep she would make the same dream that haunted her. She hated to hear the same words from the bard each time. Life is a song. And yours is just about to begin. She hated to see all her family smiling at her. She hated to stand with Ser Loras, saying stupid vows that meant nothing. The part of the dream she hated the less was the end, when she would realize the beautiful knight wasn’t there anymore. At least it was more realistic. That always was the moment she would wake up. And then she would cry for her dead family. Every night it would happen.

_Your mother would want you to carry on. You know it’s true._

She didn’t feel well. She realized Shae had to lace her gowns tighter than before. She was hungry all the time. She was weary because of the lack of sleep. Her body reacted well when she went outside today, but Sansa didn’t want to feel well. All her family was dead. She was the only Stark left alive. No. It was worse than that. There was no Stark left. She was a Lannister and the heir to Winterfell and the North. Her children would bear the name of the people who killed her kin like beasts for amusement. She really was a traitor now. She had betrayed her family. Her home would belong to the Lannisters someday because of her.

_Your mother would want you to carry on. You know it’s true._

She wanted to scream. She didn’t want to hear it. Not from him. She didn’t want his compassion, his friendship, his support, his presence or anything good he could offer her. He was a monster. His father had destroyed everything she held dear. She didn’t want him to be sad for her. She wanted his voice to shut up. She didn’t want to hear it in her head any longer. She wanted to hate him.

_Your mother would want you to carry on. You know it’s true._

She couldn’t. He was everything she had left, the only one here in King’s Landing who really tried to be there for her. The only one who really wanted to comfort her without any second thoughts, without any hidden objectives. She was no idiot as when she had arrived in King’s Landing. She knew Margaery wanted to be her friend, but also that she wanted something else from her. What it was, she didn’t really know. Tyrion had no secret agenda. The proof was he barely spoke to her. He didn’t know what to tell her. He was only concerned about her. She had seen it in his eyes in the gardens. His words couldn’t achieve any secret goal. They were only encouragements for her to live. He didn’t try to convince her of anything else. There was nothing false about him. And she wanted to hate him because of that.

_Your mother would want you to carry on. You know it’s true._

Finally she gave up. Trying to ban his words from her mind was exhausting. She thought about them. She couldn’t stay as she was. Her mother would have sacrificed her life for her. She would have started a war to see her safe. And here Sansa was, wailing all day for the people who had tried to save her, who died for her. She was a wolf. She was the blood of the North and she had to be strong for her family, for the ones who died trying to help her. She was a Stark. The last one but still she was a Stark nonetheless. She needed to be brave. That’s what her family would want. That’s what her mother would want.

_Your mother would want you to carry on. You know it’s true._
The words didn’t bother her so much now. She continued to stay in her praying position, thinking about it. Her thoughts became more clear and she had the impression a great weigh was removed from her shoulders. A big one still lingered on her, but it was less heavy than previously. In comparison to the hell Sansa had lived in for weeks, she nearly felt free for a moment. She would survive. She would survive for her family. It was a duty she had towards the dead. She remembered the motto of her mother’s family. *Family, Duty, Honor.* Family came first. She had a duty toward her family. And her duty was to act with honor for them. She couldn’t let herself die. And she didn’t want to die in fact. She had thought about it, but she couldn’t bring herself to die. She could only bring herself to live miserably, and that was exactly what her mother wouldn’t want.

*Your mother would want you to carry on. You know it’s true.*

She accepted it. As much as she hated to admit it, Tyrion’s words were true. She had to live. She reflected about it for a long time and came to accept it. Then she began to speak to the old gods as she had done before, asking for their help in her hardship. She would need it. Perhaps in time she would start again to pray into the sept to ask help from the new gods as well. The gods of both her mother and her father could help her. She succeeded in finding a temporary peace, uneasy as it could be. She would need more time to face everything. She stayed like this a long time, letting her thoughts come and go. For the first time in a month, Sansa Stark felt good. She allowed herself to linger for a very long time here in the godswood, out of the world before she would have to face it again. She focused on the fresh air caressing her face. On the noise the wind made on the leaves. On the sound of the waves in the bay underneath her. It was so calm here. She felt at peace. It was a peace she was afraid to break, because she feared she could be broken again once it would be over.

Suddenly Sansa thought she heard a creak. She looked up at her right where there was a viewpoint, but nobody was here. She probably imagined it. Anyway it was time to leave the godswood. She rose and followed the trail to the exit. As she walked however she kept the impression that someone was watching her. She stopped for a moment and realized there were other footsteps than her own. Her heart began to beat faster. She walked in a hurry. She looked at her back once and saw someone following her. She pressed on, but finally reached a dead-end. She was trapped with an unknown person behind her. What if it was Joffrey? Or Ser Meryn Trant? Or worse? It was at this moment that she felt a hand on her shoulder. She jumped in surprise and turned around to face the intruder.

“It’s all right. It’s all right. It’s all right.” He put a finger near his lips. From the way he talked and staggered Sansa could see he was drunk, even without the distasteful breath she could smell even from this distance. The man was big and his hair were messy.

“You’re drunk.” Sansa stated the obvious.

“Yes. I have good reason to be. Once I was a knight. Now I’m only a fool. Don’t you know me?”

It took some time to Sansa, but slowly she remembered when she saw this face. It was in another very dark moment of her life, not long after her father’s death. “Ser Dontos. The king’s nameday celebration. I’m sorry. I should have remembered.”

She remembered how she saved the life of the knight when Joffrey ordered his kingsguards to force a full barrel of wine in his throat. She only managed to save him by suggesting to Joffrey he could make the man his fool. And Joffrey had agreed. Sadly this memory brought another one to Sansa’s mind. Right after the accident, Tyrion had arrived with a few men in Lannister armor, his sellsword and a great band of savages. He had mocked Joffrey publicly at this moment. It had been the first time Sansa had seen someone laugh at Joffrey in his presence without losing something. But it also had been the only time someone offered her condolences for her father’s death. She chased the thought of her head. She didn’t want to think about it.
“I can’t accept your apology,” Ser Dontos replied. “I may be a fool, but I’m a living fool, thanks to you.”

“Anyone would have done the same.”

“But only you did. I can never repay you. You gave me my life. But this, this is worth more than my life.” He took a necklace from a purse attached to his garments and offered it to Sansa. She took it. It was a simple but beautiful necklace with blue amethysts. “It belonged to my mother and her mother before her. House Hollard was strong once. House on the rise. That’s all that’s left of those days, thanks to a few sad, fat drunks like me.”

It reminded Sansa of her own family. The Hollards and the Starks were both destroyed because of Joffrey. “I can’t take it. It’s very, very kind of you, but I can’t.”

“I don’t have anything else left. That’s all. Take it. Wear it. Let my name have one more moment in the sun before it disappears from the world.” He was looking at her with pleading eyes.

“I’ll wear it with pride, Ser Dontos.” It was obvious the man regretted the downfall of his family. She could at least grant him that. She smiled at him, to show him she was happy to do it.

“Yeah.” He seemed to appreciate. “Excuse me, but my duties as a fool await me.” He left, the unhappy look of a drunken man on his face.

Sansa went back to her chambers, crossing no one on her way. By chance, the royal wedding occupied Joffrey and Cersei very much, so these last times the chances she would meet them in the Red Keep were quite diminished. She put the necklace in the drawer of her boudoir. As she closed the drawer her eyes were brought to something on the furniture. It was a rectangular leather box that laid there for a week now. She hadn’t touched it yet.

She remembered when she had found it. Sansa had reached her fifteenth nameday a week ago. She didn’t celebrate it since she had no mind for it, but on the morning of this day, she had awakened with something unexpected on her personal table. It was it, at the same place it still was now. At the time there had been a note on the box, but she had thrown it in the fire as soon as she read it and recognized Tyrion’s writing. “For your fifteenth nameday. Never forget who you are.” So the box had stayed unopened there for a week.

She didn’t want to open it. Not yet. Tyrion always was kind with her, but right now she still couldn’t accept his kindness. She didn’t know if she could ever accept it again. She decided she would live, but she still didn’t know what to do of her husband. Her mother would want her to carry on, that much was true, but would she want Sansa to be happy with a Lannister? Sansa herself didn’t want it and she was sure all her family would agree with her. She could learn to live with Tyrion and find some way of life with him, but she would never trust him. For her family, she could never trust him. The box stayed untouched.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
Chapter Notes

This is the last time we have Tyrion POV before the change. Enjoy it.

By the way, for the people who are interested, I now have a Tumblr account under the pseudonym "Gracquess". I had to put a second "s" to my username because someone else already had it on Tumblr. News about my fanfics will be posted there.

This fanfiction is also available on Wattpad now.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

TYRION VII

Tyrion was walking in the gardens. He had decided to take some fresh air. Baelish’s accounts were giving him headaches again. Perhaps that was the real reason why he suggested to his father to give his job to Tyrion before he left. Tyrion didn’t trust this man. Tyrion trusted Varys much more than Baelish and that was a lot to say. Tyrion had no idea what game the previous Master of Coin was playing, but he didn’t like it. His lies to Catelyn Stark that led to Tyrion’s arrest and started the war between the Lannisters and his wife’s family were enough for Tyrion to hate the man. He hadn’t done anything against Littlefinger while he was Hand of the King because he had no other proof than the word of Lady Stark. Tyrion wished it was Littlefinger and not Pycelle who betrayed him and informed Cersei about his plans for Myrcella. Furthermore, Baelish was very useful for the Crown only with the finances. And it was by using him that Tyrion managed to make a deal with Sansa’s mother to exchange his brother against her two daughters. He wished he could have fulfilled the arrangement, but when his brother had finally reached the capital, he was no more Hand of the King, his father was in no hurry to fulfill his son’s agreement, Sansa was married with him, her sister was still nowhere to be found and Catelyn Stark was dead. The only way to send back Sansa to her mother would be to kill her and that wasn’t an option Tyrion was ready to consider. Also, Baelish fulfilled very well the other secret mission Tyrion had entrusted him: to break the alliance between the Tyrells and Renly Baratheon. He needed Renly’s assassination for that, but he succeeded all the same. And he collected all the merit while Tyrion was put aside, as if he did nothing for House Lannister during the whole war. All the same, between his lies to Catelyn Stark and his betrayal of Ned Stark, Tyrion could never trust even a single second such a man.

And now, Tyrion would soon have to negotiate with the two merchants representing House Whitehill who claimed they could sell ironwood for the royal fleet. They were waiting for Tyrion right now in the Throne Room. And they would wait for a little while. Tyrion needed a little rest from these financial matters. At least if things became more and more complicated with his work as Master of Coin, the situation with his wife stabilized. Not that Sansa was anymore happy with him than before. He could still feel her resentment for the death of her mother and her brother and it was obvious she still mourned them. However, since their discussion on the terrace, she began to eat again. Tyrion also had the impression she was sleeping better. She even accepted the essence of nightshade he offered her, though he didn’t know if she really used it. Yesterday she even asked him how his day had been during the supper. That had taken Tyrion aback. She hadn’t spoken for the
rest of the meal, but it still was a very great improvement in comparison to the last month. Tyrion
didn’t think Sansa would forgive him or his family for the Red Wedding, but it reassured him all the
same to see that Sansa was better.

To forget one moment about his troubles with the Master of Coin’s businesses, Tyrion began to
reflect about a book he read not long ago. *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*
by Archmaester Maynard. Tyrion found the matter of the work quite interesting. This maester had
managed to convince his grandfather, Lord Tytos Lannister, to give him money for an experience in
a few villages of the Westerlands decades ago. In these villages, the maester noted the proportion of
people who didn’t work among all the population, an unemployment rate. He also noted the total
production of these villages. Most of these villages had a mine where most of the people worked, or
the population mostly farmed lands. The experience consisted in giving a silver stag each month to
every person in the village for three years. The consequences of this had been very surprising and, in
the eyes of the maester, a blessing. In one village, half the population didn’t work before the
experiment. Three years later, only a tenth was without occupation. In another one, it fell from a third
to a fifth. The decrease of unemployment had been visible everywhere, as well as an increase in the
production. However, in each village, prices also climbed compared to the beginning of the
experience. The author also noticed that more the unemployment would be high somewhere, the
more it would reduce and the less prices would jump up. Tyrion had found this work very intriguing,
though he wasn’t sure if his father gave a golden dragon each month for years to everyone in the
Riverlands it would mean people would be better all of a sudden with fields ravaged and winter
coming. However, that had been quite entertaining to read about it. Perhaps he should look into more
books from this Archmaester Maynard. As Master of Coin, reading about this kind of things may
help him eventually.

However, for now, Tyrion had to focus on the matter of the ironwood. His father himself had
ordered him to find enough to build shields for Lannister and Tyrell armies, but even more important
for the royal fleet. The two merchants he met shortly before didn’t inspire great trust. One of them
was big and yelled as often as he breathed. The other one was more diplomatic, but only inspired
more mistrust from Tyrion. He reminded him too much of Littlefinger. And to be honest, Tyrion
didn’t really want to deal with the Whitehills. From what he knew of ironwood, two houses had
fought for generations for its control: House Whitehill and House Forrester, the latter one to which
belonged the Lady Mira Forrester that Tyrion met two weeks ago. According to his readings, House
Whitehill destroyed the ironwood forests on their territory a long time ago (no wonder their house
bore such a name). The Forresters, on the other hand, managed to harvest the forests in a way so that
it may last centuries. And actually, the Forresters were the specialists for the crafting of ironwood.
Tyrion didn’t think the Whitehills would be able to supply the Crown with good quality ironwood
after decades without working it. The ideal would be to receive ironwood harvested by the Forresters
if that was possible. As he was thinking about it, Tyrion suddenly noticed two young women sitting
on a bench with a jug of wine. He recognized one of them immediately. It seemed there were gods in
this world who heard his wishes. He walked over them.

“Hmm… A conspiracy of handmaidens.” The two girls were obviously startled by his intrusion.
They stood up abruptly.

“My lord.” It was the other one who spoke. For a moment Tyrion didn’t recognize her, but then he
remembered she was there when Cersei had tried to bring the Forrester girl to speak against Lady
Margaery. She was another handmaiden of the future queen. Tyrion couldn’t remember her name.

It wasn’t difficult to see he had caught them doing something they shouldn’t. The brown haired
handmaiden was hiding the jug behind her back. “Ladies. What have we here? If you mean to drink
form that flagon…”
“We’re just enjoying the sunshine.” Lady Mira Forrester seemed a bit tense too, though less than the other one.

“Is that what they’re calling wine these days?” The other girl finally gave Tyrion the flagon. It was useless to hide it now. With his great experience, Tyrion recognized the wine immediately by smelling it. “Not the finest Arbor red. But a favorite of my sister’s. Quite expensive for a handmaiden. I’d be curious to know how you got hold of it. Since I’m certain my sister didn’t give it to you. She won’t even share with me.”

“We found it.”

“Found it? Where?”

“In that bush.” It was the rounded face handmaiden who answered this time. Her answer wasn’t very clever. Tyrion wondered if Lady Mira would have said the same thing. He didn’t think so.

“Lord Tyrion.” The northern girl looked at him with a pleading in her eyes. That was interesting. It meant she cared about the other girl. They were probably friends.

“Strange it would find its way into a bush,” Tyrion began. “If Cersei knew you had this wine, she’d drown you in it. Yet you’re worried about an alliance with me? You need to know what risks are worth taking.” Tyrion wouldn’t tell his sister. He didn’t see the necessity to have someone killed for a bottle of wine. However, he had an opportunity he couldn’t miss. “Things have changed. My father has recently taken an interest in ironwood. Most of the royal navy went up in green flames. It must be rebuilt.” He gave back the flagon to the other girl and began to walk before them. “He’s insisted I handle things myself. I’m on my way to meet representatives of Lord Whitehill.”

“Lord Whitehill?” Mira Forrester was obviously surprised and horrified by this. Tyrion had hit the right point.

“He’s hired a pair of merchant lords to broker for his house. It would seem Lord Whitehill wishes to sell the ironwood right out from beneath your family. I don’t know much about the man. But judging by his upjumped sellswords… Negotiating with him won’t be pleasant.”

“I will speak for House Forrester.” Lady Mira’s voice was full of determination. This walk had been a very good idea. He turned back to face the young woman.

“Perhaps you could. Come with me. These men think I have no choice but to deal with them. Imagine their surprise when I bring a Forrester to the table. It might be the first fun I’ve had in months. My lady.”

With a gesture from his arms, Tyrion invited Lady Mira to follow him. She glanced one last time at her friend and followed him. Tyri on was very eager to see how the two merchants, especially the fat yelling one, would react. That would change him from the gloomy moments he shared with Sansa and Shae these last times. As they walked in the direction of the Throne Room, Tyrion warned Lady Mira about the two merchants and how they could react to her presence. He told her at the same time that she should be especially wary of the thin one named Rickard Morgryn. He was the quiet one of the two and the more a man was noisy, the less he was dangerous, while the opposite applied for silent men. He only had to think about Varys and Littlefinger to know it. Lady Mira listened to everything he had to say very attentively, asking questions about the two men at the same time. The girl was intelligent. Not too much for her own good he hoped, as Cersei said once.

They finally reached the doors of the Throne Room and a guard opened it for them. He slightly bowed his head toward Lady Mira with a smile as she passed before him. The two merchants were
standing, waiting for him. The fat one was obviously angry, as always.

“We’ve been waiting here for an hour.” Be glad you didn’t wait any longer, big ham. That would have been my pleasure.

“Andros, be courteous.” The other had been trying to control his friend for all the discussion they had before and he would need to do it again it seemed.

“Courtesy in a merchant. Like finding gold in your chamber pot.” Tyrion descended the steps and turned back to Lady Mira so the two men would notice her presence. “Apologies, my lady.”

“Who is this? Some girl you’ve brought for entertainment?” This Lord Andros clearly wasn’t a good diplomat. How could he end here and hope to make any contract with the Crown this way? Perhaps Tyrion should send him to negotiate with Joffrey. He wondered if Joffrey would piss himself before so much rage or if he would use the man as a target practice.

“She’s a lady, Lord Andros.” Well, the other one has eyes at least. Morgryn knew how to behave.

The northern girl chose this moment to intervene. “My name is Mira Forrester.”

She descended the steps and stood before the two men. Tyrion watched carefully. He would learn a lot of things on the two men from their reactions to this presence. And it was very funny to see them so taken aback. They were surprised for sure. The fat one couldn’t find his words anymore. It was the other one who spoke first.

“Mira Forrester?” He didn’t seem quite unbelieving, more evaluating. It was Baelish’s style. Tyrion was sure he was surprised by the presence of the girl, but he only showed it for half a second.

“Why are you here?” asked his friend.

“A fair question,” Morgryn added.

“We were told we’d be speaking to Lord Tyrion alone. This is no place for a Forrester.”

“That’s a private matter, my lords,” claimed very calmly the handmaiden. She wouldn’t tell them the reason of her presence, but they would guess it quite easily all the same.

“Forresters have nothing to offer, my lord. If you want ironwood, you’ll have to deal with the Whitehills.” Tyrion internally laughed at such a stupid declaration from Lord Andros. He talked as if he was the one with the power here. Again his partner had to reason him.

“Andros. I’m sorry, Lady Mira, but we’ve already spoken to Lord Tyrion…”

Tyrion stopped him before he could say anymore. “You spoke. I listened. Lady Mira has since persuaded me to consider her offer first. Now if you’ll excuse us.” He made a sign towards the guard at the doors and he opened them. Even an idiot like this Andros should understand what it meant.

“You’re going to dismiss…”?

“You can’t do this!” interjected the fat man. For the first time, Morgryn seemed taken aback.

“I assure you, I can.” Tyrion said it with his most serious voice.

“This is a mistake, my lord.”

“I don’t think so.” Tyrion had nothing to do with empty threats from a yelling man.
The crier stepped towards Lady Mira with a threatening look. “Lord Whitehill will hear of this! He’s not a man to take such matters lightly. Nor am I.”

“That’s enough, Andros.” Again, Morgryn tried to control his associate. And again, he failed.

“Lord Andros, I am truly sorry if I’ve upset you.” As Mira Forrester said it, Tyrion knew she wasn’t sincere, but she played her part very well.

Andros spoke with his angry voice one last time before leaving. “You have no idea. Lord Tyrion.” He glanced one last time towards Tyrion and walked out of the room. Morgryn approached him then.

“Lord Tyrion. Do let me know when you’ve come to a decision. I’d like the opportunity to change your mind. Lady Mira.” With a little bow he followed his friend. Tyrion would have to watch these two, especially Lord Morgryn. Perhaps he had put the young lady in danger.

“Good day, gentlemen!” he told them as the doors closed. “Well, that was fun. Now. As for your offer. What did you have in mind?” He poured himself some wine, waiting for Lady Mira’s answer.

“My lord?” she asked him.

“The Crown’s ironwood. I assume you have a proposition. You had a reason for coming here. I know it wasn’t just to entertain me.”

Mira Forrester took a serious expression before she spoke. “My family can supply all that the Crown needs.”

Now, that was interesting. “You’re suggesting the Forresters to be our sole supplier of ironwood. Lord Whitehill would be left in the cold. If he wishes to sell to the Crown, he’ll have to do so through your family. You will have him at your mercy. Or… you’ll bring your houses to open war. You do know that’s a possibility, don’t you?” Tyrion was more than disposed to buy ironwood from the Forresters. He didn’t trust the Whitehills on the matter and he would be more than happy to infuriate Cersei with that. However, the girl’s family could be in great danger in this case. He didn’t wish to cause the destruction of another northern house.

“Then that’s a risk I’ll have to take.” Her attitude was much different from the other time. Tyrion had heard the Lord of Ironrath who succeeded to Lord Gregor was assassinated by Ramsay Snow, the bastard son of Roose Bolton. Probably the Forresters had no more choice now if they wanted to survive. Circumstances were different and they needed allies. He would have to consider everything on his own side however before he took a decision.

“I’ll consider the arrangement. Of course, you’d have to do something for me in return. Don’t worry. The terms will be fair.” Tyrion rose from his seat and Lady Mira did the same.

“What is it you want?” The girl was cautious as always, despite the different situation. She was right to be.

“You’ll know soon enough. We have an understanding then.”

“Thank you, my lord.”

As the northern girl walked away, Tyrion warned her one last time. At least, he owed her the truth about the dangers that surrounded her. “This will either be very good for both of us or very bad for you.” She stopped. “For your sake, I hope it’s the former.” Mira Forrester started to walk again and left the room.
Tyrion really hoped it wouldn’t end badly for her. There was no need for more blood spill of the North. And this girl had resources. Perhaps Tyrion had found a new ally in the game of thrones. Future would tell.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: a new POV character
Jaime I

Chapter Notes

Someone wondered in a comment not long ago what would be Jaime's reaction to Tyrion's marriage. I hope his wishes are fulfilled.

JAIME I

It was a few weeks now since Jaime Lannister came back to King’s Landing and he still couldn’t believe how the capital and its people changed during his absence. When he left, Robert Baratheon was his king and stupid and honourable Ned Stark was his Hand. Now, Joffrey, his nephew and seed, was the king and his father was Hand of the King for the first time in twenty years. The Kingsguard changed a lot too. Barristan the Bold was gone, dismissed by Joffrey and now Jaime was the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard. Mandon Moore and Preston Greenfield were dead, Balon Swann and Osmund Kettleblack had taken their places, and Arys Oakheart was gone to Dorne with his niece Myrcella. And Cersei, the woman he loved, his twin sister, the one with who he came into the world… how she changed. She still had the same passion, the same fury he loved so much in her, but she had become so distant with him, blaming him for taking too much time to come back. As for his father, he nearly forced him to abandon his vows as a member of the Kingsguard to become the Lord of Casterly Rock. Jaime had refused. He didn’t want to be the Lord of Casterly Rock. He didn’t want to be a lord at all, truth being said. He wanted to stay in King’s Landing with the woman he loved and to do his duty. After everything he had gone through, he felt that was where he belonged more than ever.

Jaime had changed too. His journey through the Riverlands with Brienne changed him, physically and mentally. He was short a hand now, but more than that he realized how he maundered for a great part of his life. He wanted to act with honor once more, to become who he had wanted to be when he joined the Kingsguard. He wasn’t going to break another vow he made. The result was that his father disavowed him. Jaime didn’t know how to feel about it. He never thought his father would make such a thing because he didn’t want to be the Lord of Casterly Rock. He still had Tyrion after all to succeed him, and Jaime didn’t see how Tyrion could be worse than him as an heir. In fact, from what Jaime saw since he came back, Tyrion was more than ever a better choice than him to lead the Lannisters one day. He had spoken with Ser Balon Swann and his cousin, Lancel. Both told him Tyrion fought valiantly at the Battle of Blackwater and that without him the city would have fallen. Jaime was quite surprised and happy to hear it. His little brother had fought on the battlefield just like him when it was always refused to him. He had been Hand of the King and now he was Master of Coin. Jaime saw nothing to state that Tyrion wouldn’t be a good Lord of House Lannister. Even more surprising now, he was married.

The latter had left Jaime quite dumbfounded. And when he learned that his wife was Sansa Stark… Jaime remembered how Tyrion had loved his first wife, Tysha, until their father decided to end all of this. Why couldn’t they just love the woman they want? Jaime never understood it. For now however, Jaime couldn’t tell if his little brother was happy with his new wife. He knew what happened at the Twins. These events had been quite a shock, especially for Brienne. And she
thought they should kidnap Sansa, his sister-in-law, and get her out of the city since she wasn’t safe here. Well, she probably didn’t think about kidnapping her, but why would she come voluntarily with the Kingslayer and a strange woman who claimed to have sworn a vow to Catelyn Stark? Jaime knew very well Sansa Stark wasn’t entirely safe here with Joffrey and his sister, but she was far safer than somewhere lost in the Seven Kingdoms. Where could they send her? The only way to send her to her mother now was to kill her, and that wasn’t a prospect that cheered Jaime. She had no more family left. As for Arya Stark, she was probably dead by now. The daughter of Catelyn Stark couldn’t be safer than here, married to Tyrion. The way Jaime knew his brother, he wouldn’t let someone hurt his wife. Ser Balon Swann had already told him how he came to the defense of the girl when she was still betrothed to Joffrey. Jaime would have to talk with Ser Meryn Trant later about beating little girls. How could the Kingsguard have gone so low?

In the meantime, Jaime had a meal with his little brother and he was walking to his chambers. He wasn’t really hungry, but for now Tyrion was the only member of his family who hadn’t proved to be a pain in his ass ever since he came back. And Tyrion always had a way to lighten the atmosphere. Perhaps Jaime would be in a better mood after some time spent with his brother. He also had to ask him something. Something his honor depended on.

When he entered the room Tyrion was working on his books as usual. It seemed everything that was said about the duty as Master of Coin was true: a lot of work for very little recognition. No wonder their father decided to give the job to Tyrion. As soon as Jaime entered Tyrion looked up. The mocking smile that Jaime missed so much during his captivity welcomed him.

“Big brother. I’m glad to see you. You just rescued me from a tiresome and unending work.” Tyrion left his desk and, without surprise, went to the table to pour some wine for both of them.

“I’m glad to see you too, little brother.” Jaime walked too to the table and dropped himself on a chair.

“Take it. It’s the finest wine of the Arbor. There has never been so much in the city.” His brother placed a cup right before him. Sadly, Jaime tried to take it with his right hand. All the wine spilled on the floor with the goblet. Jaime sighed heavily.

Tyrion took back the cup and filled it again, placing it on Jaime’s left this time. Jaime raised his cup using the good hand this time. “For the two brothers reunited,” said Tyrion as he raised his own cup. They drank, though Jaime had some difficulty to appreciate the taste. “Pod will arrive very soon with the food.”

As Tyrion said it, the boy he called Pod entered with another servant, carrying a large amount of food. His brother still ate so well it seemed. There were sausages, boar, grapes, cheese, cake, pie… So many things to eat and Jaime had taste for none of them. Still, he appreciated to be with his brother again.

As they served the food, Jaime watched his brother attentively. Tyrion had changed since their last meeting. First, there was the scar in his face. It wasn’t as bad as people would have you believe. Some were saying he lost a nose. It didn’t look much more than a scratch from Jaime’s point of view, and it was the proof his brother had fought in battle. How many times Jaime wished he could teach his brother how to fight with a sword when they were young? Moreover, his demeanor was different. Not much, but for someone who knew him all his life, Jaime could tell his little brother too had changed in his absence. He was still making japes, but less than before and he nearly seemed serious when he made them. He seemed tired too. Where was the brother who always mocked everything just for fun? Perhaps he partially disappeared when their father gave him functions. Jaime felt quite dazed about it, though perhaps he shouldn’t. Their father had given a chance to Tyrion, something he never did before, and as far as Jaime knew Tyrion proved he was more than capable.
With some chance his father wouldn’t Trouble Jaime anymore with Casterly Rock and would name Tyrion his heir. Nothing could make Jaime happier actually.

They began to eat, or more exactly Tyrion began to eat, stuffing his plate with everything there was to eat in the room. Jaime didn’t take a lot and ate even less.

“Your new hand, it’s nicer than the old one,” Tyrion declared while he took another sausage. “Wouldn’t you agree, Pod?”

The squire didn’t seem to know what to answer. Jaime wondered how this one ended up in Tyrion’s service. “Is it solid gold?”

“Gilded steel,” corrected Tyrion. “You’re not eating. Why is no one eating? My wife wastes away and my brother starves himself.”

“I’m not hungry,” Jaime stated. Between their father, Cersei and Brienne, Jaime wasn’t really in the mood for a feast.

“You lost a hand, not a stomach. Try the boar. Cersei can’t get enough of it since one killed Robert for her.” In other circumstances, Jaime would have laughed. Instead he raised a hand when the squire tried to put a sausage in his plate.

Tyrion chose this moment to propose a toast and raised his cup “A toast. To the proud Lannister children. The dwarf, the cripple and the mother of madness.” On this one Jaime had to smile. His little brother couldn’t be more right. What a trio of children they made. Three children who disappointed their father in one way or another. Jaime advanced his left hand to take the jug of wine and pour himself more. He would need a lot of wine. Perhaps it would have made him more joyful, but in his movement his right hand toppled his cup once again. Jaime had to sigh once more.

The squire intervened immediately. “I’ll clean it up.”

Jaime stopped him immediately. He didn’t want everyone to do things for him because he was a cripple. “No, I’ll do it. Leave us.” The boy left the room right away. The other servant had left some time ago. Jaime settled in his chair.

“It’s only wine.” Tyrion willingly spilled the content of his own cup on the table with a big smile as he said it. He then rose from his own seat and went to fill another cup for Jaime. The cripple was more than depressed now. He wasn’t even able to drink without two hands.

“I can’t fight anymore,” he told his brother in a low and depressed voice.

“What about your left?”

Jaime shook his head. “I can hold a sword, but all my instincts are wrong. How can I protect the king when I can hardly wipe my own ass?”

“You’re the Lord Commander now. Command. Let others do the fighting. When was the last time Father used a sword?” Tyrion went back to his seat.

“I’m not Father. I’m the Kingslayer. When people find out I can’t slay a pigeon…”

“Train, then.” Tyrion interrupted him. “Learn to fight with your other hand.”

“With whom? You? Men talk. Soon as someone discovers I can’t fight, he’ll tell everyone.”
“Who?” Jaime was intrigued. Which swordsman could be silent enough to not reveal his secret?

“Bronn. As long as you pay him, he will tell no one. Believe me, I entrusted him with many of my secrets and he revealed none of them.”

“You want me to trust a sellsword?” Jaime was quite skeptical about this.

“As I said, as long as you pay him, he won’t talk. And this sellsword saved me by winning my trial by combat at the Eyrie… and put more than half of Stannis’s fleet to the torch with a single flaming arrow.”

Jaime remained silent for a moment, considering the proposition. “All right. I guess I can try.” There was something now that Jaime needed to discuss with his brother. “You know, Catelyn Stark is the one who released me. She set me free against the promise I would send her daughters back to her.”

“Oh. So she accepted my proposition it seems.” Jaime was quite taken aback by this statement.

“Your proposition?”

“Yes. I sent Baelish to Renly’s army to negotiate your liberation against those of Arya and Sansa Stark. I knew Robb Stark would never trade you even for his sisters, but Lady Stark was different. I saw how she was ready to do anything for her children when she arrested me in the Riverlands. I sent her Ned Stark’s bones as a sign of good faith and it seems it worked. And at the same time I told Baelish to try to put mistrust between the Tyrells and Renly if possible.”

Jaime was quite dazed, but also grateful that his brother was at the origin of his escape. “Well, I guess I have to thank you. However, Lady Stark made me and Brienne swear that we would return her daughters to her as soon as we reached the capital.”

“Yes, I see.” Tyrion looked a bit upset. “Sadly our beloved father decided to end prematurely Catelyn Stark’s life. I don’t know where Arya Stark is right now and Sansa is now married with me. I’m afraid we can’t really send them back to their mother anymore, even if she was still alive.”

Jaime had to agree with that. “Did you intend to send them back to Lady Stark? Arya wasn’t in your hands at this time, she had already disappeared, isn’t it?”

“Yes, she had. But it would convince Catelyn Stark much more if we told her we were going to give her back her two daughters instead of a single one. And if I had told her that Arya had disappeared, she might not have believed my word. Perhaps she would have thought that I killed her. So I told her a lie, it’s true, but not a complete lie.” Tyrion’s expression turned sour. “I would have sent her her two daughters back. You didn’t see what Joffrey did to Sansa. If you had come sooner, I would have sent Sansa to her mother, but things changed when Father decided that I would marry her. As for Arya, I would have sent her too if I could. There was still some hope we could find her before you reached the capital. Anyway, I’m afraid it doesn’t matter now. There are no Starks left alive, considering the last one is now my wife, hence a Lannister. In name at least.”

Tyrion seemed quite sad as he said all of this. Jaime guessed his wife hadn’t been very happy about her family’s death. Jaime remembered Tyrion’s state after what happened to his first wife. The worst was he held Jaime no rancor for that. “Look, just make sure nothing happens to the Stark girl,” he asked his brother. “I swore to Catelyn Stark that I would return her safely, but I can’t. Just make sure
she’s safe. I’ll have fulfilled a part of the vows then.”

Tyrion was looking at him with a strange expression now. However, when he spoke, he was very serious. “I didn’t allow anyone to hurt her before our father ever thought about marrying us. I am not going to permit it now either. She is my wife, even if we both didn’t want it, and I swore to protect her when I put a cloak on her shoulders. So don’t worry, I’ll keep her safe.”

Jaime was relieved to hear this. His sister-in-law would be safe with Tyrion if she wasn’t happy. He kept his promise to Catelyn Stark. They finished their meal in silence. At the end, Tyrion told him he would arrange a moment and a place for him and Bronn to practice without anyone knowing. Jaime then left his brother to his work. Judging by the pile of books on his desk, it was boring. Probably as boring as to be Lord of Casterly Rock. Jaime hoped more than ever Tyrion would inherit the damn castle and the titles.

As he walked away, Jaime remembered how Tyrion looked serious when he talked about protecting Sansa Stark. Jaime wondered why. Of course, Jaime knew his brother had a lot of compassion for everyone who was mistreated without reason. Perhaps that was why he seemed so determined to defend the girl. However, he felt there was something else. Could it be Tyrion was in love with the girl? Jaime shook his head. He knew Tyrion didn’t bed her, Osmund Kettleblack told him once. She was only a child in his brother’s eyes. How old was the Stark girl? Maybe not older than Tyrion’s first wife when they married.

This brought back bad memories to Jaime. Something that happened so long ago. He wasn’t there when his father dealt with the girl, Tysha. But he had learned afterwards what had happened. He discovered the horrible things his father did to the girl Tyrion loved so much after he left the room. Jaime felt an ocean of guilt overwhelming him as he thought about that. Tyrion had been so happy with her. Jaime never saw him as happy afterwards. And all that was Jaime’s fault. He was responsible for everything. He allowed his brother to marry her. He made his confession when his father ordered him. He wasn’t there when the girl was raped. He should have been there for Tyrion. He should have protected his little brother. But he failed him in the worst way someone could imagine. Even worse, Tyrion didn’t hold him responsible for all this and even thanked him for giving him a fortnight of happiness. Perhaps it wasn’t the same now, but Tyrion was married once more. Now he had to protect his brother as an eldest brother, and he had to protect his wife for the promise he did to her mother. This time, he wouldn’t fail. He wouldn’t break another vow, no matter what his father, his sister or anyone else would say.

Such were the thoughts of Ser Jaime Lannister as he walked to the rooms of the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard. Once he arrived there, he looked at the Book of Brothers, also called the White Book. There were recorded all the great accomplishments of all members of the Kingsguard. Jaime turned the pages one by one, looking at all the names of the great men who served in this elite force. Ser Duncan the Tall. Ser Arthur Dayne, the Sword of the Morning. Prince Aemon Targaryen, the Dragonknight. Ser Barristan Selmy, called Barristan the Bold. And him, Ser Jaime Lannister. The Kingslayer. The Oathbreaker. The man without honor. The page for him was white as snow. He had realized no great deed up to now. He would have to change that.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

The next two chapters will be the last before the change, and they will be more than
important for the rest of the fic, so don't miss them. Something really big is coming.
Tywin finished to write the royal decree giving the castle of Riverrun and all its lands to his sister and her husband, Lady Genna and Lord Emmon Frey. At least one good thing would come out from this stupid union his father arranged. His father may have loved all his children, but he was stupid and weak, allowing his bannermen to mock him and rebel against him without lifting a little finger. Tywin made sure a long time ago that it wouldn’t happen again. And now, after so many years, his House was the most respected and most powerful in all the Seven Kingdoms.

The Hand of the King put the decree in a chest on a nearby table and sealed it, to make sure no one would touch it. He would have it signed and stamped by the king in two days, after his wedding. Tywin went to the table in the corner of his office where laid a map of the Seven Kingdoms. Very soon, every kingdom would be under the control or the influence of House Lannister. However, to achieve it, Tywin needed one last thing. His son, Jaime, in who he placed all his hopes for the future of his house, had refused to become who he was meant to be ever since his birth. He preferred to serve as a bodyguard for a boy king instead of serving his family. He was no son of Tywin now. Tywin needed another heir to continue his bloodline. For that, he would need the dwarf to do his duty.

Tywin stared at the map, looking at each kingdom. Each one had to be connected to House Lannister and to the Crown in some way. Problems were solved for most of them, but not entirely. In facts, two kingdoms were no more insured, and the thing that made Tywin so furious was that his own lands, the Westerlands, were among them. It was at this moment that someone entered the room. Tywin looked at the disgrace of his family walking in his direction. He sat at the Small Council’s table, at the other end of the table, always face to face with him.

“You asked for my presence.” Tyrion wasn’t carrying one of his ledgers as usual. Anyway Tywin didn’t summon him here to talk about financial matters. They would be for another time and Tyrion would exasperate him again with his demands to reduce the cost of the royal wedding. The wedding would take place tomorrow anyway and to reduce the costs now was probably impossible. Tywin had ordered Tyrion here for something much more important.

Tywin stood tall next to his chair. “I think I told you a week ago about your obligations for your family.”
“Yes, I remember that very well. I’m short of arms and legs, not of brain and memory. The other way I wouldn’t be able to tell you that I have found a very good supplier to provide us all the ironwood we need. House Forrester will give us ironwood of better quality than the Whitehills will ever be able. I hope you didn’t forget the royal decree I asked last week when we discussed about it.”

Tywin went to his office and took the sealed parchment with the name Forrester on it. His grandson hadn’t been well inclined to give former bannermen of House Stark the role to supply the Crown in ironwood, but Tywin made him understand he didn’t have another choice in his own way. The decree was signed yesterday. He threw it before Tyrion and stayed at the other side of the table.

“Now that this matter is over,” he began, “it is time we discuss something really important.”

“Well, I think the reconstruction of the royal fleet is important.” Tyrion took the decree while he spoke.

“You know very well what I am talking about.” This halfman tested his patience all too much. “I warned you last week that you had until the royal wedding to consummate the marriage with your wife. A week later I learn that the girl is still a maid.”

“Perhaps she didn’t bleed when I took her. Or perhaps I did the deed in another place than our bed. You don’t need a bed to fuck, you can do it in many different places where blood wouldn’t be detected.” Tywin didn’t like this attitude. Again, it reminded him of someone.

“Then I am sure Pycelle could confirm me after a brief examination that your wife hasn’t been deflowered. I know you didn’t do the deed, so don’t try to hide it.”

Tyrion changed his attitude. He had turned serious all of a sudden. “And if I didn’t?”

“I gave you an opportunity far greater than you ever deserved.” Tywin was now releasing all the frustration he had over Tyrion. “The girl is the key to the North. You only need to put a son in her to get it and to rule the largest of the seven kingdoms. And yet, despite all these advantages, you waste it. I gave you a chance to be useful to the family. You have shamed House Lannister long enough. You have this night to do your duty.”

“And if I refuse?”

“I will find ways to make you do it on the following night.”

Tyrion stared at his father, not blinking a single time. Tywin recognized these eyes. The determination, the absence of fear, the resolve… He didn’t want to see it on this face. “You will not force me upon Sansa. She is my wife and I swore to protect her when we were wed.”

“Do you think you have such a duty toward her? Your duty is to your family, to the Lannisters. This is all that matter. Family. And you will do your duty to your family by bringing the North under our control.”

Tyrion didn’t answer immediately. The next thing he talked about would have surprised anyone, but Tywin didn’t show his surprise. “Tell me, Father. Was it duty to family that had you butchered Talisa Stark with a son in her belly? Or Catelyn Stark’s body thrown in a river? Or Elia Martell raped right after her children were savagely slaughtered, then cut in half? Was it duty to your family that made you slaughter innocent children and women?”

Tywin wanted to laugh at the imbecility of the dwarf. “I do what is necessary. I ordered Gregor Clegane to kill Rhaegar’s children to prove our loyalty to Robert. We had to, since we only joined
the rebellion at the very end. We gave Robert a great service this way by killing possible opponents to his reign and avoiding him to soil his hands. As for the Starks, I ordered Walder Frey and Roose Bolton to kill Robb Stark and his child. Nothing more, nothing less.”

“Oh, so if I understand well, Catelyn Stark, Elia Martell and Talisa Stark weren’t supposed to die? Is that what you are telling me?”

“I never gave any order concerning them. But since Robb Stark’s child was inside his wife’s belly, the only way to kill him was to kill her. As for Elia Martell, I had more pressing matters back then than to specify to Ser Gregor to not kill her. Her death was a small price to pay for the marriage of your sister with Robert. As for Catelyn Stark, I was considering to have her transferred to Casterly Rock or King’s Landing where I would use her as a hostage to ensure the submission of the riverlords. Sadly accidents happen and she died at the Red Wedding along with many other northern lords, though the Freys and Roose Bolton were wise enough to keep some for ransom and as hostages.”

“And of course, you closed your eyes on all this. For family.” There was venom in Tyrion’s voice when he said the last two words.

“The deaths of a few people have no importance. There are things we cannot control and we must accept them to happen for the good of the family.”

“These actions have made our family the most hated and despised house of all the Seven Kingdoms. Everyone wants to see us dead because of the atrocities you committed in the name of the family. The Dornish, the people of the Reach, those of the Vale, the smallfolk of King’s Landing, the Northerners, the Riverlands people. Even the people of the Westerlands despise us with what you did to the Reynes and the Tarbecks. We are remembered for the *Rains of Castamere*.”

“And of course, you closed your eyes on all this. For family.” There was venom in Tyrion’s voice when he said the last two words.

“The deaths of a few people have no importance. There are things we cannot control and we must accept them to happen for the good of the family.”

“And what will happen the day they don’t need or fear us anymore? You never thought about it. You never considered a single time that the Lannisters wouldn’t be able to keep the power you gave them after you’d be gone. Jaime, Cersei and Joffrey will be unable to keep the Realm at their feet. And once I’ll be in the North, the first Northerner to cross my path will kill me for what we did at the Twins. Our actual king is as mad as the one you overthrew twenty years ago. He will cause a new rebellion as soon as you’ll be gone. And when our enemies will realize we are weak, they will turn against us and destroy us. When it will happen, all the people of the Seven Kingdoms will cheer up and dance in the streets. That will be your legacy.”

Tyrion stopped to talk and seemed to wait for a reply. Tywin didn’t care to make one. What Tyrion said didn’t matter. House Lannister would be strong after he was gone. He would make sure of that. What Tywin did always was for the family and it would secure a dynasty that would last a thousand years.

Seeing plainly he wouldn’t get a reply, Tyrion continued. “Perhaps you don’t realize it, but you are not protecting the family with what you’re doing. You don’t care about your family. You only care about a family name.”

“As I once told you, the house that puts family first will always defeat those that put the wishes of their children first.”

“Seeing how this worked out with your own children, I don’t think your method gave better results. I
don’t care anymore what will happen to House Lannister in the future, you may already have sentenced us to die with what you did in the name of the family. But I won’t cause anymore sorrow or pain to Sansa. You destroyed everything that was left to her and I will not let you hurt her anymore. She is my wife. She is a Lannister now. That makes her family. You may try to force me upon her, but you won’t succeed, no matter what you do. I WILL NOT RAPE HER.”

Tywin stood still in front of the dwarf, holding his gaze. He didn’t know how long it lasted, but it lasted long. Tyrion dared to question everything he had done during his whole life to bring back House Lannister into power, after the follies of his father. Everything he did had been for this, for family. And this monster, this walking embarrassment that he allowed to live, dared to question his motivations and his actions. And he was doing it with the same look Tywin hated so much to see on his face. Tywin would put him back to his place. It seemed the lesson he gave him so long ago wasn’t enough. He would need another one. If what Cersei told him in the morning was true, he would have the opportunity to give Tyrion a very good one. He would do his duty. Tywin would make sure of that.

“You have this night to consummate your marriage. If tomorrow Sansa Stark is still a maiden, I’ll take measures to ensure she isn’t the day after. Measures to make sure YOU will be the one to take her maidenhead and to put a son in her. Now go.” Tyrion remained seated, not moving, still defying him. “Go.” Finally, he raised and walked away without looking at Tywin. Before he left the room, Tywin threw a last warning. A warning he would execute tomorrow. “Remember. The next whore I find in your bed will be hanged.” And much more. However, at the opposite of the last time, the dwarf didn’t stop to listen to him.

Tywin went back to the map. Everything was in place, the last thing he needed was Tyrion to impregnate Sansa Stark. He would. Tyrion’s grandson, Joffrey, was sitting on the Iron Throne. His granddaughter Myrcella would become Princess of Dome when Doran Martell would die. Cersei would soon marry Ser Loras Tyrell and Tyrion’s grandchildren would rule the Reach one day. Tommen would be granted Storm’s End as soon as he came of age. The fortress still held against the siege of the Tyrells, but it wouldn’t hold for long. The Riverlands would soon belong to his sister and his nephews would be the Lords of Riverrun. Only the Arryns had no family link with the Lannisters, but they were alone. Only, Tywin needed to secure the Westerlands and the North. Tyrion’s children with the Stark girl would rule the North one day, but it was even more vital now for Tyrion to have children since Jaime refused to be the Lord of Casterly Rock. Tywin would never allow Tyrion to inherit the Rock, but he could let a grandson from him and Sansa be his heir. For family, Tywin would force Tyrion to consummate his marriage tomorrow if it wasn’t done tonight. The future of House Lannister depended on it.

Tywin wondered why the gods afflicted him with such an aberration. Tyrion was a shame for House Lannister. As capable as he was, he wasn’t worthy to bear the Lannister colors and to become the Lord of the Westerlands after Tywin. He would never allow this dwarf to succeed him. He couldn’t. Not after everything that happened. Not after his wife’s death. This little monster killed the woman who put him into the world. He killed Tywin’s wife. Without realizing it, Tywin remembered the day Tyrion came into the world. He never wanted to remember this and avoided it all the time, but now it came in such a sudden way that everything that happened this day, more than thirty years ago, rushed into his mind.

Tywin had arrived from King’s Landing a few days ago. Maester Creylen’s letters had warned him the state of his wife was deteriorating. When he finally arrived, it was even worse than the maester had told him. His wife was barely able to move a member and her contractions made her scream day and night. The drugs and medicines Maester Creylen gave her didn’t have the desired effect. Tywin stayed at the bedside of his beloved wife for the three days that followed and banned everyone else from her chamber, including their children. Jaime and Cersei were always wondering why their
mother was making so much noise. Tywin didn’t care what Jaime and Cersei believed or didn’t believe. Only Joanna mattered.

At the fourth day, his wife finally entered labor and gave birth to a son. No, not a son. A monster. Tywin saw it as soon as his big head went off. Then his little arms, body and legs followed. All this time, his wife bled. She bled so much. The maester did everything he could to stop it, but there was no way. The monster was killing her to come into the world. Tywin had the baby sent to the nursery that had been prepared. He would deal with it later. When it finally became evident his beloved wife wouldn’t survive no matter what they did, Tywin sent the servants, the wetnurse and the maester away. He would be the only one to share the last moments of his wife.

He held her hand in his while he could feel her forces decreasing. He remembered how happy he was the day of their wedding, all the happiness she gave him in his life entirely dedicated to House Lannister. She was the only one who could persuade him to do something he disagreed with. He loved her.

All of a sudden, he felt her hand taking a grip of his own. He looked at her face and saw her eyes faintly opened. The green eyes he loved so much. “Tywin.” Her voice was so weak. It was barely a whisper.

“Joanna.” Tywin never cried, but at this moment he had wanted to cry. His wife, the only person he loved in the world, was dying and there was nothing he could do.

“Where is my son?” The question startled Tywin. She was dying, and that was what she was asking? “I want to see my son.” Tywin couldn’t believe his wife wanted to see the monster who was about to kill her.

“You shouldn’t care about it. He is a dwarf. The maester says he won’t live for long.”

He had wished that would close the matter, but it didn’t. His wife only looked at him with anger. Tywin hated it. He didn’t want her to look at him this way for her last moments. “I want to see my son.” Her voice was still weak, but Tywin could feel the determination, the resolve, the absence of fear and many other things in it. And he could see it on her face. The same look Tyrion would have many years later when he would oppose him.

Reluctantly, Tywin went to the door and asked a servant to bring the monster to his wife. He didn’t ask this way. He called the monster the baby, but it didn’t change who he was. But if that was what his wife was asking from him, Tywin would do it. He always did everything for Joanna. He went back to her side and took back her hand in his. She was pale and breathless. They didn’t speak until the servant came back and put the baby in his wife’s arms.

When Joanna held the baby and looked at his face, Tywin saw a shock on her face, but it turned quickly into a sad and faint smile. She held him before her face, wasting what few forces she still had for the little monster who caused her death. She kissed him on the forehead and held it tightly against her breasts. The little arms were trying to reach her face or her neck, without success.

“He will die soon. Creylen says he won’t survive for long.”

Tywin was trying to make see things clear to his wife before she left. She only gave him a look colder than ice in return. “Why? Because you’re going to kill him?”

Tywin shouldn’t have been surprised. Joanna was always clever. And she knew him better than everyone. “Even if I didn’t, he will die very soon in great sufferings. That will be mercy, which is much more than he deserves.”
“How can you say that? He’s my son. Your son.” When she said it Tywin rose and walked to the window. But before he could reach it, his wife stopped him with a few more words. “He’s a Lannister.” Tywin stopped his walk, but he didn’t turn back to face her. He couldn’t face her eyes. He knew what would be in them.

“He’s killing you. He has no right to live.”

“Really? Is he really the one who’s killing me?” Tywin had no answer to this. “You always said that family was all that mattered, that nothing else mattered. He is part of the family. He is a part of your family. Is that so difficult for you to see it?”

Tywin finally turned to face his beloved wife. “He’s not my son.” Tywin stated it coldly, without a trace of emotion. Or at least he hoped there was no trace of emotion in it. He had one of his very rare moments when it was more than hard for him to contain his emotions.

His wife gave a weak laugh. “Of course. It’s so easy for you to deny it. That’s all you can do. You never found yourself in such a situation before.”

“What are you talking about? What kind of situation?” Tywin didn’t understand. His wife was talking to him as if she was sorry for him, but at the same time she was looking at him the same she always did when she disapproved something he did or was about to do.

“You never faced it up to now.” She really felt sorry for him now. “You always did everything for House Lannister, but you never wished to not do it. Never.” Her face changed and turned angry and accusing. “Tell me a single time you had to do something against your interest in order to serve the family. Tell me a single one.” Tywin had no answer to give her. For probably the only time in his life, he had nothing to answer and was agape. His wife was right. He always did everything for the family, but never had he been reluctant to act for the family. It had never gone against his wishes. Thirty years later someone else would ask him the same question with the same eyes and the same gaze, and Tywin would have an answer. But for now, he had none.

It was at this moment that his wife began to cough violently. Tywin came to her side once more, holding her hands. He managed to hold it in a way so he wouldn’t touch the monster who caused all this. When her cough was over, her breathing was weaker than ever. She looked at Tywin once again. She spoke in such a feeble voice that Tywin had to struggle to understand what she said. But, sadly, he understood all the same. “Don’t…kill him…Tyrion…. Let him live…. Don’t kill….Tyrion….promise…me.”

She exhaled her last breath with these words, naming her son in the process. Lady Joanna of House Lannister, Lady of Casterly and Lady of the Westerlands, was dead. And for one of the very scarce times in his life, and the last to this this day, Tywin cried. And as he cried, Tywin could only say two words. “I promise.”

Tywin held his promise for thirty-three years. He never killed Tyrion. He had a debt toward his wife, and a Lannister always pays his debts. But he didn’t do anything more. He owed nothing to Tyrion. He gave him the education and the life suited to a Lannister, to a son of the Lord of Casterly Rock, but nothing more. He only promised to let him live. Tywin had always wished Tyrion would die one day, but it never happened. He refused to die. He fought to live, from the day he was born to the present time. To Tywin’s despair, he continued to live, shaming the proud House Lannister he brought back from the ashes his father, Lord Tytos, let them in. He shamed the name of the Lannister all his life. His acrobatic figures he performed through the halls and dinner rooms of the Rock (another great idea of his brother Gerion). His marriage with a whore. His visits of brothels. His drinking of wine. His gambles. His jokes. And now his refusal to consummate a fundamental marriage for the future of House Lannister.
All the same, he had to admit he respected and even admired Tyrion’s will to survive. Despite everything Tyrion was, Tywin needed him. He was no fool. Cersei believed she was as clever as her father, even more perhaps, and only that was proof of her foolishness. And Jaime… Tywin never believed his eldest son, his heir, would deceive him so much and turn his back to his family to serve mad men and drunken fools. Tyrion was now everything that was left. As much as he hated to admit it, Tywin needed the family’s embarrassment more than ever. All the future of their house depended on him.

Tywin sat at his desk, took a piece of parchment, ink and quills. Then he began to write.

I, Tywin Lannister, son of Tytos, Lord of Casterly Rock, Shield of Lannisport, Lord of the Westerlands, Warden of the West and Hand of the King, hereby declares my eldest son, Ser Jaime Lannister, heir to all my titles, lands and castles.

If my son Jaime was unable to inherit, all my titles, lands and castles are to belong to my eldest grandson from Lord Tyrion Lannister and the Lady Sansa Lannister of House Stark.

If my heir was to not be of age to rule when my death would occur, I hereby name my brother, Ser Kevan Lannister, Regent of Casterly Rock until my heir comes of age.

Tywin hesitated before he added the following line. He didn’t want to write it down, but he had to. If his brother was to be dead, he needed someone capable to rule the Westerlands until his heir would be old enough. The voice of another woman he loved came back to his head, a woman he didn’t love the same way as he loved his wife once, but a woman he once loved as a sister, until she disappointed him. Jaime is not your son. Tyrion is. Tywin refused to think a single more second about it and started to write again.

If my heir was to not be of age to rule when my death would occur and if Ser Kevan Lannister was not in the conditions to assume the regency, I name my son, Lord Tyrion Lannister, to act as Regent of Casterly Rock until my heir comes of age.

Tywin wrote many other minor disposals, including various bequests he gave to all the members of his family, from his eldest son to the cousins of the family on his wife’s side. When he was done, he sealed it with wax and pressed his seal of Lord of Casterly Rock on it. Then he unlocked the chest, put his will in it and locked it again. He would send it to Casterly Rock tomorrow for his brother Kevan, to keep it until the time comes.

Tywin was tired of his day. He wished suddenly that Joanna was still alive to help him. He pushed the thought aside as quickly as it came to his mind. His wife was dead and nothing would bring her back to him. It was late in the night now. Tywin emptied the cup of wine on his desk that he started hours ago and went to his bed. He fell asleep very quickly.

He was back at the wedding feast. He saw Tyrion making japes and acting improperly as always, embarrassing his family. He recognized the behaviour and he hated it. This dwarf was a walking joke. The dream lasted long. When it ended, Tywin Lannister made no other dreams this night.

Chapter End Notes

Some people may think there’s already a change. I must admit that if it had happened in the TV show, there would have been scenes for that. However, it doesn't contradict the show, so it's a pre-change chapter.
Please review.

The next chapter will be the last one before the change. Coming on Sunday.
Sansa IV

Chapter Notes

OK, I warn everyone, this chapter is very emotional. It's also the longest one I wrote so far.

For those who wanted more moments between Tyrion and Sansa, this is for you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

SANSA IV

She sat in her bed, her back against the pillows, reading before she would sleep. Sansa discovered a few days ago it could help her to sleep better. She read the *Unnatural History* she had started so long ago, before the death of her family. She had stopped it after the tragedy, wishing to do nothing that could have any link with her husband. But she decided to live for her family, and she couldn’t spend her days doing nothing and her nights awaken. She took some essence of nightshade for a few days, but she stopped afterwards. She didn’t need it anymore, her sleep was far better than the last weeks. Only the dreams bothered her. She would have nightmares sometimes, about Joffrey, Cersei and Lord Tywin. There was also the same dream that came again and again. She wished she could end it, but it came back, no matter what she did. The bard was still saying the same sweet words. Her family was still there, smiling. Ser Loras would disappear as always. Sansa was exasperated by this. Couldn’t she dream about something else? Though there was something else that bothered her with the dream these last times. She had the impression she was missing some details in it. What could it be? Sansa shook her head, chasing the dream of her memories.

Her state was better than it had been. During the last two weeks, she recovered a few pounds she had lost after the Red Wedding. Shae liked to say that it removed her from some of her work to tighten her dresses. Strangely, Shae didn’t seem to appreciate her own joke. She seemed in a very bad mood again. Sansa wondered what was going on with her. She even asked Shae if there was something wrong, but her handmaiden only told her it was useless to concern herself with the well-being of her servants. Sansa didn’t like it. She wanted to retrieve the friend she had when she was Joffrey’s betrothed. She didn’t want to lose Shae.

Suddenly the door opened and Tyrion entered the room. It couldn’t be that late in the night. Sansa’s husband always came to their room hours after Sansa was supposed to have fallen asleep. The sun set no more than an hour ago. What was he doing here?

“My lord,” she said in a timid voice.

Tyrion turned to face her. Sansa suddenly realized she only wore a thin under-silk. It was the same one she wore on the day of their wedding. Normally she didn’t care about it. It wasn’t the first time Tyrion was in the same room than her and that she dressed so lightly, but except for their wedding night, there always was blankets and sheets to cover her in these cases or she would wake up and put on a dressing gown very quickly. She averted her eyes and covered her arms with her hands. Uncertainty filled her, but her face also flushed.
I’m sorry, I know normally I come much later.” It was as if he could read her mind. Just before the wedding ceremony, Tyrion had come to see her and try to apologize for their wedding. He told her at this moment, in a very clumsy way, that he understood how she felt. She didn’t believe it back then and when she told him he admitted she was right. He had seemed as uncomfortable as when he came to tell her they would have to wed. However, sometimes Sansa really had the impression Tyrion could read her mind as if it was a book. Tyrion walked to his desk and put what seemed like a letter in the chest on it. When it was done he turned to Sansa.

“We need to talk.” Sansa was startled by Tyrion’s words. He walked in her direction but stopped at a respectful distance of the bed. He wasn’t looking at her and was searching his words, just like before their wedding. Finally he seemed to gather enough courage to speak. “My father is not satisfied with the state of our marriage. Last week he summoned me to the Tower of the Hand and told me I had until the royal wedding to consummate it. He just reminded me of it again.”

Sansa froze. Until the royal wedding? But the royal wedding was tomorrow. Tywin Lannister had ordered his son to take her maidenhead. Her heart was pounding on her chest. “And if you don’t… what is going to happen?” Sansa feared the answer, but it was the only thing she could ask right now.

Tyrion took a long time before he answered. “He told me he would take every necessary measures to ensure I would do it during Joffrey’s wedding night.”

Sansa stared at him in shock. He looked upon her for a moment, but lowered his eyes after a moment. Sansa could hear her heart beating even quicker. The last time it beat so quickly was during her wedding night. He’s going to do it. That’s why he came sooner than the other days. He has come to claim me.

“I won’t do it.”

These words got Sansa out of her trance. “You won’t do it? What do you mean?”

“My father can go to the Seven hells! I’m not going to force myself upon you. I’m not a monster who does his dirty work.” Tyrion sounded as angry as he was when he spoke against Joffrey the time she was beaten. However, Sansa didn’t feel grateful for that. Who did he think he was? What did he think he was doing?

“Do you really think it will matter? What are you going to do when your father will send men into our chamber and force you to take me.” She nearly shouted at him.

“I won’t let that happen.” Sansa could feel how resolved he was, but for her it was foolishness. He couldn’t oppose his father. If Lord Tywin was capable to have people murdered during a wedding under the protection of the guest rights, what wouldn’t he be ready to do to force his son upon her?

“How? What will you do when a dozen soldiers will enter our rooms? Kill them.”

“If it comes to that I will. My father is not the only who’s ready to do everything necessary.”

“You won’t succeed. You are a dwarf, not a knight or a warrior. You won’t be able to stand into your father’s way.” Sansa realized it was the longest conversation they had together ever since the walk. “You think I don’t know what he’s capable of? I know very well what he can do to reach his goals.”

“No. You have no idea what he’s capable of.”

“Of course, I do. My whole family…”
“NO, YOU DON’T!” Tyrion shouted this time as he stared at her. Sansa was taken aback by this. He never shouted at her ever since they met. She had seen him angry and shouting at other people on several occasions, but never at her. “You don’t. You have no idea.” He spoke in a soft tone and averted his gaze from her once more.

They stayed where they were, unmoving. Sansa had never seen her husband in such a state before. He started to talk again. “I can’t. I swore to protect you. What kind of husband, and of man, am I if I rape my wife on the orders of my father? I can’t do it.”

For the first time her husband nearly seemed fragile. Sansa was disconcerted by this. “Why didn’t you tell me before? You say your father told you a week ago.”

“I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want to. I’m sorry, but that’s the truth.” He seemed ashamed as he said it.

“I would rather have you make it now instead of having your father bring his guards and forcing us to do it in their presence. Or worse.” It took time and courage for Sansa to tell this. But she knew she couldn’t remain a maid forever. She knew she would have to truly become Tyrion’s wife one day. She didn’t want men to cruelly force them both to do it. Perhaps Tyrion would even accept to not repeat afterwards. Once her maidenhead was broken, Lord Tywin may not look again if they did their duty as husband and wife. It was probably a foolish hope, but she hung on this hope all the same. Without it, she may not be able to do it and it would be even worse when Lord Tywin would force her and Tyrion to do it.

Tyrion looked at her with a very strange expression, as if he didn’t believe what she just said. What did this face mean? She couldn’t decipher the feelings and the emotions on it. Her husband finally shook his head. “No, I won’t do it.”

Sansa grew impatient and angry at him. “Why? You said you wouldn’t share my bed until I wanted you to. What stop you now? I want to.”

“No, you don’t want. You only want to prevent it from happening in a worse way.” He stopped again, then he continued. “I may be a monster, but not this kind of monster. I’m not going to rape you on my father’s orders. You think you know what he is capable of, but you don’t, Sansa. You don’t know. I know. And I’m not going to be a partner in my father’s crimes and atrocities. My family made you suffer more than enough. I won’t add anything more to it.”

When he was done speaking he looked away again. Sansa was still angry at him, but she couldn’t find the courage to pressure him anymore. He wouldn’t do it. She felt that even if she removed all her clothes from herself right now he wouldn’t do it. And there was something strange about the things he said. Why did he say she didn’t know what Tywin Lannister was capable of? What could be worse than slaughtering people at a wedding?

“What is your father really capable of?” She asked it defiantly. “Tell me. You pretend what happened to my family is nothing compared to what he can do, so tell me.”

Tyrion was looking at her while she asked questions and he didn’t leave his eyes from hers after she finished. She held his gaze. She wanted to know why Tyrion was so stubborn about refusing to consummate their marriage.

Finally, Tyrion averted his eyes again. “You’re going to hate me if I tell you.”

“What would it change from our current situation?”
Tyrion looked back at her, then looked away again. Why wasn’t he able to look at her? When he
finally spoke Sansa couldn’t have been more surprised by the words that came out of his mouth.

“Did you know I was married before?”

Sansa was in shock from the words. Tyrion? Married? She found it so unbelievable. They needed
her, a hostage and a king’s ward, to get him a wife, so how could he be married before her? But also,
she never thought he would talk about something like this when she asked what his father was
capable of. “Married?” That was all she found to say.

“That was a long time ago. Many people at Casterly Rock know about this, but we never talk about
it.” He walked toward the bed and sat at the end, as far as he could from her. He never looked at her
a single time as he spoke. His voice was soft, low, sometimes nothing more than a whisper, but
Sansa heard everything he said very clearly.

“I was sixteen-years-old when it happened. My brother Jaime and I were riding on a road near
Lannisport when we suddenly heard someone screaming. A girl came running in our direction from
the woods. She had black hair, was very slender. I guess she was no more than fourteen-years-old.
Her clothes were all torn apart. Two men were running after her. They were obviously trying to rape
her. My brother, being the great and perfect knight he is, charged the rapers and took care of them
while I brought the girl to an inn on the road. She was so hungry. She probably didn’t eat for days.
We finished together three chickens and a flagon of wine.”

Sansa listened carefully to what Tyrion was saying. She was hypnotized by Tyrion’s story. She
wanted to know what happened, but at the same time she had some presumption she wouldn’t like
how the story would end. Tyrion continued to talk, looking away all the time. “At this moment, I
didn’t drink so much wine. I wasn’t used to it. And in some way I don’t remember, I found myself in
her bed. When we were done she sang me a song. I can still remember every word of it. Next
morning I was mad enough in love to ask for her hand. We only needed a drunken septon, a little
bribe, a few lies and a few pigs as witnesses and we were husband and wife. We ate one of the pigs
for our wedding feast afterwards.” Tyrion chuckled inaudibly. “I found ourselves a cottage near the
Sunset Sea and I lived for a fortnight with her. And for two weeks I was the happiest man in the
world.”

Tyrion paused at this moment. Sansa didn’t know what to say. It seemed so… She didn’t really
know what to think about it. The thought that Tyrion was once married was quite unsettling by itself,
but the way he was married… It looked like one of the love stories she loved when she was young,
only this time she didn’t have the impression it would end in a perfect way. She didn’t believe in it
anymore. “What was her name?” she asked shyly.

“Tysha. Her father was a wheelwright who lived in Lannisport. He had died a year ago. No wonder
we found her in the woods, she had no home. Perhaps she even lived there.”

He fell back into a deep silence. Sansa felt uncomfortable. Tyrion never talked about his past in such
a way. He was always japing when he talked, but now he wasn’t. She had a very bad feeling about
it. Perhaps she should stop him, tell him she didn’t want to hear the rest of the story. And yet, she
wanted to know. She didn’t know very much about Tyrion and she wanted to know what happened.
Why was he talking to her about it now? Why didn’t he talk about his first wife before? “What
happened?” Sansa feared she made a mistake by asking it.

“When the septon sobered, he went to see my father. How many dwarves, especially around
Lannisport, have the means to pay in gold? My father hated so much to have a dwarf as a son that
every dwarf in the Seven Kingdoms knew they should stay at a great distance from Casterly Rock,
and even leave the Westerlands. It wasn’t difficult for the septon to realize who he married. I wonder
how my father reacted. The great Tywin Lannister, father-in-law to a wheelwright’s orphan. My
father had already tried several times to organize a marriage for me without success, but he wasn’t
going to let one of his children marry a commoner. He sent his men to find us and they discovered
our hideout quite quickly. After all, a dwarf is so easy to spot. They brought us back to Casterly
Rock. And there my father forced my brother to tell me the truth.”

The truth? What truth? Sansa couldn’t understand. What truth could his brother have to tell him?
That made no sense. “What do you mean? What truth?” She knew she wouldn’t like what she was
about to hear. But she asked all the same, as shyly as ever.

“Everything was an act. My brother had arranged everything. The road, the woods, the rapers,
Tysha. She was a whore.” Sansa’s heart stopped to beat. A whore? She was agape. “Jaime had
planned all of this. He thought it was time for me to have a woman. And to make my first experience
unforgettable, he arranged it all to make it a beautiful story. He even paid twice the price to have a
girl who was still a maiden so I may feel it when I bed her. He probably didn’t expect I would marry
the girl. After he was done, my brother left the room and my father brought my wife in.”

Tyrion stopped again. Sansa could feel he didn’t want to continue. She shouldn’t press him. She
thought she knew what would happen next, but she didn’t want to admit it to herself. No, that
couldn’t be. “He brought her inside?” She didn’t dare to ask for more. A part of her hoped he
wouldn’t continue. Unfortunately, he continued.

“He gave her to his guards, and they dragged her to the barracks. And there he forced me to watch.”
Sansa heard a tremble in Tyrion’s voice, something she never heard with him.

“What did they do in the barracks?” She didn’t know why she asked. She wasn’t as stupid as before.
She knew there was only one reason why soldiers would bring a woman with them.

“They took her one after one. Each time one was done he put a silver stag in her hand. My father
forced me to watch all the time, to understand what she was. When his men were done, there were so
many coins in her hand that silver was rolling all over the floor.”

Sansa had the impression Tyrion was done with it. She didn’t know what to say. That was…
horrible. She remembered her father, a serious lord and a smiling father. Always there for them, to
tell them how the world was, what was their duty, telling them what they had to hear when they
didn’t want to hear it, but that it was necessary for them to know it. She tried to imagine him treating
her, Arya, any of her brothers, Jon, Theon or any other child in Winterfell this way and she couldn’t.
How? Why? She wanted to say something, but she could find nothing. There was nothing to say.
Now she knew how Tyrion probably felt after her family was slaughtered. There was nothing we
could say to someone in these situations. You could only stand there and listen. That was all you
could do.

After a lingering silence that lasted so long she couldn’t tell if they stood in their place for minutes or
hours, she finally managed to croak a few words. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know.” How could she know
about it? Who would like to talk about something like that? She always saw Tyrion as a Lannister. A
good Lannister, if that was possible, but a Lannister nonetheless. But right now, he was only a victim
of the horrors committed by his own family. No wonder he had such a bad relationship with his
father.

“Don’t be sorry. You shouldn’t. You don’t know what I did. What he made me do.”

Sansa looked back at Tyrion. She was frozen once again. That wasn’t all? There was something else
that happened? What? She wanted to scream, to tell Tyrion to not tell her, that she didn’t want to
know. But she couldn’t. Someone could have thrown a sword through her heart right at this moment
and she wouldn’t have flinched. There was nothing she could do until Tyrion had finished. She
couldn’t even breathe.

“After all his men were done with her, my father wanted to make sure I would remember what she
was. So he ordered me to go last. He ordered me to take her one last time. And since I was a
Lannister, I had to be generous, so he made me pay her a golden dragon instead of a silver stag. He
ordered me to rape my wife. And I did it.” Tyrion’s voice broke as he said the last words.

Sansa couldn’t leave her frozen state after he finished. She still couldn’t move, but now she breathed
more heavily than ever. He raped his wife. What was he going to do with her? All the fears she had
during the wedding night and when he announced they would marry came back in a single
wave. After some time, she thought she had gathered back enough strength and mind to react, but
she still didn’t know what to do. What should she do to escape him? Before she could find an
answer, Tyrion spoke again. His voice was still broken, but now there was also anger and
determination in it.

“I may be a monster, but I will not do it again. No matter what my father tries, I will not allow him to
repeat what he did twenty years ago. I am done with committing atrocities for him, and I am done
committing atrocities for a family name. I will not do it.” He raised from the bed and walked with
heavy steps towards the door. Sansa didn’t know if he was talking to her or to himself when he said
these words. She couldn’t refrain herself when he put his hand on the door handle.

“Tyrion.” She didn’t know why she called him, but she did.

He stopped in his movement and looked back at her for the first time since he started to talk about his
first wife. Sansa didn’t think she could have been more surprised after everything she just heard, but
she was. His green eyes were full of tears. She never saw him cry before.

He averted his eyes from hers again. “I’ll go to the library. Go to sleep. I won’t do it.” And he left the
room.

Sansa remained in her bed, in the same position she was when Tyrion entered the room. How much
time passed while he told her about his first wife? Sansa couldn’t say. She had lost all notion of time.

Her whole body was shivering. He ordered me to rape my wife. And I did it. The words echoed in
her mind without end. He raped his own wife on his father’s orders. What would happen to her
now? He promised he wouldn’t share her bed as long as she didn’t want, but now she knew he
wouldn’t hold his promise. His father once forced him to do it and he would force him to do it again.
Sansa had no hope this time. She had no one to save her. The Hound came to her help when she
tried to push Joffrey from the top of the battlements, when she saved Ser Dontos, and during the riot.
Tyrion came to her rescue when Joffrey had her beaten in court. Shae helped her when she tried to
hide her first moonblood. Lord Baelish and Margaery tried to help her to escape King’s Landing
when she was a hostage. If only she had accepted Lord Baelish’s offer. Though with the events that
happened afterwards, she would be dead if he had returned her to her mother. Perhaps it would have
been for the better. But now, she really was a prisoner for good, and there was no one to protect her.
Not even Tyrion would stand against his father, she knew it.

She had no way to escape. Lord Tywin would force Tyrion to consummate their marriage next night.
With the things Tyrion just told her, the worse ideas crossed Sansa’s mind about what would happen.
This night would be her last one as a maiden, unless… There was a way to prevent the horrible
things she imagined. Tyrion could do it tonight. That wasn’t an idea she enjoyed, but it would be far
less horrible than the alternative. It could be far worse. She could be married to Joffrey right now.
Tyrion always was merciful and kind toward her, so she could hope he would do his best to not hurt
her. For a moment she thought she might even enjoy the moment. Tyrion may surprise you. From
what I’ve heard, he’s quite experienced. Margaery’s words resonated in her head, but she didn’t find any reassurance in them. No more than in Lord Varys’s words. In your situation, I think it may probably be the best thing that could happen to you. Lord Tyrion is never going to hurt you, nor to let anyone hurt you, and he will do everything into his power to make you happy, however difficult it may be. Sansa knew she would never be happy with him. Not with his father always pressuring them to produce children. Lannister children.

Sansa remembered the first month of their marriage. Except for the first week, it had nearly been a period she enjoyed. Then the news of her family’s slaughtering came and everything went up in smoke. Even then, she was never mistreated. Strangely it was the period when she had the less to fear from the Lannister family. It was strange that a Lannister protected her against the Lannisters. But now, it would be over. Tyrion couldn’t protect her anymore. As difficult it was to admit, Sansa had no other choice. She had decided to live for her family. In order to survive, there was only one possible option: she would have to share her bed with Tyrion tonight. She would have to wait for him to return. She thought she might undress immediately. Perhaps it would attract him more. After all, with the number of whores people said he visited, he couldn’t stay unmoved before a naked woman. The thought sent a shiver on Sansa’s back. She didn’t disrobe. She didn’t have the courage to do it, even when she knew it was her only chance. She was no wolf. She was a coward.

She stayed there, in her under-silk, waiting the dreaded moment when her husband would come and she would have to persuade him to consummate the marriage. As time passed, she grew more stressed. She didn’t know if she wanted Tyrion to come back as lately as possible to delay the inevitable, or if she wanted him to come back immediately and be done with it. Her distress was unbearable. She tried to think about what to say, about how to behave when Tyrion would come back, but she couldn’t work out anything. Her mind wandered.

She remembered something her father once told her. Something she refused to listen when he told her, but now she wished she had. How stupid she was at the time. When you’re old enough, I’ll make you a match with someone who’s worthy of you, someone who’s brave and gentle and strong. When she thought about the answer she gave him back then, she wanted to kill herself. She thought about Tyrion. He gave her his condolences after her father’s death. He saved her from the Hound once, from Joffrey too. He didn’t hesitate to treat the monster of half-wit before many highborn people. He tried to send people to save her during the riot. He fought bravely during the Battle of Blackwater, being rewarded by a scar for that. He threatened Joffrey during their wedding feast to prevent the bedding ceremony. He refused to bed her as long as she wouldn’t want and never mistreated her. Someone who’s brave and gentle and strong. Her father couldn’t have been talking about him. He was a Lannister.

Something else came back to her mind. Something Tyrion said on their wedding night. When he said it she didn’t know what to make of it. Later, when she thought back about it, it made her laugh to think that someone could be talking about Tywin Lannister this way. The only other person she could imagine saying such things about the Lord of Casterly Rock was Lady Olenna Tyrell. If my father wants someone to get fucked I know where he can start. Now however, it seemed to her it took another meaning. She remembered Tyrion’s story, the details he gave about his first marriage. He said she was no more than fourteen. His father forced him to rape her. Could it be…? Of course, Tyrion himself told her. He regretted what he had done and he didn’t want to repeat it. For a moment Sansa felt pity for Tyrion. He was hated by all his family from what she knew. He never had a chance to be loved and to love someone in return. The only chance he had in his life, his father took it from him and he forced him to do the most horrible thing a man could do to a woman. And now his father was ordering him to do it again. For the first time since she knew him, Sansa wished she could help her husband. But she couldn’t. She would never be able to help him against his father, and she could never love him. No matter how kind and gentle he was toward her, she couldn’t.
All this made her even more uncertain. How could she convince him to bed her? Sansa had learned to do what was waited from her, but Tyrion didn’t. He stood tall before his opponents, defying them, doing what no one else would dare, telling people who they really were. He would never do it, no matter what she tried. What would happen tomorrow when Lord Tywin would try to force them to do the deed? Strangely she was worried about herself, but also about her husband. Tyrion had helped her when no one tried. He was a good man. What would his father do when he would refuse to consummate their marriage? She didn’t want him to suffer. She had to try to convince him at least. For both of them, she had to try.

Sansa waited a very long time. Finally, deep within the night, Tyrion finally came back. He had removed his boots as always to make less noise, only this time it was useless. He looked at her and seemed surprised to see her still awaken. “I thought you would be asleep.” He went to the couch and gathered a few clothes for the night. Sansa had to do it. Now.

“I want you to share my bed.” She said it very quickly, afraid she wouldn’t have the courage to end her sentence if she spoke slowly.

Tyrion looked back, exasperation visible on his face, even in the dim light. “I already told you that we didn’t have to do it and that I wouldn’t do it.”

“You told me you wouldn’t share my bed until I wanted you to. I want to.” She repeated what she said hours ago.

Tyrion grinned. “My lady, there is one thing I have known for a very long time about you. There is often a great difference between what you say and what you think. That’s how you survived here, but I can tell when you’re lying. I know you don’t want me to share your bed.”

How could he act so airily? “If you don’t, your father…”

“My father won’t do anything. If my father is ready to do everything for the family, then I’m capable to do the same for my wife.”

He wouldn’t do it. But Sansa had to try. She had to attempt another tactic. If Margaery was able to manipulate Joffrey by adapting her behaviour with him, Sansa could surely do the same with Tyrion. She had to choose the right words, but which ones? Without thinking, she asked, “What happened to her? After… everything?”

She didn’t know why she asked it, but the moment she did ask she regretted it. That would never work if she brought back this subject. Tyrion understood very well who she was talking about. “I don’t know. I never tried to learn what happened to her afterwards. What use could I have from it? She was a whore and I raped her. She was paid. In the best-case scenario she would only have proposed me to pay for her service again. In the worst she would have spit on my face or slapped me, perhaps she would even try to kill me.” He turned sad again. Sansa knew now she made a mistake. She was desperate now.

“I beg you, my lord. I don’t want your father to do something horrible to make us do it. Just do it tonight. I swear I won’t resist, I’ll give you children, I’ll be a good wife for you, I’ll do everything you want. Just do it.” When she was done she started to cry. Sansa was ready to do anything now. She didn’t want to become another victim of Tywin Lannister’s horrible plans. Her whole family was dead, she didn’t want to be destroyed as well. She would never be happy with Tyrion, but she knew he would never mistreat her. That was far more than what she could hope when she was engaged with Joffrey. She sobbed uncontrollably now. She didn’t want to suffer anymore. She wanted to go back to Winterfell, to be with her father, her mother, her brothers, even with Arya and Jon, to speak with Jeyne about knights and stories, to hold Lady in her arms. She wanted to leave
this nightmare that began the day Cersei ordered her direwolf to die. She wanted to go back at this moment and tell the truth to King Robert. How things could have been different if she had told the truth. Everything was her fault.

After a moment she realized a hand was on her shoulder. Tyrion had climbed into the bed to join her, but he still wore his clothes. She sobbed even more. Her husband began to speak words that sounded hollow in her ears. “I’m sorry, Sansa. If I could send you away, send you back to your family, put an end to this horrible war, bring them back to life and arrange things so that everything never happened, I would. But you are my wife. I swore to protect you. And I will protect you until I die.” Sansa refused to look at him. She knew what she would see. Sad green eyes, filled with compassion, pity and concern. She didn’t want to see it in a Lannister.

Slowly, Tyrion put his arms around her neck and brought her head on his shoulder. “Come. You can cry. Let it go.” Sansa burst into more tears. She cried for everything that happened to her and the people she loved, everything she had tried to keep inside for so long. After a moment she buried her face into Tyrion’s chest. She let her tears flow on his doublet. He didn’t reject her, didn’t retreat, but he didn’t bring her closer to him. He was only there for her, holding her, protecting her. As she wept, she drifted into sleep, exhausted from her despair and her tears.

This night, strangely, Sansa slept well. It was the best night she had in months. She didn’t do the dream with Ser Loras as she often did. Instead she made another one. It was not long before her father was killed. She was in her father’s solace with him and her sister. Their father told them they would leave King’s Landing. Arya complained about her dancing lessons that would end and asked about bringing her dancing teacher with them. Sansa on her side only spoke about Joffrey, saying she was to marry him, to be his perfect queen while he would be a perfect king, to have his babies.

“Seven hells.” That was what Arya said back then and she said it too in her dream. And just like it happened in real life, her father was next to speak to her.

“When you’re old enough, I’ll make you a match with someone who’s worthy of you, someone who’s brave and gentle and strong.”

Sansa wanted to reply, but she didn’t. She saw a small figure behind her father. A figure she barely noticed when he came to Winterfell since she only had eyes for Joffrey and the queen, but there was no point denying who he was. He had no scar back then. It was Tyrion Lannister. The Imp.

She made no other dreams this night. She woke abruptly when the door slammed.

Chapter End Notes

Please review, I worked a lot on this chapter and it is vital to the rest of the story.

The rape of Tysha by Tyrion isn’t mentionned in the show when he tells the story to Bronn and Shae, but in the books he tells this part to Bronn, but not to Shae (they are told about Tysha seperately). It's possible Tyrion decided not to mention the rape part because Shae was present in the show, but that it happened all the same. After all, who would like to mention that he was forced to rape his wife?

Next chapter: THE CHANGE IS COMING
Cersei I

Chapter Notes

So, finally, the CHANGE has arrived. It is told from Cersei's POV.

I was supposed to release this chapter later, but finally I decided to add it to the story earlier.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CERSEI I

The Queen Regent was alone in her room. She sat in a chair, wearing a red nightgown as she drank a rich wine from the Arbor. She had sent her servants away a few moments ago after they were done preparing her for the night. While she drank, she remembered one of her handmaidens told her a jug of her favourite wine had disappeared not long ago without explanation. It was only a single jug, but Cersei would learn how it disappeared. If someone stole it, she would have him or her whipped until all his or her back was redder than the wine she was drinking right now. A queen couldn't allow people to steal from her personal reserve without impunity, a lioness even less. She was the daughter of Lord Tywin Lannister. Hear me roar.

As she thought about handmaidens and wine, her thoughts turned immediately to the little monster. She had him. She had found his little whore. Sansa's handmaiden told her about her visiting Tyrion's chambers and shouting at him from behind the doors. It was a little bit too familiar as an attitude. She now remembered the woman from the Battle of Blackwater. She was quite pretty. Black hair, black eyes, tanned skin, slender, generous breasts. No wonder her brother kept her in the service of his wife. He preferred the company of whores as always. Perhaps he even married her. If she questioned the whore well enough, she could get it from her. How pleasant it would be to tell her father about it. Of course she already told him about Tyrion's whore, but her father was very busy and didn't care immediately about this. If Cersei could add to Tyrion’s humiliation, that was only too good. He deserved it and much more.

She emptied her cup and went to her bed, removing her nightgown to sleep. The bed felt quite empty without someone to share it. Jaime should be with her. For a moment she almost regretted she treated him the way she did after he came back, but she didn’t regret it for long. That was all Jaime’s fault. He left the capital, abandoned her with Robert and Ned Stark, forced her to take matters at hand all alone. They came in the world together and belonged to each other, and yet Jaime abandoned her for their poor little brother. How stupid he was. He managed to be caught on a battlefield by a child. He came back after so long, hoping foolishly everything would be as it was before. He took too long. All the same, Cersei missed his presence. Lancel hadn’t been such a bad replacement in his absence, all the same for Osmund Kettleblack, but Jaime was still her other half. She only felt whole when he was inside her. Nothing could replace that. Cersei wondered if Jaime had been foolish enough to fall in love with this ugly woman who looked like a man. Brienne of Tarth, her name was. It would be his style after all, if he could love the little monster who was their brother.

All that was nonsense. However stupid Jaime was, his cock only arose for her, her sister, her lover. He couldn’t be interested by other women. Nevertheless, Cersei would have to do something about
this ugly creature. Probably she could ask Ser Osmund to silently take care of her. That wouldn’t be
difficult to find a motive to have this woman dead after all, everyone believed she killed Renly
Baratheon. Who would weep for her? Maybe the Tyrells, so Cersei would have to take care of them
when time would come. She wouldn’t let the little doe-eye whore take her son away from her.

As she fell asleep, she dreamed of Jaime. He slept with her and held her tightly in his arms. He
entered her and she screamed and felt more pleasure than she ever did before. She had missed his
presence in her for so long. They did it a lot of times. Cersei couldn’t remember how many. But
finally, her ardent dreams ended when someone knocked at her door. She woke up, frustrated that
such a good night was interrupted. It was barely dawn outside, so she decided to ignore the noise.
She was Queen Regent. No one had the right to awake her before she wanted. However, the
pounding on her door didn’t stop and became more and more persistent. Someone was calling her
again and again. “Your Grace! Your Grace!”

In her sleepy state, she couldn’t know for sure whose voice it was. Exceeded by the repeating noise,
she finally answered in an angry voice. “Enter!” The man who would pass this door better had a
good reason for all of this.

A kingsguard entered and she recognized him immediately. Osmund Kettleblack. Cersei had banned
all clothes from her for the night, like when Jaime and she would express their passion. She realized
at this moment that her blankets and sheets were all wrapped around her and that they were covered
with sweat, her sweat. For a moment, Ser Osmund looked at her with a mouth opened. Cersei was
quite aware of his fascination for her and she didn’t hesitate to use it to have his obedience and his
service. However, right now, she didn’t want him before her. She wanted to go back to sleep before
she had to face the royal wedding that was to happen today. What an ordeal it would be to see her
beloved Joffrey married with a whore from the Reach. She probably still had an hour of peace before
this day and she didn’t want Kettleblack to ruin it.

“If you only came to stare at me, I suggest you go away. My son wouldn’t hesitate to shoot at you
with his crossbow if he learned you were trying to bed his mother.”

Ser Osmund took some time to react to her words. How slow of mind he was. Cersei wondered why
she attached him to her service. “I’m sorry, your Grace. But I didn’t try to bed you.”

“You bed me with your eyes. That is already way too much.”

“Apologies, your Grace, but the Lord Commander… your brother… he asked me to fetch you. He
wants you to come to the Tower of the Hand.”

“Why does he want to see me at the Tower of the Hand?” Cersei was annoyed by Jaime’s attitude.
Why didn’t he come to her chamber himself to make her dream a reality? Why to summon her like a
servant?

Osmund Kettleblack took some time to answer. “He said it is your father, your Grace. There is…”

“Alright. Go out. I’ll dress myself without your lustful eyes and come to the Tower of the Hand to
meet my father.” If her father wanted to see her so soon in the morning, he would have to wait. She
was the Queen Regent. She wasn’t summoned like a whore.

“Your Grace, your brother…”

“Will wait. You can tell him. Now go.” She cut Ser Osmund again. He was really slow of mind.
Finally the brown haired man turned on his heels after a little bow and left the room. Cersei called
her handmaidens and took her time to take a bath and put one of her most beautiful gown for the day.
No one would press her. When she was done the sun was beginning to show itself. She left her room and walked with dignity to the Tower of the Hand. She didn’t know why her father asked for her presence, but she would use this moment to speak again about Tyrion’s whore. She climbed the numerous steps that led to the apex of the Tower where her father’s solar and chambers were. She found it guarded by kingsguards and Lannister soldiers in great numbers. How strange it was. They all bowed their head with what seemed to be a sad expression when she passed before them. She entered the small council room where other people were standing, including Ser Osmund. He spoke a little time after he saw her.

“Your Grace, Ser Jaime is waiting for you in your father’s chambers.”

“Why are they waiting in his chambers? If my father wants to tell us something, this is a good place as any.”

Ser Osmund didn’t answer. For the first time, Cersei noticed he seemed uneasy. She walked past him and went to the chambers of her father. He was lying on his bed, with the same stern expression he always had, except for the times he would give her the little smile that was reserved for her, his only daughter. It was strange however, disconcerting. She never saw her father asleep before as she thought about it. Jaime stood tall at the bedside, looking at him while Grand Maester Pycelle was stooped over her father.

“What is this all about?” As soon as she asked the question her brother turned towards her. Pycelle didn’t seem to have noticed her presence.

“Cersei.” He only said her name. Cersei grew impatient with her brother. She was awaken early, being told her father wanted to see them, and he was sleeping while Jaime stood stupidly at his side.

“It’s the heart, I fear. It probably stopped during the night. He didn’t feel anything. Not most men have the chance to leave us so peacefully.”

What nonsense Pycelle was he talking about? Whose heart stopped? “Tell me why you told me to come when our father isn’t yet awaken. Did you want me to look at him while he was still asleep? If that was your idea, I have to tell you there’s nothing interesting in it.”

Jaime looked at her with what looked like a confused look. Cersei was annoyed by his behaviour. When he spoke his words were the stupidest she ever heard. “Cersei, he’s not asleep. He’s dead. Our father is dead.”

Cersei stared at him for some time, then she laughed. “Really Jaime, if you wanted to make me laugh there were other ways for that.”

“Your Grace,” began the Grande Maester, “it is true. Lord Tywin died during the night. His heart failed. I must admit it is quite unexpected, but Lord Tywin was sixty-seven and most of the people don’t live up to this age. It was to happen one day or another.”

Was this slug a partner in Jaime’s jape? Cersei was more than exceeded now. “You’re going to tell me why you awoke me at this hour right now, and you will stop to tell stupid lies to your queen.” She commanded it on a loud and angry tone.

The Grand Maester retreated before this. What a wretched old man he was. However Jaime didn’t back up. When he spoke it was in a way Cersei never heard him talk. He had never seemed so serious. “Cersei, I’m not lying. Our father is dead.”

That unsettled Cersei. She went past her brother and the old and vaulted man and came to her
father’s side. He was sleeping, for sure. She put a hand on his left shoulder and shook him. He didn’t react. She shook again, more roughly. Nothing happened. That couldn’t be. He probably took a lot of essence of nightshade and that was why he didn’t awake. To know it for sure, she put her hand on his chest, where the heart was. She would have her confirmation the two men were wrong. But after resting her hand on him for quite a long time, Cersei realized she could feel nothing. There was no beat. She put her hand on his front. It was cold. No heat came from his skin. Her father, the great Tywin Lannister, was dead.

Cersei remained in this position for a very long time. That was impossible! Her father couldn’t be dead. Yesterday he still walked, breathed, spoke and looked at all of them the same way he always did ever since they could remember anything. Her father couldn’t be dead. She wasn’t sad. She never loved him. But he was her father, the man who led them where they were today, who made sure their family was the most powerful in all the Seven Kingdoms. How could he die? Of course, he didn’t die. Cersei knew it was the truth as soon as she thought about it. Her father was assassinated.

“How did he die?”

“During, his sleep, your Grace. His heart stopped. That’s not abnormal, many people die this way if war or disease don’t take them before,” said Pycelle.

What a fool the old man was. It was no natural death. Someone killed him, probably by poisoning. But who? The Tyrells perhaps. They were the ones who could benefit the most from it. They probably believed that without her father as Hand of the King and with Margaery as queen, they would hold all the power. Cersei wasn’t about to let them succeed. Her father was killed. She was Queen Regent. She would give back the Tyrells a hundred times what they did to her. A doubt insinuated in her mind. What if the Tyrells weren’t behind this? Could it be someone else? As soon as she contemplated this possibility, she knew. She knew who killed her father. Anger rose in her. They would hear her roar.

“Grand Maester.” She spoke in a controlled voice, making sure for everyone she was handling the situation. “Send men to the Tyrells to tell them the royal wedding is postponed. Indefinitely.”

“Your grace, it took months to prepare it. The Tyrells may be offended by this. Perhaps we should…”

“Let them be offended. Place guards before all entrances and exits of the Maidenvault. They are not to leave their quarters. No one leaves his rooms without my leave. There will be no wedding as long as the assassin of my father is living.”

“Assassin?” It was Jaime who talked this time. “Cersei, he died during his sleep. No one killed him. He was old and the duties as Hand of the King are very demanding. That’s very likely that he…”

Cersei interrupted her brother by slapping him in the face. “You’re really an idiot! He was murdered! Can’t you see it? I know he was killed, and I know who did it. I will have no rest before he is dead.”

Cersei left the chamber in a quick but dignified pace. When she emerged again in the small council room, she saw that Osmund Kettleblack was still there. “Follow me. Now.” After a moment, the slow man followed her. When she left the room, she summoned two other kingsguards. “Ser Meryn, Ser Boros, follow me. We have work to do.”

The three men followed her. They may be idiots and fools, but she could count on them for what she was about to do. Their loyalty wasn’t to question.

They reached the place where she wanted to go a few minutes later. She stopped before the door. On
the other side was the one who killed her father. She warned her father that he wasn’t to be trusted and yet he didn’t listen. She was the only one among his children he could have trusted and he didn’t trust her. She told him once.

“Did it ever occur to you that I might be the one who deserves your confidence and your trust, not your sons? Not Jaime or Tyrion, but me. Years and years of lecture on family and legacy… The same lecture, really, just with tiny, tedious variations… Did it ever occur to you that your daughter might be the only one listening to them? Living by them? That she might have the most to contribute to your legacy that you love so much more than your actual children?”

Her father hadn’t listened. How he responded showed it quite enough. “I don’t distrust you because you’re a woman. I distrust you because you’re not as smart as you think you are. You’ve allowed that boy to ride roughshod over you and everyone else in this city.” It wasn’t her fault if she couldn’t controlled Joffrey. Her father then started to write letters again, as if he didn’t care about her presence. She was his true daughter, his only child who was worthy of him, and still he excluded her as if she was nothing. Now he was dead and she would be the one to avenge him and to carry on his legacy for House Lannister.

“Your Grace?” It was Ser Boros this time who spoke. He was looking at the door as if he didn’t understand why they were here. These men really were stupid. She should carry the sword and them the gown.

“The man behind these doors killed the Hand of the King and the Lord of Casterly Rock. I order you to arrest him and to bring him to the black cells. If he is to offer any resistance, gag him, knock him out if necessary, but make sure he comes quietly.”

Ser Meryn didn’t show any sign of reluctance, but the two others seemed concerned by her order. Ser Boros spoke again. “Your Grace, I’m not sure. Do you think it is really…”

“I am your queen. You are members of the Kingsguard. You swore to obey me and my son, and I speak for my son in this case. So, obey, except if you want me to tell the king you disobeyed an order from him.”

This shook both of them, but Ser Meryn was the first to move. He walked to the door and nearly smashed it the way he opened it so brutally. Cersei followed him with the two other idiots behind her.

“What’s the meaning of this?”

Tyrion should have known she would discover the truth very quickly. However, she stopped all of a sudden when she looked at him. He was laid in the bed, but what surprised Cersei was the position of his wife. Sansa was in such a position close to him that it nearly seemed she was leaning over him. Cersei didn’t understand. She knew from her conversations with her father and the rumors in the castle that her brother didn’t consummate his marriage. Did they do it tonight? That was no time to wonder about it. She would find her answer about this later. She composed herself.

“Ser Meryn, you know what to do.”

As soon as she said it, the knight walked over the bed and grabbed the little monster by the shoulder, dropping him on the floor unceremoniously. He grabbed him again and Tyrion resisted this time. “What are you…?” He didn’t have the time to end his sentence. Cersei instructed Ser Meryn to silence him if that was necessary and Ser Meryn executed her order quite efficiently. With a single punch on the face with his iron gauntlet he knocked out the dwarf. Cersei felt a wave of pleasure and complacency when she saw her brother couldn’t get up again. However, her thoughts were quickly
distracted by a scream. It was Sansa.

“What have you done? Why? He did no…”

The girl didn’t have time to finish her sentence. Ser Meryn slapped her on the cheek very hard. Before he could do anything else, Cersei intervened. “It’s alright, Ser Meryn. The Imp is all we came for. Let the girl. I’ll take care of her. Take my brother to the black cells.”

“Yes, your Grace.” At least this one was quick to execute commands. He grabbed the little frame on the floor and swung him on one of his shoulders, taking him out of the room. When he passed next to her, Cersei could see blood running on his face. That wasn’t much compared to everything he did, but for now she would do with it. Very soon she would get rid of him for good. Cersei turned towards the two other guards.

“Search the room. Try to find any clue that proves my brother’s guilt.”

The two men began immediately. It seemed they recovered their common sense. Cersei turned back to face the girl. Sansa had collapsed in her bed after Ser Meryn’s slap. She had a cut on her left cheek, but Cersei didn’t care about it. It was nothing compared to what she endured in Robert’s hands for years. Anyway that was the girl’s fault. She shouldn’t have spoken. For a moment Cersei wondered if she had played a role in her father’s death. Of course she didn’t. It was plain the girl didn’t have enough brain for that kind of things. The way she was in the bed when Cersei entered was proof enough of this. Only an idiot girl could come to be so close of her brother.

“I’m sorry about that, little dove. I fear Ser Meryn wants to serve his king too well. Anyway that’s not as if you didn’t know what it was.” She faked concern for the girl. Sansa was stupid and Cersei could manipulate her with sweet words.

Sansa was looking at her in apparent confusion. She didn’t understand what just happened. As if it was a surprise. “What’s going on? Why did you arrest Tyrion? What did he do?”

Cersei wanted to laugh at her. Instead she only smiled in a comforting way, even if it wasn’t the reason why she was smiling. “Don’t worry about all of this. There’s been an accident and I need to question my brother about it. I’ll explain it all to you later. But I need to ask you something. Did Tyrion leave the room during the night?”

Sansa took some time to answer her. “No, he only came late, as usual.”

Cersei had the answer she needed. Her brother had killed their father during the night, then he came back to his rooms to sleep. Probably he bed Sansa afterwards to celebrate his crime. She came to the bedside and removed the blankets. To her great surprise, there was no blood on the sheets under. How strange it was. Her little brother was always thinking with his cock and he didn’t bed his own wife? Anyway, it didn’t matter.

“I understand it must be a shock for you. To see your own husband being arrested right in front of your eyes. You must worry a lot about him.”

Cersei waited for a reply from the girl. In the meantime she went to the little table with the glass and the hair accessories. “He was kind with me. He never mistreated me.” She gave one of her foolish answers as always. She could be foolish enough to feel something for him. Though, as soon as Cersei thought about it, she realized it was a stupid notion. No one could ever feel something good for this little monster. Except her brother Jaime probably.

As she looked upon the things on the table, Cersei noticed a leather box. She took it. “What is it?”
she asked to Sansa.

“It’s a gift from Tyrion.” The girl answered with the same voice that she ever spoke with.

“How touching from him.” She opened the box. Inside there was a golden necklace with a lion incrusted on it. How convenient this jewel was. She tossed it toward Sansa who was still sitting in her bed. “You should wear it now, while you still can. I’m afraid you’ll be a widow very soon. Tell me if you find anything interesting.” She added the last sentence for the kingsguards and left the room.

Cersei walked back to her own quarters. She felt prouder than she ever was. In a few hours she put under arrest the monster who killed her mother and her father, and she postponed the moment when Margaery would sink her claws into her son for good. Even her father couldn’t have done better. He would be proud of her, she knew it. She was the Queen Regent. She would make it known to everybody quite quickly. The first to know would be her little brother.

Chapter End Notes

A huge change to the story. The fic will now progressively diverge from the canon. As always, everything goes wrong thanks to Cersei.

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
Sansa V

Chapter Notes

This chapter is mostly the day for Sansa after Tyrion is arrested. There's not a lot of action, it's mostly Sansa's thoughts about what just happened. Imagine her confusion after everything that happened since last night.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

SANSA V

Sansa remained motionless as the queen left the room. The two kingsguards were still searching her room, so she didn’t dare to move. It was better to stay as unnoticed as possible. *I'm afraid you'll be a widow very soon.* The words of the Queen Regent rolled in her head. It could only mean one thing. She was going to kill Tyrion. Sansa panicked at the idea. Tyrion was her husband and the only one in King’s Landing who protected her. And she didn’t want him to die. He had always been kind with her. She looked at the necklace in her hands. She wanted to stop Cersei when she seized and opened the box, but she didn’t dare. She had been the frightened little girl who hid behind courtesies as always. Now she knew what Tyrion offered her for her name day. It was a golden Lannister lion necklace. If Tyrion thought it would gladden her, he had been wrong. She wanted to throw the necklace away, but she didn’t do it with the two men looking everywhere. It would bring their attention to her.

They searched for some time, but didn’t find anything. Finally they went to Tyrion’s strongbox on his desk and tried to open it, without success. “Let’s find the keys. We’ll come back later to open it,” Ser Boros said. He then turned his attention on her. “You don’t leave this room. Everyone is confined as long as the queen says otherwise.”

They left without another look. Sansa was alone once more. However, a few minutes later, Podrick erupted from the door. He didn’t look at Sansa and went directly to the strongbox and opened it.

“Podrick. What’s going on?” She needed explanations. Why was Tyrion arrested by Cersei? What was going to happen to him? Why was everyone confined to his rooms? Today was the royal wedding. They should be preparing for it, but instead it seemed no one could move.

The squire answered her in a very low voice as he took the documents in the chest and locked it again. “I’m sorry, my lady. I cannot stay any longer. I’ll come back as soon as I can.” He left without any other word. Again, Sansa was all alone.

Sansa got up from her bed and slipped on a dressing gown before sitting in a chair at the table where she took her meals in normal time. For now, there was nothing to eat on it, only wine, and Sansa didn’t drink very much. Tyrion was the one who emptied jugs every day and for now he wasn’t there because his sister took him away so roughly from Sansa. She was lying on him when they came into their chamber, awaking her from the best night she had since an eternity.

Wait. Sansa realized something. Tyrion was with her in her bed when they came to take him, and she was laying on him. Did he…? For a moment she panicked. Did he bed her? But then she
remembered what happened last night. His confession about his first wife. Her plea for him to consummate their marriage before his father forced them to. The way she burst into tears. The way he wrapped his arms around her shoulders and allowed her to weep on him. There was nothing more. She probably fell asleep afterwards and Tyrion held her during the night. That would explain the position in which she awakened, her head on his chest, his arms around her neck and shoulders. She could still feel the soothing feeling of his arms around her. He shared her bed, but didn’t do the deed. It had been such a peaceful night. She wondered now what would happen. Would his father still force them to do their duty as husband and wife? Or would he forget about it now that Tyrion was in prison? Sansa didn’t feel quite relieved at the idea she would remain a virgin because Tyrion was killed.

She realized she still held the necklace in her hand. A moment ago she wanted to throw it away, but now she didn’t really feel for that. Instead she brought it back into the leather box on her boudoir. Everything was now a mess because of the search by Ser Boros and Ser Osmund. As she put down the box, the door opened. Sansa turned to face the new intruder, fearing who else it could be, only to be relieved to see Shae enter with plates of food.

“Shae!”

“Sansa.” Her friend left the tray on the table and went over her. “Are you alright? All the castle is in turmoil. Most of the people are locked in their rooms. I barely managed to come here.”

“Do you know what’s going on?”

“I have no idea. No one knows.” Sansa sighed. She had hoped Shae could explain her “Where’s Tyrion?”

Sansa explained everything to Shae. How Cersei entered the room with three kingsguards, how they knocked out Tyrion and grabbed him outside to the black cells, accusing him of a crime she had no idea what it was. How they searched the chamber, finding nothing of interest as far as she knew. How they ordered her to stay in her chamber, without any possibility to leave. Sansa thought she saw something in Shae's eyes when she told her Cersei said Tyrion wouldn’t live long. What is only surprise? Or horror? Or even worry? Shae gained back her composure very quickly all the same.

“Alright, we don’t know what happened, so there’s no use to panic. I’ll leave later to see what I can find about it, but for now I’ll stay. I don’t think it would be wise to leave alone right now, and anyway I must dress you and prepare you for the day.”

Her handmaiden was speaking calmly, but Sansa could feel worry and uncertainty in her voice. “What about the royal wedding?” Sansa asked.

“I don’t think the royal wedding will take place today with everything that is going on right now. But it is best for you to be dressed for the day all the same. Come, I’ll brush your hair.”

Sansa complied without a word and let Shae brush her hair, clip her nails, and dress her for the day. She also washed the little cut on her cheek. When she was done she emptied Sansa’s chamber pot by the window and put some order in the mess the kingsguards and Cersei left behind them. Sansa knew every duty Shae had to do. She couldn’t do anything more without leaving the room and she said she wouldn’t. She replaced the sheets and the blankets on her bed. At this moment Sansa had begun to eat.

“Did you eat, Shae?” Sansa didn’t know when her handmaiden’s ate to be true.

“No.”
“You may eat. There’s more than enough for two people.” After all Tyrion wasn’t there. Shae sat and began to eat with Sansa. Sansa liked it better. She considered Shae more as a friend than as her handmaiden for quite a long time now. She was the only one Sansa trusted enough to confide in. They ate silently. None of them had much to say it seemed. When they were done Shae cleaned the table as she could. Then they both had nothing to do.

Sansa took the embroidery she began three days ago and pursued her work. Shae only sat next to her, doing nothing. When Sansa asked her if she wanted some tissue to work on, her friend declined. She said she wasn’t really good at needlework. So Sansa worked alone. She was soon lost in her work, but in the back of her mind she thought about Tyrion. She was concerned about him. She also worried about herself of course. If Tyrion was in danger, she was as well because she was his wife. Finally she decided to ask her opinion to her friend.

“What do you think will happen to Tyrion?”

Shae looked back at her. “I don’t know. With the queen, who knows what could happen to him? But I think he will manage to survive to this. He survived much worse.”

Sansa thought she felt some doubts in Shae’s words. She seemed to worry about Tyrion too. Sansa was glad of it. Shae had seemed quite cold with Tyrion ever since the moment he and Sansa were wed. Perhaps it was only because Shae wanted to protect her, but Sansa guessed the fact Tyrion could never remember her name also played a role in that. After all, it was quite evident now that Tyrion would never hurt her, no matter what happened. She was happy Shae looked concerned about him just like her. She wasn’t the only one to worry about him at least.

“I hope he will not die. He is a Lannister but… he never did anything wrong to me. He even protected me from the rest of his family. I don’t want him to die.”

Shae nodded to show her agreement. After a short hesitation, Sansa decided to speak about last night.

“You know, Lord Tywin wants to force us to consummate our marriage on the next night.”

This revelation nearly caused Shae to jump from her chair from what Sansa could see. The foreign girl stared at her with anger in her eyes. “What?”

“Tyrion told me last night. His father gave him until the royal wedding to bed me, or else he would force us to do it during Joffrey’s wedding night.”

Sansa could see anger boiling in Shae. It wasn’t the first time she saw anger in Shae, but she never saw it at such a level. Her friend rose from her seat. “This man is a monster. How can he dare to do that?”

“He wants a Lannister to rule the North one day. My claim is all that interest him.”

“What did your husband do about it?”

Shae was now looking at her intensely. “He said he wouldn’t do it. Whatever his father tried, he wouldn’t bed me against my will.” Shae looked at her with an expression Sansa couldn’t decipher now, so she continued to talk. “He said he wouldn’t rape me, no matter what Lord Tywin would do. That he may be a monster, but not this kind of monster.”

Sansa wasn’t sure if she should talk about Tyrion’s revelation about his first wife. She trusted Shae with everything, but Tyrion had told it to her and only to her. He obviously didn’t want everyone to know about it and Sansa could only agree with him. That was such a horrible story. She couldn’t tell
it to anyone, not even Shae. Instead she talked about the events on the morning. “I still can’t believe what happened. Cersei and the three knights just entered like that in our room and they grabbed Tyrion like this, pulling him out of the bed as if that was nothing. And then they turned the room into shambles, looking for who knows what.”

Sansa stopped to talk and a huge silence lingered in the room for quite a long time. Finally Shae broke it. “They pulled him out of the bed? Didn’t your husband sleep on the couch?”

That wasn’t the type of question Sansa was expecting, but she guessed it was legitimate. After all, Shae always found Tyrion sleeping on the couch every time she saw him sleeping. She probably didn’t understand why Sansa suddenly said Tyrion was taken out of the bed. “I allowed him to sleep in the bed last night. The couch doesn’t seem much comfortable and he swore he would never touch me. We only slept in the same bed, nothing happened.”

That wasn’t the truth, but Sansa wished it was. Right now she regretted she didn’t show more thankfulness toward her husband before. He did everything to make their marriage as painless as possible. There were even times when Sansa could say she was happy before her mother and Robb were killed. She knew Tyrion took no part in that. She remembered his words last night. I’m sorry, Sansa. If I could send you away, send you back to your family, put an end to this horrible war, bring them back to life and arrange things so that everything never happened, I would. But you are my wife. I swore to protect you. And I will protect you until I die. He was honest. He always was. The night she spent with him was proof enough of it. He held her against him for the whole night. He could have taken her. He had every right and every reason to do it with his father’s threats. But he didn’t. He acted with honor. He only comforted her. How could someone from such a family act with so much honor? Sansa had liked this night. She had found solace in his hold. She rued her behavior toward him before that. She needed him to be in danger of dying to realize how unfair she had been.

“Excuse me, my lady. I think I will leave. I’ll try to gather some information about what is going on. I’ll manage to avoid the guards, I know ways for that.”

Shae’s words got her out of her thoughts. However, before she could say anything, her handmaiden had already left the room. She would have liked Shae to stay longer with her. Sansa returned to her needlework. She continued to work on it for most of the day, trying to not think about anything else, but it wasn’t possible. Her thoughts repeatedly wandered to the same worries. What would happen to Tyrion? What would happen to her? Why was Tyrion arrested? Did he really do anything wrong or was it only an invention of his sister, the queen? What would Lord Tywin do? Would he still force them to consummate their marriage? When would she be able to leave this room again? No meal was brought to her for midday. Anyway she didn’t care, she wasn’t hungry.

Finally, when evening came, the door finally opened. Sansa thought Shae came back with some news. However, before she could say anything, her handmaiden had already left the room. She would have liked Shae to stay longer with her. Sansa returned to her needlework. She continued to work on it for most of the day, trying to not think about anything else, but it wasn’t possible. Her thoughts repeatedly wandered to the same worries. What would happen to Tyrion? What would happen to her? Why was Tyrion arrested? Did he really do anything wrong or was it only an invention of his sister, the queen? What would Lord Tywin do? Would he still force them to consummate their marriage? When would she be able to leave this room again? No meal was brought to her for midday. Anyway she didn’t care, she wasn’t hungry.

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Finally, when evening came, the door finally opened. Sansa thought Shae came back with some news, but it was someone else who crossed the doorstep. It was the young and shy boy who always flushed when she looked at him. Podrick Payne, Tyrion’s squire. Why was he there? He had a tray of food with him and put it on the table.

After that, he stood before her, not saying a word, but Sansa had the impression he was trying to say something. Finally he spoke. “Excuse me, my lady. I would have come to you sooner, but no one is allowed to wander in the Red Keep except the Kingsguard, Lannister men, and a few people with the authorization of the queen. Ser Jaime gave me the leave to bring you some food.”

Ser Jaime Lannister? Sansa didn’t know what to make of it. The Kingslayer wasn’t a man she would trust quickly. She knew like everyone else Stannis’s claims that he was the queen’s lover and that her children were also his. She also knew now that he attacked her father in the streets and that it was
how he got his injury to the leg. He had come back recently to King’s Landing, released by her mother apparently. She wondered why her mother released this man. Moreover, she wasn’t ready to give him much credit after Tyrion’s revelation last night. He allowed the wife of his brother to be raped by his father’s guards. However, she recalled that of all his family members, Jaime Lannister was the only Tyrion never spoke ill of. She found it odd considering the events concerning Tysha.

Despite that, Podrick was Tyrion’s squire. Perhaps she could get some information from him. He seemed to be quite devoted to Tyrion. “Podrick, can you tell me what is going on? Tyrion was arrested this morning by the queen and brought to the black cells. No one is going to tell me.”

“I came to tell you this also, my lady.” Sansa was quite surprised by this. Finally, she would know what was happening for everyone being locked in their apartments. “Lord Tywin is dead.”

The new numbed Sansa for quite a long time. Tywin Lannister? Dead? She felt some joy at the idea the man who organized the slaughtering of her family was dead. The gods showed some justice after all. However, that was quite unforeseen. How could the Hand of the King die so suddenly?

“How?” That was all that Sansa could ask.

“No one really knows. He was found dead in his bed by one of his guard. According to Ser Jaime, his heart failed during his sleep. He told me that’s what the Grand Maester said when he examined the body.” So the Lord of Casterly Rock died peacefully in his bed. Sansa was a bit disappointed. To be honest, she would have liked a more painful way to die for the old man who made her family suffer so much. Podrick continued to speak however. “The queen didn’t believe her father died this way. She is accusing Lord Tyrion of murdering him.”

That made quite a shock to Sansa. Tyrion killed his father? She remembered a few things he told her last night. My father won’t do anything. I’ll make sure of that. If my father is ready to do everything for the family, then I’m capable to do the same for my wife. My father is not the only who’s ready to do everything necessary. Did he kill his father for this reason? To prevent the forced consummation of their marriage? For a moment Sansa wanted to thank Tyrion for that.

She realized quickly however it wasn’t possible. Tyrion couldn’t have killed his father. Tyrion never killed anyone, even when he was Hand of the King. Death seems a bit extreme. Though Sansa couldn’t help but feel a little special, thinking her husband was ready to kill a man like Tywin Lannister for her. But it sounded so unbelieving. Deep inside, Sansa knew Tyrion didn’t kill his father. How could he kill a member of his own family? She wasn’t a good enough reason for that anyway. It wasn’t as if Tyrion loved her. He wouldn’t slaughter his own kin for an innocent and stupid girl like her. Wouldn’t he? No, Tyrion didn’t kill his father, Sansa was sure of that.

“He didn’t do it. Tyrion didn’t kill his father.” Before she could realize it, she said the words. She shouldn’t have. Podrick was a good boy, but she wasn’t entirely sure she could trust him, especially after he said Ser Jaime sent him.

“I know, my lady. I’ve been his squire for more than a year now, and I know Lord Tyrion would never do such a thing. Ser Jaime doesn’t think he did it either.”

Sansa felt reassured she wasn’t the only to believe in Tyrion’s innocence, but the mention of Ser Jaime didn’t make her confident of Podrick’s words. Tyrion may be Ser Jaime’s brother, but the knight was also the queen’s brother… and lover, for sure. She had no difficulty to believe that Joffrey was the result of an incest. Ser Jaime could have sent Podrick to get some words from Sansa that could incriminate Tyrion, or even her. She had to be careful with what she said.

“What is to happen to the royal wedding?”
“Queen Cersei reported it for later. No one knows when it will take place.” So much expenses for a marriage that will never happen. If Tyron was free, he would fume about this.

“Does the queen have any proof of my husband’s guilt?” She said it in a very ladylike voice. She had to wear her armor again to let no emotion transpire.

“For now, none. Ser Jaime says that his father died of natural causes, and that his sister probably just believes that Lord Tyron did it. He believes he will leave the cells very soon.”

Sansa didn’t believe a word of Podrick’s last sentence. She knew Cersei and Tyron hated each other more than everyone else. She would die before she set him free. She had more and more the impression Podrick was sent as a trap. Sansa looked at the boy. He seemed to be genuinely concerned about Tyron. Sansa remembered how shy and kind the boy was. He probably didn’t even know himself that Tyron’s brother was using him against his own master. Sansa couldn’t give him any information.

“Thank you, Podrick. Please leave me now. I would like to eat alone. Could you please send me one of my handmaidens to bring back the dishes and prepare me for the night?” She hoped it would be Shae.

“I’ll do what I can, my lady.” He bowed his head and went to the door. He turned back to her halfway. “My lady, I’m going to visit my lord in his cell tomorrow. Is there anything you would like me to tell him?”

Sansa thought some time about it. She had to be careful about what she would say. Anything could be used against her by Cersei eventually. Perhaps she should say nothing. However, she was concerned for Tyron. She didn’t want him to believe she didn’t give a damn about him. Not after what happened last night. She chose her words very carefully. “Tell him that I hope he is alright. That I hope he will leave the black cells very quickly. And tell him…” She wanted to tell Podrick to thank her husband for what he did for her last night, but she feared Cersei would use it and pretend it was some kind of secret thanks for killing Lord Tywin for her. Sansa couldn’t take that risk. Instead she only said: “Tell him I miss him.” She could have said that she loved him, but that wouldn’t have been the truth.

Podrick left. Perhaps he would never visit Tyron anyway. The boy believed he would, but Sansa couldn’t trust the word of a kingslayer, a man who loved his own sister and had children with her, a man who tried to kill her father, a man who bought a whore to his brother and made him believe the girl loved him, then afterwards… She didn’t want to think about it. Tyron’s revelation still weighed over her.

Sansa ate silently. She thought about the unexpected turn of events that happened in no more than a single day. In less than twenty-four hours, she had learned that she and her husband would have to consummate their marriage, willingly or unwillingly, at the latest during Joffrey’s wedding night. She also discovered her husband had been married and that his father destroyed this marriage. Sansa slept with him without consummation. Then Tyron was arrested the next morning, and now she learned that Tywin Lannister was dead in unknown circumstances.

Sansa was happy about the death of the Lord of Casterly Rock. He was the mind behind the slaughtering at the Twins, Cersei’s father, Joffrey’s grandfather, and the head of House Lannister. He deserved to die. The way he left seemed a mercy compared to the horrible things he had done. Even if Tyron had killed him, and she knew he didn’t, she wasn’t sure she would blame her husband for that, even if that was kinslaying. However, as she thought about it, she didn’t believe this death was such a good new. With Tywin Lannister dead and Tyron in prison, who would be able to oversee Joffrey and stop him from doing everything he wanted? His mother? Sansa didn’t think so.
Queen Regent always seemed to approve what her son would do, even when she didn’t. And Margaery wouldn’t be able to influence Joffrey if she didn’t marry him.

Sansa became quite anxious about her situation. She had no one to protect her anymore. She had to leave King’s Landing, but how? And where would she go? Perhaps she should have accepted Lord Baelish’s offer. She was thinking about it when Shae entered the room. Sansa realized at the same time that night had come. How much time did she remain seated, thinking about the implications of Lord Tywin’s death and Tyrion’s arrest?

“Shae, Lord Tywin is dead.”

“I know. All the servants are talking about it. The Tyrells are confined into the Maidenvault, and much of the inhabitants of the Red Keep cannot leave their rooms. They barely allow a few servants to carry on their duties. They are accompanied by Lannister guards all the time. I was nearly caught when I went back to the servant’s rooms.”

“You know the queen accuses Tyrion of killing his father?”

“A few talked about it.” Shae’s tone changed when she answered the second time. It became indifferent, as if she didn’t care what was going to happen to Tyrion. “They allowed me to prepare you for the night and to bring back the dishes to the kitchen, but they won’t allow us much time. It would be best to start right now.”

Sansa would have liked Shae to stay longer, but she had no choice. So she let Shae change her for the night, clean the table and retrieve the empty tray. Sansa was surprised she ate all the food. Perhaps she needed to eat more than she believed sooner. She only spoke one time to her handmaiden. “Do you think Tyrion will get out of it? He didn’t kill his father, I know it.”

“I guess it will depend of the king and the queen.” Shae’s tone was hard and emotionless. Sansa didn’t like it. Tyrion could die and Shae didn’t seem to care about it. She seemed to do during the morning. Why did she look so indifferent now?

Shae left the room after a few minutes later and Sansa went to the bed. After everything that happened the last two days and her previous short night of sleep, as deep her sleep had been, she was exhausted. Strangely she found the bed quite empty. She managed to fall asleep after a few minutes. She did the same dream with her father promising her a husband who was strong, gentle and brave.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Jaime
“THIS IS MADNESS!”

Such were the words of Jaime Lannister to his sister in the afternoon following the death of their father. Jaime had been destroyed by his father’s death. Not that he would weep for him, but everything changed with his death. Their father always was the one to make sure their family was powerful and safe. Now he was dead. The future was uncertain. But for now, it didn’t matter. Jaime was furious after Cersei.

A few hours after their father was dead, she already occupied his study, as if she was the new Hand of the King. She had locked up everyone in the Red Keep in their chambers and shut all the main gates and other passages between the Red Keep and the exterior. No one could enter and no one could leave. Corridors and halls were empty, save for the few guards, all Lannisters, who patrolled them. Jaime just came back from a very laborious interview with the Queen of Thorns. He had gone to the Tyrells to explain them the situation, that it was only a temporary measure, that everyone was submitted to it, and that they should be granted freedom of movement very soon. It didn’t calm the Tyrells though.

“I don’t think your father would have wanted the royal wedding that insures our alliance to be postponed this way, even for his death. We prepared this wedding for months. Instead we are told to stay calmly in our chambers, not even being able to have our handmaidens to attend our needs.”

Jaime had promised to send them their servants whenever they wished, but it did little to make the Tyrells happy. Furthermore, he had to make sure every servant walking in the Red Keep was escorted by a guard. Another stupid order from Cersei. She seemed so sure that their father was assassinated, even when the Grand Maester said the opposite. However, the security measures weren’t what bothered Jaime the most. It was the arrest of Tyrion. His sister accused him of killing their father in the most stupid way he could imagine. And after she was the one to blame him for pushing a boy from the top of a tower! Now, she wanted Tyrion to stand trial for the murder of their father, but also for attempt of murder against the king. Jaime couldn’t believe what his sister was doing. Furthermore, Cersei’s choice of judges for the trial was unacceptable. She had chosen Joffrey to act as main judge, along with Mace Tyrell and Gyles Rosby. Their mad son, a fat flower who did everything he was told, and a man who could barely speak between two coughs. And all of them had no brain. How could Cersei hope they could do the light and have a good judgment?

“Be careful, Jaime. I may be your sister, but I am also your queen. I’m only doing what father would have done in my stead. He is dead, so it is our duty to make sure the family stays strong and survives. And the first thing to do to ensure it is to kill the man who assassinated our father.”
“Tyrion didn’t kill our father. He died during his sleep. Pyelle himself told us.”

“Pyelle is only a poor old man who can barely walk. I bet he said it because he doesn’t want to take
time to examine father’s body more closely. I already ordered him to do so. I’ll have proof soon
enough that our father was poisoned.”

“And what if Pyelle finds nothing? What if he concludes that our father died of natural causes?”

“He will find something. I know it. Tyrion killed him and Pyelle will discover how.”

Jaime couldn’t believe the words of his sister. She assumed that Tyrion had killed their father with as
much certainty as she said she was Queen Regent. “Tyrion can’t have killed our father. He is our
brother.”

Cersei stared at him with fury in her eyes. He loved her fury normally, but not now. “How blind are
you. He’s the one who did it. I know it.”

“He didn’t do it, Cersei.” Jaime put as much certainty as he could in his voice. His brother didn’t kill
his father, he knew it. Tyrion couldn’t have done it.

His sister only snorted in derision at his statement. “You’ve always pitied him. Our poor little
brother. Abused by the world. Despised by his father and sister. He’d kill us all if he could. He
decided to start it last night and you stand here, defending him, as you always did while he plotted
against all of us. He told me he would kill our father. A day will come when you think you’re safe
and happy and your joy will turn to ashes in your mouth. And you will know the debt is paid. That’s
what he told me, not long before Blackwater, when I confronted him about his attempt to kill Joffrey
and made him fail.”

Jaime didn’t know why Tyrion said these words, but there was to be an explanation. He knew that
Tyrion was innocent, but perhaps their father had been assassinated. They should wait for Pyelle to
finish his examination of their father’s body, then they would know.

“Perhaps it’s someone else who did it?” He hoped his sister would consider what he said and that she
would abandon her certainty of Tyrion’s guilt, but she didn’t.

“Of course, he wasn’t alone. I’m quite sure he had some help. Not from his wife, Sansa is too
innocent for that. She’s only a little dove. But I guess our new allies are not unfamiliar with this.”

His sister had really gone mad now. “You believe our brother plotted with the Tyrells to kill our
father?”

Cersei looked back at him with very serious eyes and a smile. “Do you find it so surprising?”

“Margaery Tyrell was about to marry Joffrey. They are our allies. Why would they kill our father?
They have nothing to gain from it.”

“You’re really an idiot. They made an alliance with us only to overthrow us. This is only the
beginning. Joffrey already nearly belongs to Margaery. Our father was the only one to stand between
a complete hold from them on our son. They needed him to die, and they conspired with that vile
creature to murder him.”

That was even worse than what Jaime thought. Cersei was always rash and quick to jump to
conclusions, but this… That was more than madness. It remembered Jaime of the Mad King and he
didn’t like it, especially when his sister was the one reminding him of the king he killed. Jaime took a
great inspiration before he talked. “I love you sister, but I have to tell you the truth. You’ve gone
Cersei sprinkled him with the content of her cup. Jaime’s armor was covered with wine, along with his hair and his face. “Leave, Lord Commander.” Jaime didn’t have to be told twice. He went back to his rooms of Lord Commander and summoned Ser Balon Swann to bring him Podrick Payne, Tyrion’s squire. The knight came back with him a few minutes later as Jaime finished to write something. It was difficult for him to write with his left hand but he did.

“Leave us alone,” Jaime commanded him. Ser Balon left the room. Jaime didn’t know much about the boy, but he seemed entirely loyal to Tyrion. He could probably trust him. “Podrick, you are my brother’s squire. You know what happened, don’t you?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Do you think my brother killed his father?” He needed to know the opinion of the boy to be sure he could trust him, but he also hoped there would be someone who would finally tell him his brother was innocent.

“No, my lord. I know Lord Tyrion didn’t do it, he’s a good man.” The squire answered very quickly and as soon as Jaime stopped to talk. That was a sign of loyalty from the squire. Jaime liked that. He could count on him.

“Podrick, I need you to do something for me, and for your master.” He raised from his seat and put the paper he just wrote along with a golden dragon in Podrick’s hands. “Tomorrow, you’ll go to see Tyrion in his cell. Give this paper to the guard, it is an authorization from me to see him. If that’s not enough give him the coin. You’ll tell Tyrion everything about the situation and get the names of everyone he would like to testify for him during his trial.” Jaime explained all the details of the trial, when he thought it would take place, and that he would do everything necessary to make sure Tyrion would get out alive from this. He added something else at the end. “Tell him that a Lannister always pays his debts. You may leave. Don’t talk about it to anyone.”

The squire nodded and Jaime went back to his desk. However, when he sat, he noticed the boy didn’t leave. “Is there something you didn’t understand?” His instructions were clear and simple.

“Forgive me, my lord, but I’m worried about Lady Sansa. She didn’t leave her rooms ever since this morning and her handmaidens are not allowed to attend her. Could I bring her some food?”

Jaime didn’t see anything against it. There was no use to starve Catelyn Stark’s daughter. He wrote another note to make sure Podrick could travel through the Red Keep safely and gave it to him. “Ser Balon!” The knight came back in the room. “I want you to escort Podrick to the kitchen, then to my brother’s chambers.” No one would ask questions to the boy with a kingsguard following him and Jaime’s note.

“Yes, my lord.”

Both left the room, leaving Jaime alone. He thought about his father’s death. Could it be possible someone killed him? There was a possibility. It wasn’t Tyrion, Jaime was sure, but then who? He thought about the Stark girl. Her mother had captured Tyrion in the Riverlands and threatened Jaime with a sword. If she was like her mother, perhaps she had guts enough to assassinate the man who caused the death of all her kin. What wouldn’t a Stark be ready to do for family? Catelyn Stark showed him well enough. However, if she did it, could Tyrion be a partner in crime? No, he couldn’t. If Sansa Stark murdered his father, Tyrion didn’t take any part in it. But perhaps he knew something. Jaime may have to question him about it. Jaime remembered what Tyrion told him not long ago. I didn’t allow anyone to hurt her before our father ever thought about marrying us. I am
not going to permit it now either. She is my wife, even if we both didn’t want it, and I swore to protect her when I put a cloak on her shoulders. So don’t worry, I’ll keep her safe. Could Tyrion decide to protect her even if he knew she had killed their father? Jaime hoped he wouldn’t. They were lions, and lions had to trust each other and fight together. However, Jaime also knew Tyrion would do everything to protect his wife. The thought unsettled him. He wrote another message. He wouldn’t abandon his little brother, no matter what happened. A Lannister always pays his debts, and he had a big one toward Tyrion.

When he was done, he brought the message to Grand Maester Pycelle. The day was coming to an end. He asked the Grand Maester to send this message to Casterly Rock.

“I’m sorry, Ser Jaime, but your sister ordered me to send no raven without her permission, to prevent anyone from spreading the news that Lord Tywin was dead. She said we should wait until the murderer was dealt with.”

That was too much for Jaime. His sister was closing the Red Keep to the rest of the world. He drew his sword and pressed the Grand Maester against the wall with his golden hand. His sword was only a few inches from the old man’s throat. Even with his left hand, Pycelle stood no chance against him, frail as he was.

“Listen to me carefully now, Grand Maester. You will send this message. You have the order from the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard to never tell anyone about this message or its content, no matter what happens, not even to the king or the queen. When the answer will arrive, you will give it to me and only to me, and show it or tell it to no one else. If you do not proceed as I told, you are a dead man. Is that clear? Or do I have to bring you so that you may occupy the cell next to my brother’s? I think you already have an experience with it.”

The old man couldn’t move and was sweating with fear. “I’ll do everything you ask from me. I’ve always been loyal to the Lannisters.”

“This time, you will be loyal to me, and only to me on this. You will lose your head, not only your beard this time if you betray me. If you ever do, you’ll wish it was me who was in a cell and my brother who would be threatening you.”

“Of course, of course. I promise, I’ll tell no one about everything. I’ll do as you say.”

He let go the old man and left him there, sobbing on the floor. Jaime grabbed him by the arm and forced him to send the message immediately. He followed Pycelle to the birdcages and made sure the message was sent to Casterly Rock. When it was done, he went back to his rooms and slept. On the morning, he broke his fast on eggs and bacon, then went to guard the king. It was his turn. For eight hours he had to guard the result of his seed who complained all time about not being able to leave his chamber, stating repeatedly he was the king and asking all time why his marriage didn’t take place as planned. Cersei hadn’t even cared to tell him that his grandfather was dead. Not that Joffrey would care, anyway. All the same this turn of duty was wearisome, especially since he had to share it with Osmund Kettleblack. This man was a sellsword before he entered the Kingsguard, but that wasn’t the reason Jaime despised him. There was something Jaime didn’t like about this man.

When his duty was over, Jaime felt he could go back to sleep, but he had other things to do first. He took a quick meal and went to search for Brienne. She was confined in her room, like everyone else. Jaime visited her very briefly yesterday to tell her what was going on, but he couldn’t make her leave her room. That would have seemed too strange, especially in Cersei’s eyes. Her chamber was very small and its furniture simple. Only a hard bed, a table, two chairs and a window. She didn’t complain about it since she was accustomed to harsh life in camps. She was probably one of the few women in the Seven Kingdoms who didn’t dream of a great chamber with a large and comfortable
bed (along with a handsome and noble man inside), a glass and all the other commodities women could wish. She was so much different from Cersei.

“Brienne,” he said as he entered. He had removed his armor and wore his usual garment.

“Ser Jaime.” She was staring outside through the window when he entered, but turned to face him as soon as he came. She showed him respect now. That was so much different from the time when she began to escort him. They were both insufferable toward each other back then, until they bathed in the same bathtub.

“We need to talk. About Sansa Stark.”

The name attracted Brienne’s attention. “Very well, let’s sit.”

They sat at the table, facing each other. Jaime didn’t know if her eyes were more beautiful than those of Cersei, but they were one of the few beautiful parts of her. Perhaps that was why he found them so beautiful. “My brother has been arrested by my sister and put into a cell in the dungeons.”

“For your father’s murder. I thought Sansa Stark was supposed to be safe with him. I’m not sure she’s safe with a kinslayer.”

“Tyrion didn’t kill our father. Cersei believes it because she wants to believe it. She has hated Tyrion ever since the day he was born because our mother died this same day. She always wanted him dead. She is only using our father’s death to get what she always wanted.”

Brienne seemed to regret her words. “I’m sorry, Ser Jaime. All the same, Sansa Stark is no longer safe here, if she ever was. Her husband is accused of murder, and if what you say is true, he will be killed very soon by your sister. We have to get her out of the city before it’s too late.”

Jaime had to sigh again. Brienne always said they should get Sansa out of King’s Landing for her safety. Where would they send her? It was true that with Cersei she was in danger. Tyrion could no longer protect his wife, but someone else could. “I’m not going to take her out of the city unless it becomes evident she will die if she stays. We cannot send her in the nature like this, with nowhere to go. All her family is dead.”

“What about her aunt, Lysa Arryn? She is the Lady of the Vale and Sansa is her niece. She could protect her if we brought Sansa to her.”

“Lysa Arryn is married to Petyr Baelish, the man who betrayed Sansa’s father. He is the acting Lord of the Vale now. Do you really think she will be safer in the hands of a brothel keeper?” Brienne had nothing to say to this. There was no sure place for Sansa Stark. Sansa Lannister in fact, now. “I swore to protect Lady Stark’s daughters, just like you, and I intend to protect the last one of them, but not by stupidly trying to play heroes. We must watch over her while she is here in King’s Landing. I will do it just like you, even if she may be the one who killed my father.”

“Lady Sansa didn’t kill Lord Tywin. She could never have done it.”

Jaime was exceeded by Brienne’s incensing of everyone she was sworn to. “Sansa had more reasons to kill my father than everyone else in the Red Keep. Her mother and her eldest brother were murdered on his orders.”

“I spoke with Lady Stark when I was with her. She told me Lady Sansa acted like a lady as soon as she was three-years-old. She loves songs, stories, needlework, and always act with good manners. She is a sweet child. She couldn’t have done such a thing.”
“Come on, Brienne. Lady Stark didn’t see her daughter for two years now. The child who left Winterfell is now a woman grown and she is married, even if she’s still a maiden. Her whole family was killed, her father was beheaded in front of her, and Joffrey had her beaten more than once. Do you really think she’s still the sweet innocent child she was when her mother saw her for the last time? And I’m sure that the time spent with my brother made her even less innocent.”

“Maybe you’re right, but she couldn’t have done it. The Starks don’t poison people, they act with honor.”

_Honor. Of course, they act with honor. And look where it brought them. They’re all dead safe one._

“We can argue about who may have killed my father, or we can concentrate on how to protect the Stark girl best. She’s alone now that Tyrion is in a cell, so she needs our protection. If we want to hold our vow, that’s what we must do.”

Brienne’s eyes softened. They were much less furious than Cersei’s. “I agree. What do you plan to do?”

“First, we must see her. If we are to ensure her safety, we have to talk to her. I think it’s time you meet the daughter you swore to keep safe.”

Brienne silently agreed with him. They left her room and went in the direction of Tyrion’s. Tyrion’s and Sansa’s rooms now, to be true. Jaime still found it hard to believe that Tyrion was married to Sansa Stark. He was literally flabbergasted when he discovered his brother was married once again. And to such a woman. Jaime had seen Sansa Stark a few times since he came back, and many men should be envious of his brother. The girl had grown since the time he saw her before the war. She was quite a beautiful woman now, even if he heard Tyrion complain about the fact his father married him to a child. Jaime thought he knew why Tyrion wasn’t happy. He was forced to marry the girl, and the girl was forced too. Tyrion always wanted to marry a girl who would love him. After the Red Wedding, it wasn’t hard to guess Sansa Stark would never love his brother. Not that it would have been likely even before, but now Sansa Stark had every reason to hate every Lannister in this world. Jaime wondered how she would act toward him. As for Brienne, he could only hope her presence would make things better. If the Stark girl saw a sworn shield to her mother, she may at least listen to what Jaime would tell her.

They arrived before Tyrion’s chamber where Bronn stood. Jaime was surprised to see him there.

“What are you doing here?”

“Doing my job, as long as I’m paid. Your brother’s squire seemed to have some of the dwarf’s money hidden somewhere and he pays me to protect his wife. For now anyway, I have nothing else to do.”

“And the other guards let you stand here, like that?”

“They don’t dare to face me, they know I’m dangerous. Anyway, I don’t walk in the corridors, I just stand here, doing nothing. Perhaps you could send me some girl to entertain me. It’s beginning to be a long time since I had one now.”

“I’ll see what I can do about it.” Jaime said it to shut the sellsword’s mouth more than for any other reason. “Let us enter, we need to speak to my sister-in-law.”

Bonn eyed Brienne skeptically. “She’s the one who brought you back, heh? Why do you bring her with you? Do you need protection even against a fifteen-years-old girl?”

“We must speak to Sansa together.” Jaime started to be annoyed by the sellsword’s attitude. He had
more than enough from their time spent to practice. The man liked to humiliate him with a sword and with words. How could Tyrion support him? Perhaps because Tyrion behaved the same way at some point. “Do I have to pay you to let us in?”

“I wouldn’t say no. You may enter, but remember, if you try anything funny, I’m paid to kill you.”

“We have no weapons.” It was true. They were both garbed in civil suits. “And I won’t do anything to my brother’s wife. Let us in.”

“The honor is yours.” The sellsword stepped aside and let the door closed before them. Jaime had to open it. He and Brienne entered the room.

Jaime noticed there was a mess in some places. Perhaps Cersei’s way to deal with imaginative murderers. Lady Sansa Stark, no Lannister, was sitting near the window, looking outside. When they entered, she turned her head to face them. The door closed behind them. She raised from her position.

“Ser Jaime.”

That was her way to welcome him. Proper, but nothing more. She welcomed him like a lady, but there was no trace of warmth in her voice. That was different from the last time he saw her. Jaime never gave too much attention to the girl, but he remembered the way she looked with expectation at Joffrey when they were at Winterfell. He also remembered she smiled during the tourney in the honor of her father where Jaime performed. All that was gone now. No smile, no shine in her eyes, only an emotionless face that looked at him without any interest.

Jaime observed her closely. He thought she was taller than the last time. Jaime wondered how Joffrey would have looked like with a wife taller than him. At this thought, Jaime repressed a chuckle. The girl was probably twice Tyrion’s height. What a sight it had to be when they both stood side by side. But he also saw how beautiful she was. The entire opposite of her little sister. Deep blue eyes, auburn hair, white skin, high cheekbones. Her body had developed a lot since last time. How lucky Tyrion had been to be married with her. That was a shame he never consummated the marriage.

“Lady Sansa. I hope we don’t bother you.”

“It’s difficult to be bothered when we are confined in our rooms all day.” She said it without emotion, but Jaime knew that was a reproach.

“Yes, I’m sorry about that. My sister, the queen, only established it temporarily, the time we can make sure everyone can circulate in the Red Keep safely. After all, the Hand of the King was assassinated.”

“I’m sure the Tyrells are very happy with these measures.” Again, she spoke coldly. She was different from her mother, but she also looked like her. Not because of her appearance, but in her way to behave. Catelyn Stark was always speaking to Jaime with scorn, directly branding him as a kingslayer and a man without honor. Her daughter was acting the same, but she didn’t show her emotions and hit in an indirect way. The result was the same however and both acted like a lady, people would say.

“Lady Sansa, this is Lady Brienne of Tarth.”

Brienne advanced. She hadn’t talked ever since they entered the room, remaining silent. She bowed the head. It looked quite preposterous the way she did it. “My lady, I was a sworn sword to your
mother before she died. I gave her my word that I would find you and protect you. I’m here to offer you my services.”

Jaime knew it wouldn’t work the moment Brienne began to talk. She was a woman clad in normal clothes. She wasn’t even wearing an armor, she didn’t even carry a sword. His sister-in-law didn’t seem quite convinced by Brienne’s words. “I don’t recall my mother having a woman to protect her. Why should I believe you? How do I know you’re not lying to me?”

Brienne answered immediately. “She told me you already acted as a lady at three. She often sent your maid away so she could brush your hair herself. The first embroidery you did was a blue winter rose. Your friend Jeyne Poole often called your little sister Arya Horseface.”

Brienne’s words had some effects on Sansa. Jaime could see her mouth open a little and her eyes showing some surprise. “How did you come to know my mother?” It seemed she believed Brienne now, or at least started to believe her.

“I was a kingsguard for Renly Baratheon. Your mother came to his army to negotiate an alliance with him. We both were here when he was killed. Your mother and I were accused of his murder and we escaped together. When we reached the Riverlands, she gave me the task to bring Ser Jaime safe in King’s Landing, then to bring you and your sister back to her afterwards.”

The Stark girl eyed Jaime for a moment. “Why would she order Ser Jaime Lannister to be released? I knew my mother. She would never have set him free.”

Jaime felt it was his time to speak now. “She made a deal. Me against you and Arya Stark. But we were delayed on the road. Bolton soldiers captured us. I lost a hand in this.” He raised his golden hand to emphasize it. “Roose Bolton allowed us to leave if I told my father he had nothing to see with my mutilation. Sadly when we arrived, it was too late. Your mother was dead.”

Jaime spoke in a way to let her know he was sorry about that, which was true. In fact, he didn’t feel quite guilty about Catelyn Stark’s death, but he was sorry he couldn’t keep his word. However, Sansa Stark was looking more suspiciously at them now. She turned her eyes toward Brienne. “I remember you, now. You are the one who killed Renly Baratheon.”

Brienne was quite shocked by this. Jaime knew she hadn’t done it, but most of the people believed so. “I tried to save him. I didn’t kill him.”

“Then who killed him? You said yourself that you were present with my mother when he was assassinated and that you were accused of murdering him. I know my mother didn’t do it. So if it wasn’t her or you, who was it?”

Brienne took some time before she answered. “He was killed by a shadow. A shadow with the face of Stannis Baratheon.”

Now Jaime knew they were lost. She should have invented something instead of telling the truth. Sansa was looking at her with a face that clearly stated she didn’t believe it. “You should have found a better lie.” She turned her heels and made a few steps toward the window.

“If your mother was still alive, she would tell you the same thing.”

Sansa turned again to face them. “My mother is dead. She and my brother may have been traitors, but I know my brother would never have set Ser Jaime Lannister free, even for me and Arya, and my mother would never have disobeyed him. I see no reason to believe you.”

Jaime intervened. Brienne really ruined everything. She was too much honorable. He had to try to
rectify the situation. “My lady, your mother made a secret pact to exchange me against her daughters because I was about to be killed by the Northerners. Lady Brienne is honest, she swore to protect you. And I am only here to tell you that I’ll do everything for my brother to be released. We are only here to offer you our help. I swore to your mother to protect you me too.”

“Why would I want the help of a kingslayer?” The words hit Jaime hard. “Why should I believe you will help your brother? Your own sister sent him to the black cells and from what I know you are much closer to your sister than to your brother.” Jaime didn’t know if that was an implying of the love between him and Cersei, or only that he had a better relation with Cersei than with Tyrion. “Anyway, if I must rely on the past, I’m not sure you’re quite good to protect your brother’s wife. Perhaps I should ask Tysha.”

The last sentence left Jaime bewildered. He and Tyrion never talked about it to anyone. The people of Casterly Rock who knew about the affair never spoke of it in fear of his father’s wrath. How could she know about it? Could Tyrion have told her? If that was the case, Jaime probably underestimated their marriage. Tyrion had to trust her greatly to tell her this, especially since she was his wife, or he was quite foolish, but Jaime knew his brother was many things but no fool.

Sansa started to speak again after a moment. “I’m not interested in your help. Leave me please. I would like to be alone.” This time she turned her heels to not look back at them and went back to the window, looking at the outside again.

There was nothing they could do now. “Come Brienne.” The tall woman took some time to react, but she followed Jaime as he opened the door and let her leave first. Just before he left, he said one last thing to his sister-in-law. “Just for your information, my lady, a Lannister always pays his debts, and I have more than one towards my brother, no matter how close I am to my sister. Because he’s the one who made the deal with your mother to free me.”

He didn’t take time to look at the girl’s reaction. She would probably look at him with the same dull and impassive face she had during the whole meeting. She thought about him the same things her mother thought, but she didn’t show her emotions. In some way she was even worse than her mother for this. Jaime could mock Catelyn Stark to make her react, but with her daughter it was impossible. If he had faced her this way before he met Brienne, the girl would probably have managed to make him lose his patience and his assurance. Now that he had met her officially, Jaime had more than ever the impression she could have done it. She seemed cold blooded enough to commit assassination, but there was no proof she did. Jaime would wait the trial to decide if Sansa Stark was guilty.

“Well, it went well,” he said sarcastically as they walked back to his rooms of Lord Commander.

“She refused our services. We both swore to keep her safe and she refused our help.” Brienne looked despondent. Perhaps Jaime would feel that way if the person he swore his sword to was dead, one of her daughters he swore to protect dead as well and the only one still alive refusing his services. When he thought about it, this situation partially applied to him too. Only he didn’t feel any attachment to Catelyn Stark or her daughters like Brienne did, so it was much easier for him. However, to the opposite of Brienne, he wouldn’t give up.

“She refused our help, but that doesn’t mean we can’t watch over her. Follow me, I have something to show you.”

When they arrived, Jaime opened the White Book to his page. Brienne leaned over the table and began to read the left side. The right side was still blank. He still had no great deeds to fill it.

“Ser Jaime Lannister. Knighted and named to the Kingsguard in his 16th year. At the sack of King’s
Landing, murdered his king Aerys the Second. Pardoned by Robert Baratheon. Thereafter known as the Kingslayer.”

Jaime had a ball in his stomach as she read it. Jaime felt she said the last sentence with abhorrence, but not the same than in the beginning of their journey. “It’s the duty of the Lord Commander to fill those pages. And there’s still room left on mine.”

Jaime grasped his sword and held it out for Brienne to take it. She took it and put two fingers on the two flat sides of the sword. Her blue eyes enlarged. Jaime had to admit he preferred the look of surprise on her face than the look of hatred in Cersei’s eyes.

“Valyrian steel.” That was all she said.

“Mmm. It’s yours.”

Brienne looked up at him with her big blue eyes. “I can’t accept this.”

“It was reforged from Ned Stark’s sword. You’ll use it to defend Ned Stark’s daughter. You swore an oath to return the Stark girls to their mother. Lady Stark’s dead. Arya’s probably dead, too, but Sansa is still alive. I cannot protect her myself, I have duties as Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, but I can have Cersei to believe that you have a job to keep watch on her so that she may not escape.”

“I’m not going to spy on her.”

“This is only an excuse. I want you to make sure no one harms her. I’ll make the other guards believe that you are working against her, but in fact you’ll be protecting her.” Brienne nodded in agreement. She seemed quite grateful for that. “They say the best swords have names. Any ideas?”

After a moment of reflection, Brienne finally said a single word. “Oathkeeper.”

This time it was Jaime’s turn to feel grateful. Brienne had helped him to find back his honor. He would help her to keep her own. “Now go, and do your duty. Make sure Sansa doesn’t notice you’re watching her. She mustn’t know you’re following her, whether she believes it’s for bad or good reasons.”

“Yes, Ser Jaime.”

She bowed her head and left. Brienne would protect Sansa Stark. As for Jaime, he would protect his little brother. If Cersei believed she could have Tyrion executed so easily, she was making a great mistake. Jaime wasn’t alone to protect his little brother.

Chapter End Notes

As always, Brienne knows how to introduce herself.

Please review

Next chapter: a new character (special demand from one of my reviewers)
Podrick I

Chapter Notes

To answer the demand of one of your reviewers, I decided to make a Podrick chapter. I was planning to make it a Tyrion chapter originally, but I thought it might be quite interesting to visit Podrick’s mind at least one time. Also, since Tyrion is in a cell, we can see more details of what happens in King’s Landing through Tyrion’s squire’s eyes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

PODRICK I

The squire was going down in the dungeons of the Red Keep. It was the afternoon. Finally, he couldn’t visit Lord Tyrion in the morning and had to wait a later time of the day. Ser Jaime Lannister had given him a note that allowed him to visit his master, Lord Tyrion. Luckily, the gaoler allowed him the access to Lord Tyrion’s cell without Podrick needing to bribe him. He would be able to bring back the golden dragon to Ser Jaime. However, he hadn’t been so lucky with the wine. The guards confiscated it as soon as they saw it. Lord Tyrion needed wine, and a lot. Podrick had failed him on this. They reached Lord Tyrion’s cell after a short descent. There was still light at this level. Perhaps they chose to not bring his lord deeper because he was a Lannister. Podrick was glad of it. Lord Tyrion didn’t deserve the worst cells. In fact, he didn’t even deserve to be in a cell. He was a good man.

The guards opened the door and allowed Podrick to enter. Lord Tyrion was sitting on the floor of straw, his doublet dirty and unbuttoned on the top, with a grim expression on his face. Podrick guessed he might have the same expression on his own face if he had been taken out of his bed, knocked unconscious, and brought to a black cell without a single explanation. Lord Tyrion didn’t deserve this.

“Podrick. Apologies for the stench.” Podrick thought it might be a good welcome considering the circumstances, but they had more pressing matters. He looked back at the door to make sure it was shut.

“I brought you some wine, my lord, but they took it from me.” Podrick was really sorry he failed at this.

“A noble effort.”

“They didn’t find the candles, though. A quill, some parchment, duck sausage, almonds, and some hard cheese.” One by one, Podrick put down the things he smuggled on a nearby bench.

“You’re a good lad.” Podrick smiled at his lord’s comment. Tyrion Lannister may be a drunkard, but he was a good man all the same. He never complained about Podrick’s services, no matter how bad he would perform them. He remembered when he had come to his defense when Lord Janos Slynt told him he could replace him with a proper squire. *Myself, I prefer the improper ones.* And Lord Tyrion rewarded him when he did his work well. It was difficult to forget his reward for saving his life at the Battle of Blackwater.
“My lord, Ser Jaime sent me to you.”

“Oh, my brother sent you. Good. Can you tell him to get me out of here?”

“I will, but I fear he can’t my lord. Your sister gave orders for you to be detained until your trial.”

“My trial? So it is true. My father is really dead. The guards weren’t mocking me. And of course my sister believes that I’m the one behind his death. I can’t pretend to have loved my father, but to kill him? Never. If one of my father’s children could be foolish enough to kill him one day, it would be my sister. I guess her first decision after having me killed will be to cancel her betrothal to Ser Loras.”

Podrick didn’t really know what to think of it. Perhaps the queen really was behind Lord Tywin’s death, after all Lord Tyrion was quite clever on these matters. He also knew she had tried to have Ser Mandon Moore kill Lord Tyrion. If he hadn’t been there, his lord would already be dead. He should have killed Ser Mandon even before he attacked Lord Tyrion. He should have known. However, Ser Jaime didn’t think Lord Tywin was killed. “Your brother said that according to the Grand Maester, your father died of a heart failure during his sleep.”

Lord Tyrion seemed to think about it some time. “It might be the best explanation. My father was old after all. Though I have to admit that his death is quite unexpected, especially if we consider he was in excellent health. If the Grand Maester said his heart failed, then it means there was no injury on his body. If he was murdered, it was probably by poison. I don’t know who did it, if that’s the case, but I know it’s not me. Do you believe I murdered my father?”

“No, my lord.” Podrick was sure Lord Tyrion didn’t do it, but he asked him all the same to be entirely sure. “You didn’t?”

“No. Gods, no.” Podrick felt reassured by his master’s words. He believed him. “I hated my father, everyone knows it. He hated me as well after all, but I have nothing to do with his death. What are they saying about me out there?”

“Not much. There are still people who don’t know for sure that Lord Tywin is dead. Those who do know don’t even know you were arrested for the majority. You’re going to stand a trial for murdering the Hand of the King, and for attempt of murder against the king.”

Lord Tyrion looked at him with anger now. Podrick hoped he didn’t say anything he shouldn’t have. “That’s Cersei’s doing, for sure. Not only she uses our father’s death to accuse me, she avails the situation to accuse me of supposed attempts to have her son killed. I’m surprised she’s not accusing me of the murder of our mother at the same time. Have they announced the judges yet?”

Podrick sat on the bench. “King Joffrey, Mace Tyrell, and Gyles Rosby.”

“Well, I’m sure to be sentenced to death then. Gyles Rosby is in Cersei’s pocket, Joffrey has wanted me dead for a very long time, and Mace Tyrell will vote exactly as Joffrey and Cersei tell him. What a trial it will be. With Joffrey as main judge, I will probably be sentenced to die even before I am asked if I committed the murder.”

“Your brother asked to get a list of people you would like to testify for you. He said he couldn’t get you out of prison right now, but that he would make sure you would get out of here alive. He asked me to tell you that a Lannister always pays his debts.”

Lord Tyrion looked at him with a curious gaze. “Very well. I hope my brother knows what he’s doing. My wife, Sansa. And Varys, he could vouch for me. You could ask for Jaime to testify also.”
“Very well, my lord.” Podrick stopped for a moment, but before he could talk about something else, his lord brought the subject he was about to address.

“Yes, my lord. She stays in your rooms. Most of the people are confined to their own. She wanted me to tell you that she hopes you’re alright, that she hopes you’ll leave the black cells very soon, and that she misses you.”

To the last sentence his lord seemed quite taken aback, but he smiled all the same. “When you see her next time, tell her I hope me too I’ll leave the black cells very soon, our chamber is much more comfortable than this place. Tell her to stay out of trouble. I know trouble comes to her almost every time, but that’s no reason to start looking for it. And tell her I hope she’s alright as well.” There was a silence for some time. “What about Shae?”

“She’s alright, my lord. She’s still assuming her duties as Lady Sansa’s handmaiden.” Podrick realized Lord Tyrion asked about his wife before he asked about Shae. Podrick knew Lord Tyrion didn’t love his wife, that he loved Shae, but he did care about Lady Sansa very much all the same. However, Podrick had to speak to his lord about something very important.

“My lord, Lord Varys intercepted me this morning. He told me your sister was aware of who Shae was. Another handmaiden of your wife saw her leave your room.”

Now his lord really seemed in distress. Podrick didn’t see him in this state very often. “Gods, no. If Cersei knows about Shae…” He looked directly to Podrick. “Pod, you must go and find Shae. You must force her to leave King’s Landing as quickly as possible by every means necessary.”

“Yes, my lord. Lord Varys already organized a passage for her on a ship to Pentos. She will have a house with servants and money, her own cabin on the ship. I’ll tell her everything about it and bring her to the ship.”

“Ask Bronn to accompany her instead. He will be better to protect her and people won’t find it curious to see him in company of a handmaiden, while they could find it quite unusual if she was with you.” Podrick nodded. He knew Lord Tyron was right about it. However, his master now looked at him more intensively than ever. “Podrick, you must compel Shae to leave. It’s no more time for soft words. Cersei will kill her for sure if she stays, or worse. I told her so many times this place was dangerous that she doesn’t believe it anymore. To tell her that my sister discovered her won’t be enough. Even if she leaves now, she will come back later. You must make sure she never returns. You must make sure she never wants to return.” Podrick didn’t know what his lord meant. “Tell her that our friendship is over. Tell her that Sansa has already been through a lot and that I don’t want her to suffer anymore on my account. That I need to uphold my vows. Tell her she’s only a whore and that I can’t have children with her. That I can’t be in love with a whore. Sansa is fit to bear my children and she is not. Tell her that I enjoyed my time with whores, most of all my time with her, but now that time is over. She has to leave to never come back.”

Lord Tyrion’s voice broke as he said the last words. Podrick knew he had to do it. It was his lord’s orders. Podrick knew that Lord Tyron didn’t believe what he said, but that he would have to convince Shae these words were true. Podrick liked Shae, she was a good woman. She always was kind with him the few times he saw her. He would have to tell her everything his lord told him to save her. It was no time to refuse to do what his master told him to.

“Yes, my lord.” Podrick gathered some courage before he talked about another subject. Varys wasn’t the only one to approach him this morning. “There’s something else, my lord. A man, I didn’t know his face, he came to ask if I’d testify against you. Said I’d be named Ser Podrick Payne if I told the
judges you’d bought a poison called the tears of Lys.”

“Ser Podrick Payne? Has a nice ring to it. What did you tell him?”

“I didn’t tell them anything, my lord.”

“Are you going to accept their offer?”

“My lord.” Podrick would never testify against Lord Tyrion.

“Testifying against me wasn’t a suggestion. If they can’t tempt you with honey, they’ll choose something less sweet.”

“You’ve been good to me, my lord.”

His lord nearly cut him. “Pod, the trial will take place very soon. They’ll want an answer before that.”

“I already gave them an answer, my lord.”

Lord Tyrion rose at this moment. He wasn’t tall, but Podrick always felt short in his presence. Lord Tyrion was a great man, no matter what other people said. Podrick could see his shadow right now, taller than any other man with the sun on the back of his lord. He thought he heard Lord Varys tell one day that a very small man can cast a very large shadow. Podrick always found the expression more than appropriate for Lord Tyrion.

“I will not have you dying on my behalf. Do you hear me? If I have to take that long walk to the executioner’s block, I don’t want to see your head already mounted.”

“My lord.” Podrick was afraid of what would come. Lord Tyrion rarely spoke to him on such a commanding tone.

“Pod, I am giving you an order. Go and find my brother, tell him I need him. And get yourself out of King’s Landing before it’s too late.” Podrick refused to reply to this. He couldn’t follow this order, not this one. Lord Tyrion had always been good to him. He never had a better master to serve. He didn’t want to leave his service, even if it meant dying with him. He was his squire. “Pod! This is farewell. As soon as you’ll be done with Shae, leave the city and never come back.”

He had no other choice. As Lord Tyrion’s squire, he had to obey him. “Farewell, my lord.” He raised from the bench and turned to leave. As the door opened, his lord called him one last time.

“Pod. There has never lived a more loyal squire.”

Podrick wanted to cry. He bowed his head for the last time in his lord’s direction and walked away. If he looked back, he would cry.

As Podrick walked back to the surface, he could only feel how unfair all this was. Lord Tyrion was a good man and he was in prison for a crime he didn’t commit. Now he had to abandon him on his orders. But before, he had one last thing to do. The last thing he would do for his master before he would leave King’s Landing. That wasn’t a task he relished to, but he had to do it. Lord Varys told him which ship would take Shae away to a safe place. But first he had to find Bronn.

Thanks to Ser Jaime’s note, he could travel everywhere he wanted in the Red Keep. He found Ser Bronn before Lord Tyrion’s chambers, guarding the Lady Sansa as always. Podrick paid him with Lord Tyrion’s money for it. He knew his lord would agree with this. When the sellsword saw him
coming, he raised a hand.

“Sorry, this is no more the time for visits. The young lady doesn’t want anyone to bother her for the rest of the day. She was bothered earlier and she didn’t like it. So unless you have food to bring her, and it doesn’t seem you have any, I’m afraid I can’t let you pass. Or perhaps I could let you pass if you finally gave me the details how you managed to get out of a brothel without paying.”

That was something Podrick would never tell. He wouldn’t tell even if we offered him all the gold of Casterly Rock. “I’m sorry, Ser Bronn, but I need your help.” He told the sellsword everything: the discovery of Shae by the queen, Lord Varys’s arrangements to save her, Lord Tyrion’s orders about Shae and his departure, the man who tried to bribe him, Lord Tyrion’s belief that Shae would be in better hands if Ser Bronn escorted her to the ship. Ser Bronn listened carefully and as Podrick spoke, his face grew darker and sad.

“Alright.” He took the wineskin he had with him and drank deeply. “Let me do the whole thing. I and the girl come from the same world. You’re a god lad, but you’re highborn. It may have better results if I tell her myself. I’ll bring her to the ship. What did Tyrion want to tell her exactly?” Podrick repeated Lord Tyrion’s exact words. He had a very good memory. The knight sighed. “That’s not a job I’ll relish, but I’ll get it done. Don’t worry, she’ll be on this ship when it leaves and I’ll make sure she never wants to come back.”

Podrick panicked for a moment, but Ser Bronn noticed it and continued very quickly. “Don’t be so afraid. I won’t hurt her. Not physically, at least. In her mind and her heart however, I’ll have to. No choice. Remember this, lad. Never fall in love. That’s what happens when we fall in love.” Podrick nodded, though he didn’t want to believe the sellsword’s words. Ser Bronn suddenly put a hand on his shoulder. “Be careful out there. If you become a sellsword, perhaps we’ll meet again. I hope it won’t be as foes. Ask the Imp’s brother to pay me after you’re gone. I sell my sword, I don’t give it.”

“Ser Bronn, don’t you think you should keep guarding Lady Sansa? Maybe you shouldn’t leave her for Shae. I can take care of her.”

The man chuckled. “She doesn’t need my presence all the time. Anyway, someone else is watching for her. She tries to remain hidden, but she’s not quite good at it. She’ll watch over the young lady while I’m away.”

The sellsword left, leaving Podrick with many questions. Who else was watching for Lady Sansa? She? Was it a woman? Podrick had no time for this anyway. He needed to meet Ser Jaime before he left to report everything Lord Tyrion told him. Everything except for Shae. He would bring this secret in the tomb with him if necessary. Podrick left the corridor and walked in the direction of the rooms that belonged to the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard.

As he walked, Podrick thought about everything that happened these last years. Podrick didn’t have a great destiny that awaited him when he was born. He was highborn and had a family name, but he was the lowest among the highborn, which made him barely over the smallfolk. He came from a lesser branch of House Payne. He wasn’t very happy to be related to the King’s Justice, but there was nothing he could do about it. His father spent his life to squire for cousins who were richer than him. When he died in the Greyjoy Rebellion, Podrick’s mother ran away with a cousin his father had squired for. Podrick could barely remember his mother since he was only four-years-old when she abandoned him. All the same, he wished he had known her. Luckily, a distant relative of his father, Ser Cedric Payne, took care of him. He treated Podrick more like a servant than a member of his family, but Podrick was glad all the same. Ser Cedric wasn’t more cruel with him than with his other servants. Sadly, Ser Cedric Payne died at the beginning of the war in the Riverlands. Podrick attached himself to a hedge knight, Ser Lorimer, since he was alone in the army. Ser Lorimer got
drunk one night and borrowed a ham from Lord Tywin’s personal store. Since Ser Lorimer shared the ham with Podrick and was discovered afterwards with the bones of the ham, he was hanged. Podrick would have been hanged too if Lord Tywin hadn’t realized he was a Payne. As a punishment he was sent to King’s Landing in order to squire for Lord Tywin’s son, the Imp.

Podrick hadn’t known what would be waiting for him at King’s Landing while he travelled from Harrenhal to the capital. There were many rumors about Lord Tyrion, all bad. However, when Podrick came into his service, he was quite surprised. Lord Tyrion scared him at the beginning with his japes, but Podrick soon discovered they were only japes and that Lord Tyrion was a good man. He witnessed it when he exiled Lord Janos Slynt for killing babies, and heard several examples of his new master’s goodness. His rescue of Lady Sansa when King Joffrey had her beaten in public was one of the best. Podrick made many mistakes at the beginning of his service, but Lord Tyrion never seemed to bother about it. He never mistreated him and Podrick didn’t have to do much work for him. It was a better life than he ever had. Lord Tyrion even gave him some presents, especially after he saved him at the Battle of Blackwater.

The battle was Podrick’s best memory. He never felt complete and useful as in this moment. He fought against men who tried to destroy the city. Lord Tyrion’s speech spurred him to fight to death as much as all the other men. Podrick saw at this moment that his lord wasn’t only a good man, but a brave man. He was proud to be his squire from this moment and he didn’t hesitate when he saw Ser Mandon Moore trying to kill him. He threw the lance in his hands through the knight’s head. But now Podrick had to abandon Lord Tyrion on his lord’s orders. He knew Lord Tyrion only wanted to protect him, but it didn’t make it any easier to leave him. Podrick never had such a good man to serve. He would have to leave King’s Landing to live on his own. He would never become a knight as he always dreamed of.

He reached the door of Ser Jaime’s chambers. He had to talk to the Lord Commander. After that, he would leave King’s Landing to never return. He would leave his lord and never see him again. With a resigned face, he turned the handle of the door and entered to do his last duties as Lord Tyrion’s squire.

Chapter End Notes

Only a week left before season 6 begins.

Please review

Next chapter: Cersei
Cersei II

Chapter Notes

Once again, we are in Cersei’s head. That's strange how it can be interesting to be in the head of someone we hate so much. (At least for me, perhaps there are people reading this who love Cersei. But I don't.)

Of course, she sprinkles wine on someone. Wear your oldest clothes or the clothes you hate the most when you meet Cersei Lannister and there is wine close.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CERSEI II

The Queen Regent drank deeply from her cup of wine after another long day. It tasted victory. Two weeks passed since her father’s death and she managed in so little time to solve so many problems that should have been taken care of so long ago. The construction of the royal fleet would begin very soon now, thanks to the large supply of ironwood Lord Rickard Morgryn promised her. She didn’t know why Tyrion wasted so much time trying to have a contract with the Forresters, a family of traitors who would be destroyed very soon. Perhaps it was another soft spot he developed for former Stark’s bannermen because of Sansa. All the same, everything was arranged now. To make sure the Crown would have enough money to build the new fleet, she decided to defer the repayment of the debts toward the Iron Bank of Braavos and the Holy Faith. Both would complain, but it didn’t matter. They would wait.

She also named Lord Gyles Rosby to be the new Master of Coin and respected the decision her father took before his death to name Mace Tyrell Master of Ships. The Tyrells had complained for days for the delay on the wedding ceremony, but they kept calm after she offered this position to Mace Tyrell. That wasn’t as if the oaf was a threat anyway, and she remembered the Tyrells who they were at the same time. Cersei wondered how House Tyrell could keep up with such an imbecile to lead it. She also added two thousand additional gold cloaks in the capital. With the money saved from the Iron Bank and the Faith, Lord Rosby could find enough money for it between two coughs. The only members of the small council she couldn’t support were the eunuch and Pycelle, who always questioned her decisions. Perhaps it was time to replace them. Qyburn would make a good Master of Whisperers. However, she wouldn’t do it now. She would wait after the trial.

The achievement she was the most proud of was the trial that would take place next week. Everything was arranged. Pycelle understood her father was murdered very quickly and finally confessed after the examination of the body that he was poisoned with a very rare substance called the tears of Lys. The Grand Maester also revealed that he had this poison in his personal rooms, but that some of it disappeared when Tyrion arrested him last year. He also said that her brother asked him for some essence of nightshade, supposedly to help his wife to sleep. Only by itself, the Grand Maester’s testimony would be more than enough at the trial to incriminate Tyrion. She also made sure that half the kingsguards and Varys would testify. She would testify too, of course, and the assassin of her father would face judges who knew him for what he really was. She would get rid of this monster who threatened to kill her son. Oh, I'm a monster. Perhaps you should speak to me
more softly, then. Monsters are dangerous and just now kings are dying like flies. He said it in front of all the members of the small council. If Cersei had the power then, she would have arrested him right away for threatening her son, the king.

Everything would be alright at the trial, though there were things that still needed to be cleared. Thanks to the Forrester girl, who she sent in Tyrion’s cell with wine (he couldn’t resist it, even less when it was a familiar young girl who brought it to him), she knew Tyrion had no witnesses. However, the man she charged to have his squire testify against him told her the boy refused. Cersei would have to take care of that, though she wasn’t very hurried about it. After all, the boy was barely fifteen, probably even younger than Sansa. As for the sellsword, Cersei made sure he wouldn’t do anything for his former master. A marriage with Lollys Stokeworth and promises of gold were enough to turn him against the little monster. Tyrion’s wife wouldn’t cause any problem, she was harmless, a perfect little dove. No one saw her these days. She hid in her chambers all day, even if Cersei granted the freedom of movement to everyone a week ago. People could walk inside the Red Keep, though she kept a close look on some of them (especially the Tyrells), but they couldn’t leave. All entrances and exits were closed day and night. No one would leave or enter without her permission before the trial was over.

The only one that proved problematic was her brother Jaime. He refused to become the Hand of the King when she proposed him, and he refused to testify against their brother at his trial. He abandoned her again. Probably it was for the better. Jaime would have said good things about Tyrion at his trial, and they had no need for that. And since he refused to be Hand of the King, Cersei decided there would be no Hand. She was the only one Joffrey needed to be rightly advised. She wouldn’t let someone hurt her son, and she would prove it when Tyrion’s head would roll from the executioner’s block. She would plant his head on a spike, finally. He should have died so long ago. He killed her mother. He sent Myrcella away among snakes. He tried to have Joffrey killed. Now he killed her father. She wouldn’t let him kill Joffrey or Tommen or her. The words of Maggy the Frog would never come true. She would make sure of that.

She emptied her cup and refilled it. Osmund Kettleblack entered at this moment. “Your Grace, your brother wishes to see you. He says it is of the utmost importance.”

Cersei didn’t want to see Jaime ever since he refused to help her as he should have, protecting their poor little brother as always. He chose the little monster who murdered their father instead of her and she couldn’t support it. He was her other half and he should follow her. However, Cersei had nothing to do right now and she couldn’t send away the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard without a good excuse when he said he had something important to talk with the queen. Perhaps he finally saw the light and decided to follow her. If that was the case, she may not be alone in her bed tonight.

“Let him in.”

Ser Osmund left the room and Jaime entered soon after, closing the door behind him. He stood tall before her. He was so handsome. Cersei wanted nothing more than to take him to her bed and feel whole again as he entered her. It had been too long since the last time they were together. Furthermore, she needed to celebrate her victory over her enemies. Jaime wouldn’t celebrate with her if she told him about it, but she didn’t have to. She only needed to make him understand that she wanted him and he would come with her. In the end, Jaime was like every man, his cock doing half his thinking, even more sometimes. Cersei experimented it many times up to now and it proved very useful to reach her goals.

“You look so tired Jaime. Perhaps you need some rest. We could take some time together, like in the old times.” She could see confusion on his face. “I’m sorry I was so harsh with you. With our
father’s death and the many duties I have now I tend to act without thinking. I hope you forgive me. You know I love you.”

Confusion was still conspicuous on her lover’s face. She rose from her chair behind her desk, previously her father’s desk. “Let’s go to my chambers. Or we can do it here right now if you wish.”

For a moment her brother looked about to jump on her and make love to her after so much time, but his face turned hard as quickly as the desire appeared. “It’s over. Your little games, they’re over.” He put his hand inside tunic and produced a parchment he dropped immediately before her on the desk. It was Cersei’s turn to be confused.

“What does it mean?”

“Read it. It comes from our son.”

Cersei took the parchment. The seal of the king was on it. She broke it, opened the paper and began to read it. As she read, she had to refrain her screams. How could her son do something like this?

I, Joffrey of the House Baratheon, the First of my Name, King of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm, hereby proclaim my grand-uncle, Ser Kevan of the House Lannister, Hand of the King.

I also recuse myself as judge in the trial of my uncle, Lord Tyrion Lannister, previously the Master of Coin, and name the Hand of the King to act as main judge in my stead. Ser Kevan Lannister is to organize the trial as soon as he will arrive in King’s Landing.

In the objective to lessen the burden on my mother, Cersei Lannister, the Queen Regent, after the unforeseen death of her father and my grandfather, Lord Tywin Lannister, I remove her from any participation in the organization of the trial against my uncle.

Let it be known that it is my will.

Cersei couldn’t believe what she was reading. Her son, her own son, was turning against her. Why? She looked at her brother, searching for an explanation. Then she saw it, the smirk on his face. All ideas of sleeping with him left her.

“This is your doing?”

“Are you surprised? You’re not the only one who knows how to play games.”

Cersei couldn’t support this little smile on Jaime’s lips. She looked again at the document. Did he really think a piece of paper would be enough to stop her? She fixed him and tore the paper very slowly to emphasize her gesture, until only very small parts remained of it. It was her turn to smile with satisfaction. “You think a piece of paper will be enough to protect Tyrion? The trial will take place tomorrow. That’s all you won with it.”

Strangely, Jaime didn’t seem affected by this. “Some of the other kingsguards told me you had a passion for tearing papers. Tyrion said the same when I visited him a few days ago and he suggested I had two identical decrees written, sealed, and signed by Joffrey. I see now he was right.”

That was too much. He had gone to talk with their brother. She had given orders to the guards to let no one see Tyrion without her authorization. She would make sure the guards would never repeat their mistake or any mistake ever.

“How did you convince Joffrey to sign it?” She had to know how Jaime had done this. He couldn’t
have threatened their son. Joffrey was too brave to fear his uncle.

“I only made him understand that a trial would be very annoying with very long procedures and I hinted that a king had more important matters to attend. I also pointed out that his mother was taking all the decisions ever since his grandfather died, including those to confine him to his chambers, to cancel his wedding, and to prevent him from seeing his bride-to-be. It was probably time that he decides again who was to serve him. I inserted the name of Kevan in the conversation and Joffrey chose him immediately. He told me he once thought about entrusting the North in his hands, and since our uncle is already on his way to the capital, Joffrey believed he was the best choice.”

Uncle Kevan? On his way to King’s Landing? That was impossible! “How does it come he’s riding for King’s Landing? I allowed no ravens to be sent in the past two weeks.”

“Do you think Pycelle follows your orders when his life is threatened?” Jaime took another parchment, much smaller than the previous and obviously made for a raven to carry it. He dropped it on the table as well. “Here’s the answer of our uncle to my message.”

Cersei unrolled the small piece of paper and read it.

_The new of Tywin’s death is horrible. I’m riding right now for King’s Landing with an escort. I should be there very soon to pay my respect to my brother. In the meantime, nothing is to happen to Tyrion and he shall be granted accommodations suited to his name. I’ll settle this matter as soon as I’ll arrive._

As she was done reading it, Cersei tore apart the message. “You think you can act against me like this, you and our uncle? The trial will take place tomorrow, no matter what you do.”

“I’m afraid it won’t. Joffrey saw the message before I brought it to you. He decided to wait for our uncle’s return before the trial took place. Everyone in the Red Keep already knows about it now. And Joffrey started again to spend time with Margaery. She entertains him very much.”

Cersei couldn’t believe what she heard. She wanted to smash her lover’s face. How could she wish to take him into her bed a few minutes ago? Everything she did these last days had been destroyed in a single one by Jaime. How was it possible? Jaime never thought, he laughed at everything and everyone. He said whatever came into his head. He could never have worked out such an elaborate plan. It was the Tyrells, she knew it. Margaery, the little doe-eye whore, or her grandmother, the Queen of Thorns. They were behind it, she had her proofs now. They were working with Tyrion against her, and Jaime stupidly conspired with them to help Tyrion. She would burn them all for this.

Jaime suddenly spoke again. “I think you should drink less, Cersei. It’s not good to keep clear ideas, and it makes us quite unaware of what’s going on around us.” Cersei sprinkled the content of her cup on her brother for the first time in two weeks. “I think I should wear worn and old clothes when I visit you from now on.”

“Ser Osmund!” The kingsguard entered the room immediately. For once he was quick. “Bring my brother to the black cells, the one next to my other brother. If he loves him so much, I’m sure he won’t complain about it.”

Ser Osmund didn’t react immediately. In fact, he took even more time than usual to respond. It allowed Jaime to talk. “Ser Osmund, I am your Lord Commander, chosen by the king himself, my nephew. How do you think he will react when he learns you put both his uncles in prison?” The knight didn’t move.
“Your queen orders you to arrest him!” She shouted at the man, but he did nothing.

“Ser Osmund, I think you are tired. You may go to sleep. I’ll call Ser Balon Swann to take over.” At Jaime’s words, the former sellsword left quickly after a bow. He only was a coward. Cersei was surrounded by cowards and traitors, including her own twin. “By the way, Cersei, Joffrey ordered you to be confined to your own quarters for the next month. He says a week of confinement for him is worth two for anyone else, and since you confined both him and his future wife for a week, he considers it is more than fitting for you. I love you, dear sister.”

Jaime left the room on these words and Cersei fell into despair. Her son turned against her. It was Margaery’s work, for sure. She was working with Tyrion. She would have her strangled in her bed for that. When Cersei would get out, it would be too late. Her uncle Kevan would have arrived. He didn’t know what Tyrion did. He would listen to foolish Jaime and release the little monster. However, there was still a chance. She had to get to Joffrey and speak with him. She could still change everything. She walked furiously toward the door, but when she opened it, half a dozen Lannister guards led by captain Vylarr blocked her path.

“Your Grace, I’m sorry but you are not to leave your rooms. Orders from the king.” Vylarr spoke firmly when he said that. He was a traitor as well. Cersei turned her heels. It was useless to try an escape. She would take care of all these traitors as soon as she would be free. She had a month to prepare plans for that and to determine how to make her uncle see the truth about Tyrion.

Cersei went back to her desk and smashed a jug of wine on the wall. When she finally calmed an hour later, she poured herself another cup of wine from another jug. That was an unexpected turn of events, but she would turn it against her enemies. She swore it. If her uncle came and decided to hold a trial for Tyrion all the same, and she would make sure there was a trial, the case she built against him was more than enough to prove to anyone that he killed the Hand of the King and plotted to kill the king. Cersei would have her revenge, sooner or later.

However, she was afraid too. There were some uncertainties. Her brother would tell Kevan that Tyrion was innocent and he may value Jaime’s point of view because he was a man. Also, Tyrion’s squire refused to testify against him, and there was his whore too. She escaped. Varys told her she took a ship not long after Tyrion’s arrest. The eunuch hadn’t been able to discover which ship, but he thought she probably left for the Free Cities and so was out of reach. Cersei wanted to put a bounty for everyone who would bring her back, but the Master of Whisperers pointed out that it would cause too much problem. The girl wasn’t easily recognizable and it would bring whores from all across the world to King’s Landing because of all the opportunists who would bring the first whore they saw with black hair and black eyes in the hope it would be her. Finally Cersei abandoned the idea of the bounty. She didn’t want to see hundreds of whores processing before her. All the same, she wished she put her hand on the girl before she left. The whore could have said so much about the monster during the trial. She should have taken care of her as soon as her father died, but she had better things to do back then than to worry about whores.

She looked at her father’s chest on the desk. She couldn’t find the keys to open it and no one in the Red Keep was able to open it without them. She let her left hand wander under the desk as she continued to drink. However, at one moment, her hand brushed a bulge under the desk’s surface. She gripped it and felt something that looked like a knob. She tried to pull it, but nothing happened. She then tried to turn it. There was a click and a little trapdoor appeared right before her on the desk. There was a single key inside. How clever her father had been. She knew what the key was for. She retrieved it and used it on the chest. It opened.

Inside were some golden coins, but essentially official papers. Cersei didn’t think her father would complain about her opening his letters since he was dead. She was his one true daughter and had the
task to continue his work. Most of the documents were royal decrees or letters her father made not long before his death. None of them were quite important. However, there was a paper that brought her attention. It didn’t bear the seal of the Hand of the King or the stag, but the lion sigil. It was the seal of the Lord of Casterly Rock. The words this letter contained surprised her. It was a will. From the date on it, it was written the day preceding her father’s death. It seemed strange to her that her father would write a new will right before he was killed.

The beginning of the will wasn’t surprising in itself. Her father once again made Jaime his heir. However, as she read the rest, fury spread through all her body. Her father only let her gold. It was a lot of gold, but it didn’t matter. She wasn’t mentioned a single time about the inheritance of Casterly Rock. She was his daughter. If Jaime refused Casterly Rock, it should be hers by all rights. Instead, he named Tyrion’s son his heir if Jaime refused to inherit. He made Kevan the Regent of the Rock if the boy was unable to rule and, even worse, made Tyrion Regent if Kevan was dead. Cersei couldn’t swallow it. Casterly Rock was hers. It didn’t belong to this monster. She burnt the will with a candle and watched the last words of her father burn away. No one would ever know about it. That couldn’t be the last words of her father.

Realization came to Cersei then. Of course, it wasn’t her father’s work. She knew from Varys that Tyrion visited their father late the day before he died. That was probably the time when he poisoned him, but he could also have written a false will that would give him Casterly Rock. Tyrion already had Winterfell through his wife, but of course he wouldn’t settle only for the North. He wanted the Westerlands as well, and probably the Iron Throne once she and her children would be dead. She held him now. She had discovered all his secret plans and would use them against him. It didn’t matter that she was confined in her rooms.

Cersei emptied another glass of wine. How much did she take this evening? She didn’t know and didn’t care. She was condemned to stay in these rooms for a long time, so better enjoy it. When she would leave, they would all pay for their treachery. Jaime, Vylarr, Ser Osmund, Margaery, Pycelle, Olenna Tyrell, all the other people of the Reach, and especially Tyrion. He would be the first to pay for what he did. The first to suffer the anger of the lioness.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
Chapter Notes

We saw in the previous chapters the consequences of Tywin's unexpected death and how Cersei tried to seize the power in King's Landing before the power vacuum. However, she didn't expect Jaime and Joffrey to turn against her or Kevan to come. Cersei is temporarily neutralized and she burnt the will Tywin wrote not long before his death. During this time, Sansa remained as discreet as possible, but now the situation is different. How will she react to this?

This chapter and the next one are a turning point for Sansa who will have to take a critical decision for her and Tyrion. Enjoy it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sansa VI

Sansa knelt in the godswood to pray. For the first time in two weeks she dared to leave her rooms. She couldn’t support anymore to stay locked in her chamber, especially since she had no more company. Shae disappeared two days after Tyrion’s arrest. Podrick informed her she returned to Lorath. Apparently she received a message from a sister who needed her help. Sansa didn’t know Shae had a sister. In fact, Sansa didn’t know anything about Shae’s family. Her friend never talked about it. It seemed it was a subject she preferred to avoid. Sansa couldn’t blame her. Her own family wasn’t something she wanted to talk very much. But now, Shae was gone.

Sansa had wept the night after Shae’s departure. Shae was the only close friend she had here in King’s Landing. Margaery was her friend, it was true, but she wasn’t able to speak with Sansa as often as Shae, and her friendship was partially for political reasons. The Tyrells wanted her claim. The only difference was that Margaery probably wanted her friendship as well as her claim, and that was why she continued to see her, though not as often as before. Only the friendship was left. With the confinement, she couldn’t see Margaery anyway. After they were allowed to travel through the Red Keep again, Sansa didn’t dare to leave her rooms in fear of Joffrey, Cersei or anyone else. Her husband was in a cell. What would happen to her? There was Bronn who stood guard before her door, but he was a sellsword. He could abandon her if Podrick stopped to pay him or if someone offered him something better. She had noticed recently that he wasn’t as often before her door as in the first days following Tyrion’s detention.

As for Ser Jaime Lannister and this woman who accompanied him, Brienne of Tarth, Sansa didn’t trust them. The woman claimed she served her mother before she died and that she swore to protect her and Arya. Sansa could hardly imagine her mother having a woman to defend her. Also, this woman was the one who killed Renly Baratheon. What an explanation she gave for his death. A shadow! If she needed to lie, she could at least tell lies that could be believed. However, after some reflections, Sansa wondered if she said the truth. Unless the woman was very stupid, she would have told something more plausible. There was also the details she gave about her, things that only a member of her family or someone who lived at Winterfell could have said. However, the story of the shadow was simply impossible. She was lying, and that meant she was stupid. Sansa didn’t need
someone stupid and a liar to protect her. She probably escaped with her mother from Lord Renly’s camp after the assassination and released Jaime Lannister herself, surely hoping to get a pardon or some other reward for that. If she was free to walk around the castle, it was proof enough that she got it. As for Ser Jaime, she wasn’t about to trust Cersei’s lover and Joffrey’s father, a man who forsook all his vows. Sansa wanted to vomit when she thought she found him handsome when he came to Winterfell. The Hound had more honor than him. After the tale Tyrion told her about his first wife, she was less than inclined to accept Ser Jaime’s help. Most likely he was working for Cersei. She made it clear to them when they visited her that she wanted nothing from them.

Sansa began to pray. She prayed for her family who was dead. There wasn’t a clear conception of afterlife in the faith of her father, but she lost nothing in praying for it all the same. She could pray for the Seven, but she didn’t want to go to the sept of the Keep. She could meet undesirable people. Here in the godswood she was alone. After she was done praying for her family, she prayed for Shae. She wanted her to be safe, and she prayed for Shae to never forget her. With some hope, they would meet again someday. It was a desperate hope, but she wanted to cling to it all the same. She also prayed for Ser Dontos, then for Margaery and her family. The Tyrells may have rejected her, but they were still better people than the Lannisters, except one. She also prayed for Podrick, Tyrion’s squire. By habit, she prayed for a short winter, though she could feel the one that was coming would be long. She prayed for Jon, her only relative still alive. Finally, she prayed for her husband.

She was more than worried for Tyrion. She didn’t want him to die, but the conviction that he would only leave the black cells to be beheaded became stronger and stronger in her every day. She had come to trust him after the night they spent together, and Cersei arrested him right after it. She didn’t love Tyrion. She could never love him. In fact, Sansa didn’t think she could ever love someone again. All the same, Tyrion was the closest person she could consider a friend now, and he was in a cell. She prayed the old gods to free him. She even went as far as to promise them she would convert him to her faith if they let him live. That would be hard to do, as unbelieving Tyrion was, but Sansa was ready to do anything to save him now. He was the only protection she had here in King’s Landing. What would happen if Cersei’s words turned out true? I’m afraid you’ll be a widow very soon. She would be forced to marry someone else. She didn’t want to marry again. Tyrion was kind with her. How would be her next husband? She wanted Tyrion to get out alive of this, but she couldn’t see how. She didn’t know what to do.

Suddenly, Sansa heard a creak. She was sure she heard one. She turned her head back and saw him. It was Ser Dontos Hollard, hiding in the shadow of the trees. Sansa was happy it was him. She feared it could be Joffrey for a moment. It took her a lot of courage only to come here.

She rose to greet the disgraced knight. “Ser Dontos.” She forced a smile upon her lips.

“We need to talk. Please follow me.” He spoke with a low voice. It was barely a whisper. He walked away and, after a moment of hesitation, Sansa decided to follow him. She could trust him.

The path wasn’t long. They arrived very quickly to the same place they talked the last time, when he gave her his family’s necklace. Sansa still had it among her things, but she didn’t have an opportunity to wear it up to now. She was planning to have it on her during the royal wedding, but for now no one could tell for sure there would be a royal wedding.

Ser Dontos was obviously drunk as always, but he spoke nonetheless. “My lady, I’m sorry about it, but no one can hear us here. You must repeat this to no one. I can help you.”

Sansa was confused. “Help me? Help me about what?”

“I can help you to get out of King’s Landing.”
The words echoed through Sansa’s mind. *Get out of King’s Landing. Get out of King’s Landing. Get out of King’s Landing.* “How?”

“There is a ship that belongs to a friend of yours that will be waiting for you in the Blackwater Bay tonight. You only have to come to the godswood at the hour of the wolf. From there I will lead you out of the city.”

Sansa couldn’t believe what she was hearing. It was too wonderful to be true. She could leave King’s Landing. She could get away from Joffrey, from Cersei, from all the Lannisters, escape all the torments she suffered for the last two years. She could go back home. She would leave… Tyrion.

The last thought didn’t really fill her with joy. She realized how silly she was. She couldn’t go back home. Winterfell was burnt, perhaps in the hands of the Boltons now. She had nowhere to go.

“Ser Dontos, that’s very kind of you, but I can’t leave. I have nowhere to go now. All my family is dead, my home has been destroyed. I don’t know where else I can go.”

“Your friend will bring you somewhere safe. He will keep you away from the Lannisters.”

“Who is this friend?”

“A great friend of your family. He didn’t give me his name, but he cares about you. He only wants to see you safe and he has the means to get you to safety.”

What Ser Dontos told her wasn’t very specific. He was asking her to believe him when a man he didn’t even know told him that he wanted to bring her somewhere safe. “Where would he bring me?”

“He didn’t tell me, but he has a lot of resources. He’ll able to keep you safe. He is a friend of your family.”

Ser Dontos was drunk all the time. Sansa didn’t think he knew for sure what he was talking about. He was telling her that he could help her to escape King’s Landing, but couldn’t tell her who he worked with and where this someone would bring her. It seemed to be a plan worthy of a fool. “Ser Dontos, how can you be sure this man is really a friend of my family? You don’t even know who he is, and you don’t know either where I will go. How can I trust someone like him?”

“Do you trust me? Do you think I would suggest it to you if I wasn’t sure? I am a knight no more, but I’m alive thanks to you. I don’t want to see you killed by the queen or the king. I can help you to escape this place forever. For one time in my life, let me be a true knight, not the drunken fool I was even when I wore my armor.”

Sansa couldn’t help but feel pity for the man. He had been a knight and Joffrey stripped him of all his titles. Now he probably only wanted to gain back some of his lost honor by saving her, but his plan didn’t seem well designed. Sansa didn’t know who this friend of hers was. She couldn’t trust him. “Ser Dontos, I don’t think I can leave.”

“You can, if you want. You’ve been here for too long, supporting all bad treatments the Lannisters inflicted on you. I was there when the king ordered his kingsguard to beat you. I wish I would have done something, but I didn’t dare to. It’s no more time to hide. We must accept to take risks, or else we will only be victims all the time. It may be too late for me, but not for you. Your family still has friends and they are ready to help you. You can stop to be a victim and I want to help in this. I beg you, my lady. I don’t want to see you mistreated again, or die, after you saved me. Let me save you in return.”
Sansa didn’t know what to say to that. After a moment, Ser Dontos spoke again. “Just come here at the hour of the wolf and I will make sure you escape. You will be free.” The disgraced knight turned on his heels and walked away on unsteady feet. After a moment, Sansa left too and went back to her chambers. By chance, she didn’t meet Joffrey, the queen, Ser Jaime or any kingsguard on her way. She started to do some needlework again, as she did often these days. She didn’t have much else to do.

She thought again about Ser Dontos’s words. It was true, ever since Lady’s death, Sansa was nothing more than a victim, a pawn in the game of thrones. She never did anything to play a role. She always let the others choose her role for her. She never attempted to do anything on her own. She didn’t even try to help her family here in King’s Landing. Margaery managed to help the Tyrells in her own way, but Sansa never did. Margaery told her that she could have influence and power, but Sansa didn’t listen to her. She was only a little bird who sang the same song all time. She always waited for a tall and handsome knight in shining armor to save her. She never tried to save herself, nor to save her family. She stayed behind while the rest of her family was fighting for her. She had only been a survivor.

Could she escape? She could try, but what if she was caught? The man Ser Dontos met could only have made him believe that he was a friend of her family. If Sansa learned something in King’s Landing, it was to never trust anyone. The risk was very high. On the other hand, she never took risks before, and that led her where she was now. She was married to a Lannister who was imprisoned and her future was uncertain. What would happen once Tyrion would die? At the reflection, to stay here may be even more dangerous than an attempt to escape. Once Tyrion was dead, she would have no one to protect her in King’s Landing. Even Shae was gone. Cersei would probably marry her to someone else. Who? She preferred to not imagine what would it be to marry another man, especially at the moment she finally decided she could trust Tyrion. She didn’t want to marry again.

Sansa decided. She had no other choice. She didn’t know who wanted to get her out of King’s Landing, but this friend was her only chance. It was a risk she had to take. If he had resources as Ser Dontos said, perhaps she could use his help to avenge her family. Her father often told her that his bannermen were men of honor, loyal to the Starks. Maybe she could get their help to retake Winterfell. There were so many plans that emerged in Sansa’s head that she put a stop to her ideas after a moment. What a fool she was to think she could rise the North against the Boltons by herself and on the hope this friend would help her. All the same, she had to leave the capital if she ever was to play a real role in this game. She had to survive, for her family. She would go to the godswood this night.

There were flutters in her stomach at the thought she would leave King’s Landing this night, but she was also uncertain if it would work. She and Ser Dontos could get caught. The poor knight would be executed for sure if they were captured. As for her, who knew what Cersei and Joffrey would decide? Would they kill her? Would she stand trial like Tyrion? At the thought of her husband, Sansa felt guilty. If she left, everyone would look at it with suspicion. They might believe she had a role to play in Lord Tywin’s death. Tyrion could find himself in an even worse situation than before. Sadly, there was nothing Sansa could do for Tyrion. He was already condemned, no matter what would happen or what she would do. She couldn’t save him, but she could save herself. One day, she may even make it known to everybody that her husband had been a good man, a man of honor who never mistreated her, who saved her, and that his devilish nephew and his horrible sister killed him on false accusations. She would make sure his memory wouldn’t be stained by his horrible family. That was the least Sansa could do for him.

When afternoon came to an end, Podrick entered the room with her supper. Podrick was sharing the work with her handmaidens ever since Tyrion’s arrest, especially after Shae left. No additional
handmaiden was granted to Sansa after Shae’s departure. Sansa feared he could be a spy in Jaime Lannister’s service, even though she highly doubted the squire knew it. He probably thought Ser Jaime was really trying to help his younger brother. She remained silent, not talking to the young boy. However, when he was done placing the plates, he didn’t leave immediately. He stayed there, looking at his feet.

“Podrick?” Sansa didn’t know why he was standing like a statue, but it was best to make him speak so she could get rid of him as quickly as possible. The squire finally looked up.

“Forgive me, my lady. I just thought you might… There have been some developments about Lord Tyrion.”

Podrick caught her interest with that. “What happened?”

“Nothing bad, my lady. Only, the trial will take place no sooner than in a month. King Joffrey appointed Ser Kevan Lannister, Lord Tyrion’s uncle, as Hand of the King. He decided it would be his Hand who would take care of the trial and that Ser Kevan would stand as judge in his stead.”

These news surprised Sansa. She didn’t think Joffrey would abandon his place to judge Tyrion. On the other hand, if that gave Tyrion some more time, she wouldn’t complain. Podrick continued to talk.

“Lord Tyrion never spoke very much about his uncle, but he said he didn’t have anything against my lord. I think he may have a chance to win the trial.” Suddenly, a smile appeared on the boy’s face. That wasn’t a smile Sansa saw often. “Especially since the queen is confined to her rooms.”

At this new, Sansa was agape. “The queen? Confined in her rooms?”

“Yes, my lady. An order from the king. People say he didn’t like to be locked inside his own rooms by the queen after Lord Tywin’s death.”

Sansa wanted to explode with laughter, but she refrained herself. The Queen Regent, the proud Cersei Lannister, was stuck up in her chamber on Joffrey’s order. Perhaps the gods really had a share of justice for her. However, all this seemed so unbelievable. How could the king have decided by himself to lock up his mother? Also, there was the naming of Ser Kevan Lannister as Hand of the King. The queen was the one with real power. Joffrey never did anything without her initiative. What happened for Joffrey to act this way?

“Podrick, may I know how the king came to take these decisions?”

“It was Ser Jaime. He went to speak with him and called Ser Kevan from Casterly Rock. Lord Tyrion is the one who advised him to do so when he visited him in his cell.”

Again Sansa had to repress laughs. Tyrion, even behind bars, was still playing against his sister. Even more, he turned her own son against her. That looked like one of his jokes he made in Sansa’s presence. However, Sansa quickly returned to the reality. If Tyrion did this, it wasn’t just for the pleasure to have Cersei humiliated. Sansa saw him act when he was Hand of the King, and from her conversations with him, before and after their wedding, she knew Tyrion never did anything without a plan. He was planning something. Joffrey’s decision didn’t only delay the trial. It neutralized Cersei and put someone else in charge of the trial, but what difference would it make? If he asked for his uncle to come, he probably hoped Ser Kevan could help him.

“Podrick, what do you know of Ser Kevan Lannister?” Sansa didn’t know a lot about Lord Tywin’s brother. She knew he was a commander of the Lannister armies, one of the main advisors of the late
“Well, from what Lord Tyrion told me he seems to be a good man. Lord Tyrion once told me his uncle always showed him respect and didn’t hate him like his father. I don’t think Ser Kevan has anything against my lord. Ser Jaime said their uncle would listen to what he and Lord Tyrion would have to say about their father’s death. He said he would judge him fairly. I think he’s right. Ser Kevan saved my life once.”

“He saved your life?”

“When I served as a squire for a knight in Lord Tywin’s army and that the knight was arrested for borrowing a ham from the lord’s personal stores, I was sentenced to death with him, but Lord Tywin discovered I was a Payne and it was Ser Kevan who suggested to send me to Lord Tyrion instead as a punishment.”

Sansa remained silent for a moment, thinking. “You may leave, Podrick. Thank you for the news.”

“My lady.” The squire bowed his head and left the room.

As she ate, Sansa thought about the turn of events that just happened. Cersei was no more in charge of Tyrion’s trial and Joffrey wouldn’t be among the judges. If what Podrick told her was true, then Ser Kevan would cleanse Tyrion of all the charges against him if he thought he was innocent. Tyrion was innocent, Sansa knew it. It changed a lot of things. Tyrion had a chance to prevail. Yes, it changed a lot of things. Most of all, it changed her plans to escape. Her escape would look suspicious and lower Tyrion’s chances to survive the trial. Furthermore, if Tyrion won, she would benefit his protection once again. She wouldn’t be in danger anymore in King’s Landing and, as Margaery once told her, she could use her influence on Tyrion and as his wife to finally play her own game. She had a chance.

However, there were risks to stay in King’s Landing all the same. Tyrion could still be sentenced to death if his uncle believed him guilty. If it happened, she would be in great trouble. Even if Tyrion survived the trial, Joffrey would still be a danger for her. On the other side, she didn’t think Tyrion would stay in King’s Landing after the trial. He would probably go back to Casterly Rock. As his wife, Sansa would have to follow him. Ser Jaime was a kingsguard, so Tyrion was the heir to Casterly Rock. Sansa didn’t know what to think about this prospect. Margaery’s words came back to her. You could rule the Westerlands with your husband and prevent another war like this one to happen. Don’t turn your back right now to this. The idea to be the Lady of the house who murdered her family was… confusing.

There were so many uncertainties. An hour ago, Sansa had decided she would leave with Ser Dontos tonight, but with the news Podrick just brought to her, she didn’t know anymore what to choose. Each choice presented a lot of dangers. She could end up dead, or worse, in both scenarios. What should she do?

Conflicting thoughts and feelings fought in Sansa’s head for hours. She chose to escape, then to stay, then again to escape, and on, and on. She had to consider too many things. The opportunity to leave King’s Landing. The possibility to become the Lady of the Westerlands. Her fate if people intercepted her while fleeing. Her fate if Tyrion was declared guilty. Tyrion’s fate if she escaped. The possible husband she would be forced to wed if Tyrion died. The uncertainty about this friend who wanted to help her. She couldn’t get her ideas clear. It was impossible for her to take a decision.

Finally, she grabbed the edge of her
boudoir with her hands. Her eyes wandered on the surface and stopped at the leather box. She
opened it for the first time in two weeks. The golden Lannister lion necklace was still there, where
she left it after Tyrion’s arrest. She took it into her hands.

Sansa appreciated Tyrion in some way. He never mistreated her and did his best to help her, but this!
He gave her a symbol of his own family, the people who murdered her brother and her mother, for
her name day. Did he want her to look like a Lannister, to make sure people believed she was his
wife? Did he mean by that she was a Lannister now? Never forget what you are. He wanted her to
know she was a Lannister now. She took the necklace by its pendant in her right hand and closed it
in a fist, tightening the jewel. She wanted to break it. She wasn’t a Lannister, and Tyrion was trying
to make her believe she was. She would leave him.

Suddenly, Sansa heard a strange sound, some click. It came from the pendant. Did she break it? She
opened her palm. For a moment she thought she really broke it. It looked like the surface of the
pendant had been separated from the rest. However, when she looked closer, she realized it wasn’t
broken. It was open. There was something inside the pendant. The surface with the Lannister sigil
could be rotated to reveal what was hidden inside. When Sansa turned it enough she saw what was
inside. Her breath stopped.

Inside was another sigil carved in silver. A direwolf. It was her family sigil. It wasn’t a golden
Lannister lion necklace. It was a silver Stark direwolf necklace, concealed as a Lannister necklace.
Sansa felt tears coming to her eyes. That was Tyrion’s gift. Never forget what you are. She sat and
silently cried. She had been wrong about him. She looked back at the direwolf. She was a Stark. She
was a wolf. She knew what she had to do.

When the hour of the wolf came, Sansa left her rooms.

Chapter End Notes

To be clear about something, the idea of the necklace isn't mine. I borrowed it from
another fanfiction writer whose stories I like very much. However, the necklace is not
entirely the same than in its original form. If you want to know where I got my idea
from, read "Never forget what you are, or the medallion" by Pellaeonthewingedlion.

For the people interested in good fanfictions of Game of Thrones, especially if you are a
Sansa/Tyrion fan, you must read the two long fanfics of this author if you didn't read
them already, "The lesser evil" and "Things we do for love". Only available on
Fanfiction.net. I had a lot of inspiration from these stories.

Please review

Next chapter: a knight
Brienne I

Chapter Notes

OK, the first episode in Season 6 went out tonight. That can't be more appropriate. The most surprising is I wrote this chapter weeks ago.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

BRIENNE I

She was standing alone in the darkness, hidden behind a pillar. Brienne had agreed to stand guard during the night before Lady Sansa’s door while the sellsword, Bronn, would stand guard during the day. All the same, Brienne would double his guard many times. She didn’t trust the sellsword. He would sell his sword to the first person who paid him more than Ser Jaime or Lord Tyrion and abandon the Lady Sansa. Brienne couldn’t and wouldn’t abandon her, no matter what happened. She swore a vow to her mother. *I will shield your back and give my life for yours if it comes to that. I swear it by the old gods and the new.* Now Catelyn Stark was dead. Brienne had failed her, but she wouldn’t fail her daughter.

Brienne didn’t think it was a good idea to keep Sansa Stark here in the Red Keep, even less after Lord Tyrion’s arrest. She wasn’t safe among the Lannisters. Ser Jaime said that she was probably safer here than everywhere else and that he swore to send her back to Lady Stark, but that it was impossible since Lady Stark was dead. Hardly, Brienne had to admit there was some truth in what Ser Jaime said. He also told her that his brother would never let anything happen to his wife and that it was good protection enough. Brienne didn’t really believe it. How could Lady Sansa be safe when she was married to a Lannister? Considering the Lannister in question was accused of murdering his own father, Brienne didn’t believe at all that Lady Catelyn’s daughter was safe here anymore. However, there was nothing Brienne could do. Sansa Stark refused her services when she visited her, so Brienne had no way to get her out of King’s Landing. She couldn’t make her escape against her will after all. Brienne swore to keep Sansa Stark safe, not to obligate her to be safe. She couldn’t impose her services. However, nothing stopped her from keeping an eye on the girl.

Suddenly, she heard a noise coming from Lady Sansa’s door. It opened, then closed, and Brienne heard footsteps on the floor. She carefully looked in the corridor and saw a human shape with a heavy cloak walking in the other direction. This person could only be Sansa Stark. No one else could leave her rooms. Brienne followed her silently, keeping a firm grip on her sword in the scabbard to make sure it wouldn’t make any noise while she walked. She didn’t wear any armor, so she wouldn’t be heard and could move much more easily. She followed her at good distance to prevent the lady from seeing her, but also close enough to not lose her track.

They left Maegor’s Holdfast and Brienne followed her to the godswood. Brienne found it strange that Lady Sansa would come here to pray in the middle of the night. Lady Stark’s daughter sank deeper and deeper into the woods until she reached a place Brienne knew only too well. It was some sort of observation point where she saw Lady Sansa pray before. It was a dead-end and Brienne couldn’t follow her. If Sansa Stark was to turn around, she would come face to face with her if Brienne followed this path. Instead, she followed a parallel path and found a spot where she could
see Lady Sansa through the trees and their branches, at least in part. She could see now there was another shape, bigger, with Lady Sansa. She stood still and listened carefully. The two people were whispering, but she managed to hear them.

“I’m glad you could make it.” Brienne didn’t know to who this voice belonged, but she knew it wasn’t Lady Sansa who was speaking. The voice was that of a man and, the way he spoke, Brienne could tell he was drunk. She lived long enough in military camps to recognize a drunken voice miles away from her. “We don’t have much time. The ship could leave without us if we don’t catch it in time.” A ship? What was this man talking about?

“Wait a minute, Ser Dontos. We must talk.” That voice belonged to Sansa Stark, for sure.

“We don’t have the time, my lady. If you want to escape, we must do it now.” Escape? Sansa Stark was leaving King’s Landing? That was what Brienne thought they should have done, but she didn’t know the man the young lady was talking to. She called him Ser Dontos. Who could it be? The name meant nothing for Brienne. Brienne wasn’t sure Lady Sansa would be safe if she escaped with this man. She couldn’t trust him. She had to intervene.

“I’m sorry, Ser Dontos, but I will not leave King’s Landing. I came here to tell you that I’m going to stay.” The declaration of the young lady stopped Brienne in her movement. She listened closely once again.

“My lady, you must come. If you stay here, you may die. You can’t trust the Lannisters. You’re not safe here.” Brienne couldn’t agree more on this. Well, she agreed mostly. There was a Lannister she could trust.

“Ser Dontos, I thank you for what you’ve done for me, but I can’t take that risk. Cersei and Joffrey will put a bounty on my head as soon as they’ll discover I escaped. I won’t be safe anywhere. No one who may be willing to protect me is alive or able to protect me. I would end up dead outside as well. Here in King’s Landing, I may have a chance.”

“You won’t have any chance here. Not with Joffrey or the queen. After they are done with your husband, you will be the next.”

“The Lannisters will never allow Joffrey to kill me. I am the key to the North, they need me. Anyway, Tyrion may have a chance to get out of this alive. His uncle Kevan is coming to take care of the trial and he doesn’t despise Tyrion like the queen and the king do. If I leave, people will find it suspicious and may believe that I escaped because I helped him to kill his father. I don’t want him to die because of me.” Brienne was locked by Lady Sansa’s last words. I don’t want him to die because of me. Could it be possible she cared about her husband? That was impossible. Lord Tyrion was a dwarf, with a reputation for whoring and drinking, and a Lannister. Even so, Brienne had to admit the last argument didn’t really matter. After all, Ser Jaime was a Lannister as well. All the same, Lady Stark told her her daughter loved stories about knights and maidens, the same Brienne loved once when she was a child, and that she always wanted to marry one of the handsome knights or lords from the songs. Brienne could hardly reconcile it with what she just heard.

“He is a member of the family who slaughtered yours. He probably had a part in it. Even if he is declared not guilty, you will still be his wife and a prisoner. You will also be a prisoner if he is executed. You don’t have to be a prisoner anymore. You don’t owe him anything. Come with me, and you will be free.”

Brienne could only approve the words again. Only, Sansa Stark suddenly talked again. “I will never be free. I am a woman, and I will have to marry someone whatever happens, unless I become a septa, a Silent Sister, or a whore. I am in a prison right now, it’s true, but it is a wide prison. I am not
constrained into a single cell. My cell is always opened, I can walk freely everywhere in the prison
and talk to everyone I want. There are gaolers who want to hurt me, but there is one who is here to
protect me from them. The exit to the prison may be closed, but my life is good inside, and to take
the exit would mean to enter another prison, where I will probably not have the same freedom than
the one I have now. The only way for me to stay into that prison, it’s for Tyrion to live.” Her voice
turned more aggressive. “You are wrong. I owe him a lot of things. You were there when Joffrey
had me beaten, you saw him save me. He also tried to save me during the riot. He wasn’t the one to
save me, but he tried all the same. He was the only one in the Red Keep to tell me he was sorry for
my father after he was killed. He even tried to send me back to my mother when he was Hand of the
King.” Brienne knew what Lady Sansa was talking about. It was Lord Tyrion who made the deal
with Lady Catelyn to exchange Sansa and Arya Stark for his brother. If only they knew then that
Arya Stark had disappeared. “He never wanted to marry me, no more than I wanted to marry him.
He spared me the bedding ceremony at our wedding. He refused to consummate our marriage
without my consent. He never touched me. He never mistreated me. He protected me against the rest
of his family. Even when his father threatened to force him to rape me, he refused. He may be a
Lannister, but he is a good man all the same. He may be a whoremonger and a drunkard, but he is
also kind and brave and gentle and strong. He may be a dwarf, but he is a bigger man than he looks.
A very small man can cast a very large shadow.”

When she was done speaking, a huge silence followed. Brienne followed this silence, and not
because she didn’t want to be located. She was agape at the words of Lady Sansa Stark. She had
spoken so highly of her husband, Brienne had the impression she could have been speaking of her
father, her mother or her brother. The way she spoke remembered Brienne so much of Lady Catelyn,
but it was her praise of Lord Tyrion that let Brienne so thoughtful. Lord Tyrion Lannister had such a
bad reputation, and yet Sansa Stark stood, a few feet from her, defending his honor. Brienne didn’t
know all of this about Lord Tyrion. Ser Jaime assured her that his brother would protect Lady Stark’s
daughter. Brienne hadn’t believed him when he told her, but now she thought he might have been
right. If Lady Sansa was speaking this way of Lord Tyrion, what Ser Jaime told her had to be true.

It reminded Brienne of her opinion on Jaime Lannister before she met him. He was the Kingslayer,
an oathbreaker, a man without honor. He killed the king he was sworn to serve, pushed a ten-years-
old boy from the top of a tower, slept with his own sister and had children with her. And yet, he was
a man of honor in his own way. He was despised by everybody because he forsook a vow, and yet
he saved half a million people by forsaking his vows. So many vows. They make you swear and
swear. Defend the king, obey the king, obey your father, protect the innocent, defend the weak. But
what if your father despises the king? What if the king massacres the innocent? It’s too much. No
matter what you do, you’re forsaking one vow or another. Brienne understood what he meant later,
in the bathtub at Harrenhal. Tell me, if your precious Renly commanded you to kill your own father
and stand by while thousands of men, women, and children burned alive, would you have done it?
Would you have kept your oath then? That was the real story of the Kingslayer. With everything
Brienne heard from Lady Sansa, it seemed there was something hidden about the Imp as well.

“You can be free of the Lannisters. I beg you, my lady, this opportunity won’t present itself again.
There is too much risk for you here in the capital. You can escape all this right now. Your friend will
help you.” Ser Dontos spoke again. He was pleading now.

“I have friends here,” Lady Sansa replied. “I have one in a cell, and I don’t intend to abandon him. It
may be dangerous to stay here, but it will be dangerous outside as well. I’m done with hiding and
fleeing. I’m going to fight now, and I will fight here, in King’s Landing.” The resolve in Lady
Sansa’s voice reminded Brienne again of her mother. She continued to speak. “I will never forget
what you have done for me, Ser Dontos, but I don’t need it. I will not escape, and I will not put your
life in danger for mine either. Let’s pretend all of this never happened.”
Lady Sansa had obviously turned her heels. Brienne heard footsteps. She was relieved. She didn’t lose Lady Stark’s daughter. She would still be able to keep her safe. She was about to walk away when she heard muffled cries.

“I’m sorry, my lady, but I was promised a lot of gold for bringing you. I wanted to bring you willingly, but it seems I’ll have no choice. I’m taking you to your friend, no matter what you say.”

Brienne understood immediately. The man was kidnapping Sansa Stark. Brienne drew her sword, ran over the path and went down to the other one where Lady Sansa and her abductor were. When she reached them, they were still at the same place, Lady Sansa struggling of all her forces against the man’s grip.

“Let her go!”, Brienne shouted, her sword raised. The man turned towards her. When Lady Sansa laid her eyes on Brienne, she could see the surprise in her eyes. The Stark girl didn’t think she would be following her, but Brienne had taken a vow and she would respect it.

The man drew a dagger and brought it to the young girl’s throat. “You make a single move in our direction, and she dies. Now drop your weapon.” Brienne wanted to curse. She couldn’t do anything. If she tried to disarm the man, Sansa Stark died. If she did nothing and stepped aside, she would lose her and Lady Stark’s daughter wouldn’t be safe any longer. She had sworn to protect Sansa Stark, and she was about to fail. She would fail Lady Stark again. “Drop your weapon!” His dagger was close to Sansa’s throat. She couldn’t defeat him before he killed her. There was nothing she could do. She couldn’t let Sansa Stark die. As she was still thinking about throwing her sword or not, blood spurted all of a sudden near Lady Sansa’s throat. It couldn’t be!

Both people standing before Brienne fell on the ground together. Brienne ran to them, separating the girl from the knight as soon as she reached them. When she was close enough, she realized there was an arrow in Ser Dontos’s throat. The blood came from it. He was dead. She turned her attention very quickly to Lady Sansa.

“My lady, are you alright?” The young woman tried to crawl away from her, but Brienne caught her two shoulders with her hands. “Lady Sansa, I’m not here to hurt you. I’m here to help you. Are you hurt somewhere?”

Sansa Stark was looking at her with distress. Brienne wasn’t surprised. For people who never saw blood before, or at least whose life hadn’t been in danger directly before, there were more than enough reasons to be in this state. Brienne looked at her neck where the dagger had been. There only was a little cut, nothing serious. Brienne would be able to take care of it easily. As for the blood on her, it was the man’s blood. It was no surprise since the arrow pierced his throat while he was holding Lady Sansa. Suddenly Brienne realized something wasn’t normal. Where this arrow was coming from? They had to get out of here, but before Brienne could do anything she heard someone running behind her. She seized her sword that she let on the ground when she had looked closer to Lady Sansa and turned to face the outsider. She would protect Sansa Stark’s life with the steel from Lord Eddard Stark’s sword.

As black shape appeared before her. It had a quiver on his back and a sword in his hand. Brienne couldn’t see his face. The moon was high in a sky free of clouds, but it was in the back of the shape, so his chest was in the dark.

“Alright my lady, we can both lower our sword. I think we have the same objective right now.” Brienne was startled by the voice. She knew it. It was Ser Bronn of Blackwater, the Imp’s sellsword. He was wearing his black chainmail, as always. No wonder Brienne hadn’t seen him. It was the perfect disguise to be unnoticed at night. But Brienne refused to lower her sword. This man was a sellsword, without loyalty to anybody. Who knew why he was here at this hour?
“Tell me what you are doing here first.”

“So, that’s how you thank someone who just saved the lady you swore to protect? Very well. I was coming back from a brothel when I saw you wandering in a corridor. Since you’re supposed to guard the lady during the night, I thought something might be going on, so I followed you very quietly. I remained on the balcony up there and I watched the conversation between the lady and the fool.”

“You were spying on her?”

“As you were,” Brienne had to admit it was true. She thought what the man did wasn’t honorable when she did exactly the same thing. “I had a few arrows with me. Sometimes we can hunt something interesting in the godswood. When the fool grabbed the lady, I notched an arrow and waited for the right time to loose it in his throat or his head. And you proved to be a welcomed distraction since he stopped to move in order to face you.”

What he said made sense, but Brienne wasn’t ready to trust him all the same. Perhaps she was only angry at him because he saved Lady Sansa when it was her duty, but he could have other motivations too. What if he was there to kidnap Lady Sansa too? The man he just killed said he was promised a lot of gold for her. The sellsword could be tempted to kidnap her himself to get the gold. Only money interested him.

“How should I trust you? You are a sellsword. Who tells me you’re not working for the queen? Who tells me you’re not here to abduct her yourself?” She waited for the sellsword’s answer.

“Well, I have nothing to gain from that. Podrick and Ser Jaime both pay me to protect her. She is the wife of the little man who hired me before, and if he gets out of this adventure alive, I don’t think he will be very happy if I don’t protect her. He may stop to pay me for that. And to be honest, the queen isn’t someone I would relish to work for. She would have to pay very much for me to accept. Anyway, if I wanted to kidnap her, I could have done it a long time ago and on many occasions. Why would I decide to do it now? Furthermore, you don’t have much choice to trust me.”

“Why? You could go to the queen and tell her everything.” Brienne wasn’t ready to collaborate with a sellsword.

“Seven hells. How could Jaime Lannister spend so much time with you without smashing your head? I have no interest to tell her, as I just explained you. And what are you going to do? Kill me? First, I’m not sure you’ll succeed. Second, people will find it strange if they find two bodies here in the morning. They will quickly make the link with you. And you’re not the only one who will be in trouble, but the young lady also. People know she often comes to pray here. So, we can make sure together to bring the lady safely to her chambers, or we can fight like two stupid knights and place her in an even more dangerous situation than she’s already in. For all three of us, I think it would be best we work together. So, do we lower our swords?”

Brienne had nothing to reply to the speech. It was true, to fight this man would put Lady Sansa in danger. She had no choice but to trust him for now. However, she wouldn’t guard down. “You first.” If they were to lower their weapons, she would make sure the mercenary wouldn’t play her some trick.

The dark shape sighed. “Very well, if it takes that for you.” He sheathed his sword. “Are you happy now?” Brienne lowered her sword in return, but didn’t sheath it. “It’s really difficult to gain your trust. The one-handed man was right about you.”

Ser Jaime talked to this man? And he hired him? Perhaps she could allow him some trust finally. She
sheathed her sword and turned back to Sansa Stark. She was still on the ground, shivering. Her eyes were fixed on the body that lay at her feet. “My lady, we cannot stay here. Follow me, I will bring you back to your rooms.”

Brienne reached out for her. Lady Sansa stared at her as if she was someone she never saw before. After a moment, she took the hand Brienne extended and got on her feet. She looked at Brienne, then at the sellsword. “Thank you. Both of you.”

“Better go quickly to your chamber before someone notices you’re not there. I’ll take care of the body. I know a place where no one will ever find it. Take care of the lady.” The sellsword went to the body after he talked. Brienne escorted Lady Sansa out of the godswood. She still didn’t entirely trust the man, but she preferred him to erase any trail they might leave instead of bringing Lady Sansa back to safety. Anyway, the man was certainly better than her for this kind of things.

As Brienne accompanied Lady Sansa, she saw that she was regaining some of her calm. She wasn’t shivering anymore, but Brienne could feel she was still afraid. She would protect her, no matter what happened. She swore a vow.

When they arrived to her chamber and entered it, most of the fear left Lady Catelyn’s daughter. Brienne could see it. She had in some way the same courage and the same determination than her mother. Brienne took care of the little cut on her neck. It wasn’t much. It would leave no scar and be gone entirely in a day.

“Thank you, Lady Brienne.” Brienne bowed her head in thanks. She was done taking care of her wound. She guessed she would have some explanations to give now. “How did you come to be here? Were you following me?”

Brienne conceded. “I was, my lady. You refused my services, but Ser Jaime thought it would be better if we divided the guard before your door between Ser Bronn and me.”

“Why? I refused your services. I told you I didn’t want your help, that I didn’t need it.”

“With all my respects, my lady, you needed it. Without me and Ser Bronn, who knows where you would be right now? If one of us hadn’t been there, this man who tried to abduct you may have succeeded. You may even be dead.”

“Of course I know, I’m not stupid. What I mean is why did you do it?”

Brienne took a great inspiration before she talked. “I swore to your mother before she died that I would bring you and your sister back alive and safe to her. Your mother may be dead, but my oath still holds.”

Lady Sansa looked back at her with a strange expression. Brienne had the impression she was studying her. “Is it true, what Ser Jaime said? Did Tyrion and my mother make a secret deal?”

“They did it. Lord Tyrion sent your father’s bones to your mother when she was with Lord Renly’s army. He proposed her to exchange his brother against you and your sister Arya. When Lord Renly was killed, we both went back to your brother’s army. Ser Jaime tried to escape and killed the son of Lord Rickard Karstark. He was about to be killed by your brother’s bannermen. Your mother released him and made him promise to send you and Arya back to her once he would reach King’s Landing. I swore the same, but we arrived too late. Your mother was dead when we finally came here.”

Sansa Stark was still looking at her with the same expression. She didn’t seem indifferent to what she
was saying like the last time. “Why did you serve my mother? You were a kingsguard for one of my brother’s enemy. Why?”

“I had nowhere to go, and no way to avenge my king. Your mother was there with me when he was assassinated. She convinced me to escape with her before Renly’s men kill me. Your mother was good to me. She was brave, and strong. Not the bravery or the strength of a knight, but another kind of bravery and strength. I swore to watch her back. I wished I had been at the Twins to protect her. The only thing I have left now is to protect her daughters, but your sister is nowhere to be found. To protect you is all I can do for her now to honor my vows.”

The girl facing her remained silent for a moment, still looking at her closely. “Did Renly Baratheon really die the way you pretended? Was he really killed by a shadow?”

Brienne knew it would seem stupid to anyone who didn’t see it, but it was the truth. “Yes, with the face of Stannis Baratheon. I know you don’t believe me, but I am telling the truth. Your mother convinced me to escape with her because she was there and she saw that I didn’t do it. She saw the shadow just like me and knew no one would believe us if we stayed. That’s why she took me with her.”

A lingering silent followed. “I believe you.” Brienne was surprised, but relieved to hear this from Lady Stark’s daughter. “Lady Brienne, you proved that you were sincere in your will to protect me. There are not many people I can trust here in the capital. I accept your services.”

Brienne unsheathed her sword and laid it at the feet of Lady Sansa Stark, then knelt before her. “I am yours, my lady. I will shield your back and give my life for yours if it comes to that. I swear it by the old gods and the new.”

Sansa Stark took Brienne by her shoulder. “If you ever need help one day, I will do everything in my power to provide it to you. I swear it by the old gods and the new.” Brienne rose up and sheathed her sword. She had someone to serve again. “This is valyrian steel. How did you come to have a sword like that?”

Brienne was startled by the question. She had to be honest, now that she was in Lady Sansa’s service. “This sword was given to me by Ser Jaime. It was forged for him by his father, Lord Tywin Lannister.”

“How is that possible? No valyrian steel sword has ever been forged since the Doom of Valyria.”

“The steel comes from your father’s sword, Ice.” She saw utter surprise on Lady Sansa’s face when she revealed the truth. “I’m sorry, my lady. Lord Tywin melted it down after your mother’s death. Ser Jaime gave it to me because he wanted me to protect you with the steel of your father’s sword.”

Lady Sansa remained silent for a time, but the next question surprised Brienne a lot. “Do you trust Ser Jaime?”

Brienne nodded with her head. “I trust him. He saved my life at Harrenhal.”

“How?”

“While we travelled to King’s Landing, Bolton men caught us. Ser Jaime made them believe that my father was very rich and would pay handsomely for my return. He saved me from raping. Afterwards, when they brought us to Harrenhal, Roose Bolton sent Ser Jaime on his way to King’s Landing while he kept me at Harrenhal for high treason. His men sent me into a pit with a wooden sword against a bear, after he left for the Twins. Ser Jaime forced the guards Roose Bolton charged
to bring him to the capital to return to Harrenhal and saved me.” An awkward silence followed. Lady Sansa really seemed to have some difficulties to believe what Brienne just told her. “He wants to hold the vow he made to your mother. He really wants to help you, and he wants to help his brother.”

“Why? I may understand he wants to protect Tyrion, but why does he want to respect his promise so much? He was forced to make this promise if he wanted to live. It was a vow with a sword on his neck. Why does he put so much significance on a promise my mother forced him to make when he broke so many vows he made willingly?”

“He’s not who you believe, my lady. I had the same misconception about him when I met him the first time. You don’t know the circumstances in which he killed the Mad King.”

“What were the circumstances?”

Brienne could tell her, and she had to. For Ser Jaime, and for the vow who linked her to Lady Sansa now. “When Tywin Lannister marched on the capital with his army, Ser Jaime told the king to not open the gates for him. He told him that his father would never pick the losing side. The Mad King opened the gates nonetheless, and the Lannister men sacked the city. Ser Jaime begged the king again to surrender peacefully, but instead he ordered him to kill his father and to bring him his head. Then he ordered pyromancers to burn King’s Landing. He had hidden wildfire all over the city in the previous months. Ser Jaime killed him at this moment. He saved the life of hundreds of thousand people. That’s why he’s called the Kingslayer.”

Sansa Stark was staring at her, unbelieving. However, she was pleased by the words that came out of her mouth. “It seems the Lannisters are not all bad people finally.”

A new silence lingered. “My lady, do you need rest? I can stand guard before your door for the night.”

“Yes, thank you. I need it.”

Brienne went to leave the room, but she stopped before she reached the door. She had questions to ask to Lady Sansa. “My lady, if I may ask, who was this man in the godswood? Why did he offer you to escape?”

Lady Sansa looked up at Brienne. “His name was Ser Dontos Hollard. He was a knight once, but Joffrey made him his fool when he came drunk at the tournament for his seventeenth name day. He wanted to flood him in wine, but I persuaded the king to let him live. I thought he only wanted to help me. It seems that finally he did it for gold. He tried to kidnap me.” The last words were spoken on a hard tone.

“There are not many true knights left today.” Brienne knew what she was talking about. She spent enough time with so called honorable knights to know many of them had no honor. Renly was no knight and no warrior, but he had more honor than these men. “Do you have an idea who could have paid him?”

“I have none. I’ll need to think about it.”

“My lady, I’m sorry, but I heard everything you told him. You don’t mean to leave King’s Landing, do you?”

“No. I won’t leave.”

“What will you do then?”
Lady Sansa Stark looked again at Brienne. She could only see determination and strong will in her eyes. “I will win the trial of my husband.” At this moment, Brienne knew without any doubt that she stood before the daughter of Lady Catelyn Stark.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
Tyrion VIII

Chapter Notes

It has been 10 chapters since the last Tyrion's POV. Sorry for that, but there isn't much that happens when you're in prison. Sansa will be the main character of the fic for some time, but here is a Tyrion chapter, to see how things are going for him, including in his head.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

TYRION VIII

Tyrion’s new cell was much better than the previous one. He was no more in the black cells, but in the tower cells now. His brother came himself to take him out of the dungeons and told him everything. The plan he and Tyrion devised worked perfectly. In fact, Tyrion was the one to devise the plan. Jaime only asked questions when he doubted it would work, but Tyrion managed to convince him to do it all the same. The results were quite visible. Jaime had already called their uncle Kevan from Casterly Rock. It gave Tyrion an opportunity and an idea. If Kevan was the one to see to the trial, Tyrion would have a million more chances to survive than if Cersei was the one organizing it.

Tyrion had to admit it had been funny. Well, in the beginning he feared Jaime wouldn’t be able to execute the plan, but after he did it, Tyrion jubilated. Their sister was so headstrong and arrogant, as always. She saw enemies everywhere, except some places where her most dangerous enemies actually were, and her most dangerous enemy, if awaken, was her son. She confined everyone after their father’s death, from the king to the gaolers. Joffrey was furious of this of course, but he wouldn’t do anything about it unless someone made him understand he could. And Jaime did it so perfectly. Now, Cersei was sealed in her rooms. The few simple-minded fools who followed her would do nothing to help her. Her son, his future bride, the Tyrells, Jaime, many of the lords and ladies in the Red Keep, the smallfolk… so many people hated her. Those who didn’t hate her had no love for her. The few loyal to her wouldn’t dare to help her in her actual situation. Tyrion appreciated very much being able to outsmart Cersei like he did when he was Hand of the King. The most beautiful in all that was that he had done it from a cell. As always, Cersei only looked in one direction when she acted and never considered the overall consequences of her actions. Tyrion doubted she would learn it very soon.

Tyrion’s situation was now much better than before. His trial would take place in a month at best, the time Kevan needed to arrive in the capital. He was now living in a cell that only had the bars of a cell. He had a comfortable bed, complete furnishings, chairs, a table, food and wine in quality and quantity, a chamber pot and windows that allowed the sun to enter. Podrick could serve him again freely. At first, Tyrion had been furious that he hadn’t left King’s Landing as he ordered him. However, if he could get out of there alive, and it was possible now, Podrick didn’t need to leave.

However, everything wasn’t so good for Tyrion. His uncle was a good man who always respected him, unlike his father, but he would listen to Cersei as much as he would listen to Tyrion and Jaime. His brother had just died. Who knew what Cersei could put in his head? Kevan had no preference
for Tyrion over his siblings. If Cersei could build a case strong enough against him and convince his uncle, Kevan would most likely declare him guilty. Tyrion only had Sansa, Varys and Jaime as possible witnesses. Jaime told him that Pycelle said their father died of a heart failure when he examined the body, but Tyrion didn’t think it would matter. He put Pycelle in the black cells when he was Hand of the King. He doubted the Grand Maester would testify for him. It was more plausible that he would testify against him and plot with Cersei to charge Tyrion. He could lie after all. Tyrion didn’t trust a maester who betrayed two Hands of the King, letting both die, one from poisoning, the other from beheading. It so happened moreover that one of these Hands was Tyrion’s father-in-law now thanks to his marriage, and that the other Hand had been the friend of this same father-in-law. There were more than enough morons in King’s Landing and people who hated Tyrion to testify against him for revenge, gold, or Cersei’s favor, whatever sort of favor it was. Lancel Lannister and Osmund Kettleblack knew a very specific sort of favor they could get from her. After that, Cersei was calling the Rose of Highgarden a whore?

At least, Shae was gone. Podrick confirmed it as soon as he saw him again. That was more than a relief for Tyrion. The woman he loved was safe. Of course, she would hate him for the rest of his life for what Bronn told her for him, but Tyrion preferred her to live hating him than to die loving him. If he escaped from this alive, he could probably go to Pentos to explain her why he did this. However, he knew he couldn’t do it. He could never leave the Seven Kingdoms if he was declared innocent, and he could never bring back Shae with him. Sansa was his wife now. He couldn’t take the risk of Shae being found again with Sansa still married to him. He said vows and he had no choice but to honor them, even more now after everything Sansa went through.

Tyrion had gotten drunk the night after Podrick told him the new about Shae. He needed it, with or without the new. He had spent two weeks without drinking. He had to catch up. Now however, he was sober and he read. That was all he could do. He didn’t lack of books. Podrick brought him all those he asked for. Right now, he was reading *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Valyrian Freehold*, by Lord Eddard Gibbon. It related the last centuries of the Valyrian Empire and its author claimed the end of the great city of Valyria was caused by the rise in power of religious institutions that began to exercise temporal power. Tyrion wasn’t sure if it was true, but he agreed with the lord that things could get very wrong when religious authorities were allowed to have other powers than spiritual ones. Some reports from Varys about the way Stannis Baratheon was burning people on Dragonstone because they refused to believe in his Lord of Light, on the suggestion of this Red Priestess who advised him, seemed to prove it. Tyrion was glad he could stop the man from being King of the Seven Kingdoms.

Podrick entered with the food for the midday meal. “Oh, finally. I’m hungry.” However, the trays of food weren’t the only things he brought. Jaime was with him also, without his armor of Kingsguard. Tyrion was even happier to see his brother. In two weeks he only had three visits in the black cells, if he excluded the day they moved him to his tower cell: Podrick, Jaime, and Lady Mira Forrester. The northern girl was the only one to bring him wine.

“So, my big brother has come back. Considering my new situation, I would say my plan worked out very well.”

Jaime smirked. “Yes, it did. It’s been three days now that Cersei had been confined in her chambers. She already tried to escape thrice, each time without success. Each time she told to the guards they had to obey her since she was Queen Regent.”

“It doesn’t seem to mean so much when the king decides to punish his mother. Normally it should be the mother who punishes her son for his stupidities. Now it seems to be the opposite.”

“You’re right.” Jaime sat. “It doesn’t bother you if I eat with you, I hope?”
“Not at all. I didn’t have much company these last weeks.”

The food was excellent and copious as usual. Tyrion noticed his brother ate much more than before. That was a good thing. “So, tell me, no detail has been fixed concerning my trial yet.”

“No, I have no other message from Kevan. He’s on his way. It will probably take place soon after he arrives.”

“What about the royal wedding?”

“Well, for now, I thought it would be best not to press things. Do you think it is a good idea to have a royal wedding with no one to stop Joffrey from doing anything crazy?”

“I can’t agree more. I hope he won’t decide suddenly to have me killed.” They could never know what Joffrey intended to do.

“The Tyrell girl keeps him busy. I think she knows this is not in her interest to have the wedding so soon. To have Cersei and Joffrey together at the ceremony in the current situation doesn’t seem to entice her very much.”

“Good. Then I’ll live at least until Kevan arrives and decides if I’m guilty or not.”

“Kevan will not sentence you to die. You are innocent.”

Tyrion had to sigh “We both know it Jaime, but Kevan doesn’t. He will listen to Cersei and every witness she will call at the trial. You know how our beloved sister is. She is certain that I killed our father. Even if he was killed and that the killer threw himself before the Iron Throne, confessed to his crimes, and gave irrefutable evidence of his guilt, it wouldn’t matter to Cersei. She won’t rest until my head’s on a spike. She is ready to do everything to achieve her goal. She can bribe, threaten, offer all sorts of favor to people to testify against me. And I don’t even mention the enemies I made while I was Hand of the King. Some might decide that perjury is a small price to pay to see my head off my shoulders.”

“Cersei is locked up in her rooms now, she can’t do anything.”

“She had two weeks to gather people around her. When she comes out they could still be in her pocket. She is still the Queen Regent until Joffrey marries Margaery.”

“We’ll wait for Kevan to be there. You will have your own witnesses. Anyway, what could she say against you. The Grand Maester told us Father died in his sleep when his heart failed.”

“I sent Pycelle to the black cells and had his beard cut. I don’t think he’s going to testify for me.”

“I will. I will tell the people what Pycelle told us.”

“And what if Pycelle and Cersei say the opposite? They could. Pycelle is in Cersei’s hands now that our father is dead.”

“You really sound paranoid now.” Tyrion’s brother seemed quite exasperated. “We will wait for the trial. Kevan doesn’t hate you, he respects all of us. You’ll be cleared of your charges. There is no proof for any of them.”

Jaime seemed to believe naively that now their uncle was coming, everything would be alright. There was no point trying to convince him of the contrary. Nothing would ever be alright. They were playing the game of thrones. Tyrion changed of subject “How is Sansa?”
“She’s alright. In fact, I’ve never seen her so active.” Tyrion was puzzled before his brother’s statement. “I don’t know what happened to her, but as soon as Cersei was behind doors, she began to travel through all the castle. She is very busy preparing your defense.”

His defense. Tyrion was without words before these news. Sansa was preparing his defense. He would never have thought that. He needed to know more about it. “What is she doing?”

“Talking to various people, trying to convince them to testify for you when it could be useful. I had a long discussion with her two days ago. We spoke for hours about what I would say when I would testify for you and about the witnesses and facts Cersei would bring against you. I never thought she could talk so much. The very few times I saw her she seemed mute, or she was praying.”

“With the death of her family, that’s no surprise. Did she manage to get more witnesses?”

“Podrick and Bronn will speak for you apparently. She and I also convinced Ser Balon Swann to testify for you instead to testify for Cersei. That’s not much, he’s only going to speak highly of you, but it’s a witness less for Cersei all the same.”

Ser Balon Swann? Well, perhaps Tyrion had the respect of some people here in King’s Landing finally. He was impressed by this change. To turn Cersei’s witness against her, it took a lot of wit. Tyrion knew Sansa was intelligent and clever. Most of the people only thought of her as an innocent girl who loved songs, stories, and always did what was asked or expected from her. Tyrion knew it wasn’t true. Sansa only never had the chance to use her intelligence for anything else than preserving her own life. He saw it after she was beaten on Joffrey’s orders. She was much more than a scared girl, but people could only see her this way. It was an armor she wore all time. Perhaps she finally decided to leave it. Tyrion wouldn’t complain about that. He would like to see her another way than how she was ever since he saw her for the first time in King’s Landing.

“What about Varys?” Tyrion asked.

Jaime looked down. “Varys has already been called by Cersei to testify. When I talked to him he said he would testify as Cersei’s witness, no matter what happened.”

Of course, Varys would do it. He always protected his back. “Well, that’s too bad. Do you know which judges Kevan intends to choose?”

“As I told you, we still have no message from him.” They didn’t talk about the trial for the rest of the meal. They talked about many other things. As they continued to talk, Tyrion was thinking about his wife. He hoped Sansa knew what she was doing. He was happy that she wasn’t staying in a corner anymore to weep, but what she was doing could end badly for her, especially if he lost the trial. Cersei wouldn’t forget it.

When they were done with the food, Jaime rose to leave. He was the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard after all. He couldn’t stay with Tyrion all day.

“Jaime.” Tyrion had to ask him about it. “Make sure Sansa is safe. She may not know the consequences of what she’s doing. Try to protect her from Cersei’s men. Our sister may be locked up, but there are still people working for her.”

“I will protect her, Tyrion. You have my word.” He looked at the bars and made a move with his hand. The guard standing behind left. Jaime went to the bars and looked outside. Tyrion had the impression he wanted to make sure no one was there. Then he turned back to Tyrion. “I swore a vow to Catelyn Stark to protect her daughter and I will respect it.” That was a change with Tyrion’s brother ever since he came back. He seemed to consider his promises very important to hold now.
There were things that happened while he was Robb Stark’s prisoner and on his way to King’s Landing obviously. Tyrion would have to ask him precise questions about it when he would be free, if he ever was.

Jaime continued to speak. “However, there is something you should know. I didn’t talk about it to anybody, but you should know.” Jaime’s voice was now very low, as if he feared to be heard. “Sansa tried to leave King’s Landing a few days ago.”

This information let Tyrion quite fuzzy. “She tried to leave?”

“Bronn and Brienne told me about it. She went to the godswood in the night and met some man. A certain Ser Dontos Hollard who was now Joffrey’s fool.”

Tyrion recognized the name. “I know who it is. Joffrey made him his fool when he came drunk to his seventeenth name day. Apparently he tried to drown him in wine, but finally he made him his fool. Some say it was on Sansa’s suggestion.”

“All the same, she went to meet him. From what Brienne and Bronn heard, he had offered her to flee the capital. According to what they say she refused, and the fool tried to abduct her. Bronn had to kill him with an arrow.”

Someone had tried to kidnap Sansa. Tyrion wanted to curse. He wasn’t there to protect her. Well, not that he could have done anything against someone maybe twice his size. Perhaps he could, if it was a fool. However, Tyrion was worried about his wife. “What happened to her? Is she alright?”

“Yes, yes, she’s alright. In perfect shape in fact.” Tyrion was relieved. “However, someone tried to get her out of King’s Landing and she seemed to be ready to follow him, at least for a time. I don’t really know why she could have changed her mind, but the fact is, it seems she was planning an escape.” Jaime’s words let Tyrion thoughtful. It couldn’t be a coincidence that someone tried to take Sansa out of the city not long after he was arrested. This man, Ser Dontos, couldn’t have worked all alone. Someone else was behind this. “Do you think she could be the one who killed our father?”

Tyrion couldn’t believe what his brother was suggesting. “Sansa couldn’t have done this.”

“She had more reasons than anyone in the Seven Kingdoms. Do you think it’s a coincidence she nearly left not long after our father’s death?”

“No, but… Sansa’s not a killer. Not yet anyway. I spent enough time with her to know it. She was in our chamber for the whole evening and night before Father’s death. She couldn’t have killed him.”

“Well, I met her a few times ever since your arrest, and she seems cold-blooded enough to do it.”

“Someone tried to get Sansa out of the city. You said yourself she was nearly abducted. Someone might only want to use the situation to his advantage. Sansa is the key to the North, after all. Whoever has her can eventually claim half of Westeros. Too bad the fool is dead, we could have known who he was working for.” Tyrion looked in his brother’s eyes. “I hope you don’t intend to stop protecting her.”

Jaime sighed. “I told you I would protect her. In fact, Brienne and Bronn are doing much of the job now. She always has at least one of them with her. There is also Podrick, and I gave specific orders so she may have the freedom to walk as she pleased through the Red Keep. I swore a vow to her mother, but it won’t stop me from suspecting her.”

Jaime was sincere, Tyrion could tell it. He would protect Sansa, but he really thought she could have killed their father. Tyrion thought his father could have been killed. After all, his death was so
sudden and unexpected, but it was still as likely he died of natural causes. They would have to inquire seriously on the matter after the trial, but without Cersei trying to interfere to make people believe what she wanted to believe.

“Just tell her to be careful with what she’s doing. Tell her I would never forgive myself if something bad happened to her.”

Jaime looked at him with a strange expression, but finally he only said, “I’ll tell her. Good day, little brother.” Jaime left and Tyrion was alone again. Podrick came to take back the empty plates and left nimbly, something quite unusual with him.

Tyrion thought about what Jaime told him about Sansa. He didn’t think about Jaime’s doubts about his wife, but he thought about the fact she was preparing his defense. That wasn’t something Tyrion had expected from his wife. He thought she would accept to testify for him, dutiful as she was, but to look for other witnesses and proofs to clear him? Tyrion was happy about that. Perhaps Sansa didn’t hate him so much. Too bad she would only show it when he was in prison. He wished he could have seen it before. He still remembered the night when he held her in his arms. Tyrion never slept so well in years. He only held her, nothing more. He promised he would never hurt her, and he didn’t, but he couldn’t resist the temptation to try to comfort her. She had looked so vulnerable this night. He had feared she may rebuff him, but she didn’t. Finally Tyrion had been able to do something for her. And for that he needed his father to threaten to force him to rape her, just like he did a long time ago with Tysha. The girl was a whore, but it had been a rape nonetheless. Tyrion had decided he would never do it again. His father wouldn’t force him to turn Sansa’s life into a living hell anymore. He didn’t kill his father, but to be honest Tyrion wasn’t sad about it. He only regretted Cersei could use it to imprison him.

Would Tyrion have been ready to kill his own father for Sansa? He was unable to answer this question right now. He would probably have found another way. Some way to convince his father that they consummated the marriage. Or some way to make him believe they would consummate it without fail later. Tyrion didn’t know. It was very difficult for him to imagine that he would kill his own father. Despite everything, how he made his life miserable and how he hated him, he was still his father. At least, Tyrion was glad he wouldn’t have to deflower Sansa immediately.

The day went by and Tyrion continued to read. It would probably be another night he would spend to read, like before. He wished Sansa was there. The night they shared the same bed, he had no trouble sleeping, until Cersei ruined everything. Now Sansa was trying to prove his innocence. Perhaps when he would get out of prison she would accept to… Tyrion sighed. What a foolish idea it was. She was a child. He turned the page of the book he was reading and put that thought aside.

*It’s not like she loves me.*

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: someone with blond hair
Daenerys I

Chapter Notes

So, I said it would be someone with blond hair's POV. Here it is. The Mother of Dragons comes into the story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

DAENERYS I

She was staring at the city from the balcony of the Great Pyramid of Meereen. Daenerys Targaryen had taken the city a week ago, and now everything seemed calm. When the city was taken, she allowed her sellswords to plunder it. To be true, they hadn’t looted very much. The people of Meereen did most of the work, so they were the ones to plunder the most. In fact, it was more justice than plunder since they took the riches their masters accumulated with their labor. The Seconds Sons didn’t have much left to plunder afterwards, and on her orders, Daario prevented his men from doing too much. As for the Unsullied, they weren’t interested by plunder. Again, Daenerys didn’t conquer a city. She liberated it.

Now, everything looked quiet. Daenerys quickly made sure chaos wouldn’t spread after she entered Meereen. She crucified one hundred and sixty-three leaders of noble families for the one hundred and sixty-three innocent slave children they crucified all along the road from Yunkai to Meereen. She also established the usual sentences for murder, rape and stealing. Now, eight bodies were hanging on the walls, and many hands and cocks had been taken. The streets were calm now. However, she could still discern the cries of the people calling her *Mhysa*, their mother. Daenerys had succeeded.

Astapor, Yunkai, Meereen, they all fell before her. Slavor’s Bay was free. Daenerys only had to make sure the former slaves would be able to keep their freedom, then she would go back home, to Westeros. She would take back the Iron Throne, her father’s throne, from the usurper who sat on it. The Targaryens would once again rule the Seven Kingdoms.

Daenerys had enough forces now. With her Unsullied and the Seconds Sons, she could take back King’s Landing. The common people of Westeros, the smallfolk as the lords and ladies called them, would flock at her side, as they did in Yunkai and Meereen. However, even if she believed it with all her heart, there was a little voice in Daenerys that told her it may not be enough. She remembered a few words Ser Jorah told her a long time ago, when Viserys was still alive. *The common people pray for rain, health and a summer that never ends. They don’t care what games the high lords play.*

Would the people of Westeros see her as their savior and their rightful queen when she came home? Or would they see her as another pretender like all the others who fought right now? Would they support her against the Lannisters, the Baratheons and the Starks?

“Your Grace.” Daenerys recognized this voice. She could recognize it everywhere and anytime. The man had advised and protected her for more than two years now.

“Ser Jorah.”

“Your small council is waiting for you. We are all here.”
Daenerys Stormborn, of House Targaryen, the First of Her Name, the Unburnt, Queen of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoyens, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Breaker of Chains and Mother of Dragons, shot a last look at the peaceful streets of Meereen and went inside to see her counselors. They were all there. Ser Barristan Selmy, who saved her at Astapor and crossed a continent to serve her. He was the only one sitting, at least until Ser Jorah joined him at the table. Missandei, her interpreter she met and freed at Astapor. Grey Worm, the Commander of the Unsullied, who followed her with his eight thousand men after she offered them their freedom. She trusted all of them. Only the other man, his back nonchalantly against the screens, caused some doubts in her. Daario was a sellsword who killed his two leading partners of the Second Sons and entered her tent while she was taking a bath. He was the only one Dany couldn’t trust entirely, but he was useful nonetheless. She wondered how he looked without his clothes.

She started to speak. “You probably all know why I summoned you. I broke the chains of every slave in every city of Slaver’s Bay. My task here is coming to an end. You all served me well, but some of you were born and lived here for all their life. I will go back to Westeros to claim the Iron Throne that belonged to my father and his father before him very soon. I may stay a little while longer to make sure things are stabilized here and to form a new government for Meereen, but I will leave all the same. You are all free to stay here in Essos if you want, but you have to decide it now. I will not allow you to reconsider it afterwards. What do you choose?”

Ser Barristan Selmy was the first to speak. He rose from his seat. “I have served under your father and your grandfather, your Grace. You are the rightful Queen of Westeros. I crossed the Narrow Sea to serve you for the few years that are left to my life. I burned away my years fighting for terrible kings. Before it’s over, I will serve with pride. I will fight for someone I believe in. I will follow you, wherever you go.”

He sat down and Ser Jorah Mormont was the next one to speak as he rose him too. “I’ve followed you ever since the Dothraki Sea. My sword and my advice are yours as long as you want them. And Westeros is my home. I have nothing here in Essos. You can always count on me.”

Daenerys wasn’t surprised, but she was pleased all the same. She knew the two men would follow her to death, even though they didn’t have the same reasons for it. Daenerys looked at her friend, Missandei. The young woman from the island of Naath answered with the same honesty she always had. “You released me from slavery, your Grace. This one is bound to you. She has nowhere else to go. I will follow you to your home.”

Dany turned to her Commander of the Unsullied. “Grey Worm?”

“The Unsullied will do everything you command them, your Grace. We will die for you if you command it.”

She turned to the one she wasn’t sure about. “Daario Naharis?”

With an expression of indifference, the sellsword answered. “As long as you pay them and allow them to plunder after the fights, my men are yours. I’ll make sure they follow you.”

Daenerys smiled at the man. She really wondered how he looked naked. He saw her without clothes, maybe she should order him to do the same for her in return. She spoke to all of them. “Do you have any advice to give me before we sail to Westeros?”

Her bear was the one to speak first. “There are news from across the Narrow Sea, your Grace. Tywin Lannister is dead. Murdered by his own son, the Imp, from what we know.”

Daenerys’s eyes widened. That was quite unexpected, and wonderful. Tywin Lannister betrayed her
father. His son, Ser Jaime Lannister, murdered Aerys the Second. She couldn’t hold a smile.

Ser Barristan was next to speak. “And we have taken the Meereenese navy, your Grace.”

“The Second Sons took the Meereenese navy.” Daario corrected Ser Barristan and came to sit as well and took a grape from the plate on the table.

“Who told you to take the navy?” She never ordered anyone to take Meereenese ships.

“No one.” He answered the same way he always spoke, as if nothing was serious. He always looked so indifferent.

“So why did you do it?”

“I heard you like ships.” Dany reflected on that. With enough ships, she could sail to Westeros right now.

“How many ships?”

“Ninety-three, your Grace.” It was Ser Barristan who answered this time.

“How many men can they carry?”

“Ninety-three hundred, not counting sailors.”

“Will that be enough to take King’s Landing?” Daenerys was full of hope all of a sudden. Her chance to take back from the usurper what was hers finally presented itself.

“The Lannisters have more.” Ser Jorah spoke. He seemed pessimistic about it. Barristan Selmy retorted immediately.

“They’ve been fighting Joffrey’s wars for years. They’re tired, dispersed. And now the Hand of the King, the man who really ruled the Seven Kingdoms, is dead. Joffrey is no battle commander and his mother neither. The Kingslayer is a good fighter, but he is also headstrong and arrogant. When he sees us coming, he will charge us without thinking and be defeated easily, as he was at the Whispering Wood. There is no one to win the battles of the usurper right now. They are weaker than they will ever be. Eight thousand Unsullied, two thousand Second Sons sailing into Blackwater Bay and storming the gates without warning.”

Daenerys liked the enthusiasm of Ser Barristan. He looked younger than Ser Jorah right now. She felt this enthusiasm as well. The Iron Throne was within reach, closer to her hand than it ever was. She looked at Ser Jorah with a little smile. What would he say? He always was pessimistic about her chances to take back the Iron Throne.

He finally conceded. “It’s hard to say. It could be enough. But we’re not fighting to make you queen of King’s Landing. Ten thousand men can’t conquer Westeros.”

“The old houses will flock to our queen when she crosses the Narrow Sea.” Ser Barristan really believed, just like her, this was her moment.

“The old houses will flock to whichever side they think will win, as they always have.” Daenerys began to have some doubts then. What Ser Jorah said wasn’t entirely false. Her brother Viserys thought the houses would join him as soon as he would come back to Westeros, but he was a fool. Ser Barristan wasn’t a fool, but his speech reminded her so much of her brother’s. Ser Jorah rose at this moment, very slowly. “There’s other news. From Yunkai. Without the Unsullied to enforce your
rule, the Wise Masters have retaken control of the city. They’ve reenslaved the freedmen who stayed behind and sworn to take revenge against you. And in Astapor, the council you installed to rule over the city has been overthrown by a butcher named Cleon who’s declared himself “his Imperial Majesty.”

Dany turned her back to her advisors. All had been for nothing. Slavery wasn’t eradicated from Slaver’s Bay. It was back in Yunkai, and probably as well in Astapor. She released men, women and children from their chains only to let them fall back into them when she left. If she left here too, the same would happen in Meereen. They called her Mhysa, but she was about to abandon them to their fate. What kind of queen was she to do that?

“Please leave me.” She needed to be alone. They all began to depart, but she stopped her bear before he left too. “Not you, Jorah.” She needed to talk with him and only with him. Right now, he was probably the only one whose judgment wasn’t clouded by the hope to finally take the Seven Kingdoms.

When they were alone, she turned to face him. “It appears my liberation of Slaver’s Bay isn’t going quite as planned.”

Jorah’s expression seemed to indicate he agreed. “You could sail for Westeros and leave it all behind. A boy sits on the Iron Throne. A boy many believe to be a bastard with no right to it. The Hand of the King and the Lord of Casterly Rock is dead, and the Lannisters might be fighting among themselves. They’ve never been more vulnerable. Tywin Lannister was who made House Lannister powerful, and he’s gone.”

“You counseled me against rashness once in Qarth. I didn’t listen. That all worked out well.” Jorah chuckled. She knew he loved her, but she could never love him the same way he loved her. All the same, she valued his guidance more than everyone else’s advice. However, this time, even though she thought rashness may give her what she wanted, she didn’t think it was the right thing to do. “How can I rule seven kingdoms if I can’t control Slaver’s Bay? Why should anyone trust me? Why should anyone follow me?”

“You’re a Targaryen. You’re the Mother of Dragons.” Of course she was, but that wasn’t enough. If she didn’t take care about her people here in Essos, how could she be a queen in Westeros? She belonged to her people, and right now, the people who needed her the most, who would never be free without her, were here, in Slaver’s Bay. She looked outside at the sky.

“I need to be more than that.” She faced Jorah again. “I will not let those I have freed slide back into chains. I will not sail to Westeros.”

“What, then?”

“I will do what queens do. I will rule.”

Daenerys walked back to the balcony and looked down again at Meereen. She was Queen of Meereen now, and she would rule the city for the good of her people. After some time, she thought she heard Jorah’s footsteps. He had left the room. Perhaps it was a mistake. She may have lost the Iron Throne, but she couldn’t leave right now. The Meereeneses she freed needed her. A queen didn’t belong to herself, but to her people. She would stay until she was sure no children born into Slaver’s Bay would know what it was to be sold or bought. Her home would wait. When she would come home, she would seize the Iron Throne, take back everything the usurpers took from her, and deal with all the traitors who overthrew her father. She nearly regretted Tywin Lannister was dead. She would have liked to exercise justice on the man who caused the fall of her family. When she would get back to Westeros, whoever were the new Lord of Casterly Rock, the Lord of Winterfell
and the Lord of Storm’s End, she would deal with them. She would bring them justice. But it would wait.

Chapter End Notes

 Mostly, they learn Tywin Lannister is dead instead of Joffrey (and Tywin is a much greater loss for House Lannister than Joffrey), but Daenerys chooses to stay in Meereen all the same. The Mother of Dragons will come back. She will have an important role later in the story.

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
Sansa VII

Chapter Notes

A chapter I really loved to write. There is a character I introduced earlier in the story who begins to play an important part in the fic from now on.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

SANSA VII

She walked in the corridors of the Red Keep. Sansa just had a troubling discussion with Lord Varys. She didn’t really know what to make of the man. He had tried to comfort her during the wedding feast, telling her Tyron would be a good husband. She believed what he said now, and yet she couldn’t decide if she could trust him. She hadn’t gone to meet the man. He was the one to come to her. He waited for her in her own chambers and talked about the trial. He was testifying against Tyron, but with his mysterious ways he looked as if he wanted to help him instead. He told her a few things about Cersei, but not much in fact. Mostly, he told her to be careful. She didn’t know if it was a warning out of concern, like the same one she received from Tyron through his brother a few days ago, or a threat. However, what let her the most bewildered were the words he told her when he left her. “You’re not looking at the right place, Lady Sansa. You must search the army of wolves.”

His words didn’t make any sense. Perhaps it was only a way to trouble her, to distract her. Bronn and Podrick told her Lord Varys worked closely with Tyron when he was Hand of the King, but Sansa doubted he was still loyal to her husband. She really didn’t know what to make of this perfumed man. She needed to think about it.

She was heading for the godswood now, Brienne walking not far behind her. Most of the time Brienne was the one to escort and guard her during the day, while Bronn would guard her during the night. He was much more discreet than the woman knight. Lady Brienne now wore a complete set of armor all the time. This way, people knew she could fight if need be. Some were laughing at her on her passage since she was a woman, but Sansa knew they would learn at their expenses she wasn’t someone to mock if it came to a fight. She had seen her sparring on a morning. She defeated most of her opponents, including Ser Loras Tyrell. Ser Loras didn’t seem to like her. In fact, he seemed to hate her, probably because of Lord Renly’s death. He surely thought she was the one to kill him. However, Sansa really thought Brienne was telling the truth now. After what she saw and what she told her, she couldn’t imagine Lady Brienne lying about it. Once, they talked more deeply about Renly and Sansa saw that she loved him. Her explanation was still so unrealistic, but Sansa couldn’t help but believe she was telling the truth.

As for Ser Loras, Sansa had lost some of her admiration for him. First, there were his angry duels with Brienne. Also, when she looked at him duelling now, she had the impression to see someone who was only trying to prove he was better than everyone else. He had the same smile than Ser Jaime Lannister had before when he won a duel. Furthermore, he didn’t look at Sansa anymore. It wasn’t that he ignored her and wasn’t aware of her presence. He looked as if he simply didn’t mind her. There was also a rumor she had heard recently from Ser Balon Swann when she discussed with him. Apparently, Ser Loras and Renly Baratheon had been lovers, and that was why Ser Loras was
so affected, even more than Margaery, when Lord Renly died. Sansa found it repulsive. How could a man be in love with another man? She wanted to vomit when she thought about this possibility. On the other side, if a brother and a sister could be in love… It seemed all kind of horrors were possible. All the same, it would explain a few things. Ser Loras didn’t remember her when he escorted her to Lady Margaery the first time, and he didn’t seem to be interested in her in any way when it was planned they would marry. He didn’t even speak to her again after she was betrothed to Tyrion. The dwarf acted more like a knight than the Knight of Flowers. Words from Lady Olenna Tyrell came back to her mind. *Loras is young and very good at knocking men off horses with a stick. That does not make him wise.* She had been quite indisposed by the old lady’s words, but now she thought she might agree with her. Her fancy on Ser Loras Tyrell now looked for her as stupid as the one she had for Joffrey once. Dwarves and dogs acted with more honor than princes, kings and knights. She still found Ser Loras quite handsome (who could say the opposite?), but she didn’t admire him like before. She was a little girl no more. She was a flowered woman now, and a married one. And she would save the husband who saved her.

It had been a week now since the news of Ser Kevan’s coming reached her. She had worked tirelessly ever since to find witnesses to testify for Tyrion’s innocence, and to gather proofs pointing his innocence. She had quite a number of witnesses now, and the word of some of them would have great value for Ser Kevan. At least she thought so. She had the impression to hit a wall now. There weren’t much people who wanted to testify for her husband. He seemed to have made many enemies during his tenure as Hand of the King. Many things Podrick and Bronn told her worried her. However, she had no choice. She used all her arsenal of courtesies, and even let slipped hints that Tyrion might be quite grateful for someone who would tell the truth to the court. A Lannister always pays his debts. She never really asked directly, but she brought people to consider testifying for Tyrion. It worked in some cases, but it didn’t in most of them. Sansa had to make sure people didn’t believe she was really working for her husband to be exonerated. She had to work in the shadows, to be careful, as Tyrion told her. She managed to build quite a solid defense case for her husband, but she wondered how strong would be Cersei’s case against him. She had to reflect about it peacefully, and that was why she was heading to the godswood now. She needed to pray to the old gods for help, wisdom and courage. She would need a lot of them.

As she turned a corner, Sansa heard noises in the middle of the corridor. Right before her, she saw two Lannister soldiers discussing. There were heavy sounds coming from where they were, as if someone was throwing objects in all directions. She stopped. Suddenly, another soldier came out from a door and showed them a dagger.

“It’s Damien’s! I recognize it. There’s no doubt now, she’s the one who killed him.” Sansa didn’t like what the men were talking about. They seemed to be searching some room.

“Lady Sansa. I think it should be best if we took another path.” Brienne didn’t like it obviously.

“Yes, I agree. Let’s turn around.”

Both women turned their heels. There were other ways to go to the godswood, though they were longer, but Sansa didn’t want to face these men. They didn’t look happy. She had to be careful.

The detour they took brought them quite far away from their original path. As she turned a corner, Sansa bumped into someone coming from the other direction. She began to apologize. “Excuse me, I didn’t see you coming… wait.” Sansa realised who was standing before her. She was slightly smaller than Sansa, with black hair and green eyes, and she wore clothes from the Reach. She saw her a few times with Margaery and she had come to fetch Sansa to her mistress the day after her wedding.

“Lady Mira? Mira Forrester?”
The northern girl seemed quite surprised to see Sansa. “My lady, I apologize, I’m in a great hurry. I’m afraid I can’t talk to you. Sorry to have walked into you.”

Mira tried to pass alongside Sansa, but she stopped her. “Wait. What’s going on, lady Mira?” Sansa saw something in Mira. She was in distress. But why?

“I’m really sorry, lady Sansa, but I have no time to discuss.” This time, the handmaiden managed to pass by Sansa, but Brienne got in her way. She was towering Lady Mira, and it seemed the girl understood she couldn’t ignore the giant woman like she tried to ignore Sansa, especially considering Brienne had her hand on her sword. She was loyal to Sansa to the end.

“Lady Mira, tell me what’s happening. You don’t act normally. Are you in trouble?”

The Forrester turned on herself to face Sansa. “My lady, you must let me go. It could be dangerous for you to be seen in my company right now.”

“What?”

“She’s there!” Sansa heard two voices in her back. She turned to face two Lannister soldiers walking in her direction. Their visors were opened and she could see they were angry. Did they come for her? Had Cersei managed to get out of containment and discovered her attempts to defend Tyrion at the trial? She saw Brienne pass by her and stand between her and the approaching guards, the right hand on her sword, ready to draw it. The two men stopped and brought their hands to their sword as well. Brienne’s voice was threatening when she spoke to them.

“If you dare to approach Lady Sansa one more inch, you are dead men.”

The guard on the right showed dismay while the one on the left looked angry at the statement. He was the one to talk. “You dare to threaten Lannister soldiers? You will pay for it.”

He was about to draw his sword, so Sansa intervened. The last thing they needed right now was a battle against Lannister soldiers. “Don’t do it! Don’t fight! Do you know who she is? This is Lady Brienne of Tarth. She was a kingsguard to Renly Baratheon, and now she’s a friend of Ser Jaime Lannister. She entered Renly’s kingsguard by defeating Ser Loras Tyrell in personal combat, and she defeated Ser Jaime the same way as well. Do you really think you’ll survive a fight against her?”

Sansa’s words caused the two guards to not move. She could see the fear and the uncertainty in their eyes. Everyone heard about Brienne, and there weren’t many women carrying a sword in the Red Keep. They heard what she was capable of and now she was feared as well as mocked. The guard to the right released the pommel of his sword. “Excuse us, lady Sansa. We’re sorry to have caused you fear. We’re not here for you. We’re here for this young lady.” He pointed with his head to Mira, who was standing setback from Sansa.

“What? Why are you after her?”

“It doesn’t concern you, young girl. I would step aside if I was you.” This time it was the guard at the left who spoke. Sansa fixed him in the eyes.

“She’s a friend of mine. We are friends because she’s a better knight than I am. If you try to harm her, you’ll be sorry.”

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“Sers, I don’t think I know your names. It is quite inappropriate for knights to not present themselves to a lady.”

The man to the left didn’t seem to like her comment, but Sansa knew the other one wouldn’t be insensitive to her comment. The words he spoke proved she was right. “Excuse us again, Lady Sansa. I am Ser Rowan of House Kenning, and this is Ser Valar of House Algood. We are terribly sorry, but this woman behind has committed horrible crimes. We have strict orders to arrest her and
bring her to our Commander.”

“May I know why? Considering the disagreements you just caused to me, I think I have the right to know why I had to bear them.”

Ser Valar was still looking at Sansa angrily. He was no real knight, for sure. Ser Rowan, on the other hand, seemed better disposed. He hesitated, but finally he spoke. “Of course, my lady, this is your right. We just discovered that this woman was taking Lannister soldiers in her bed and that she killed one of them.”

“These are lies!” Sansa turned to look at Mira. There was still fear in her eyes, but also indignation. “I never slept with any man ever since I came to King’s Landing, even less with Lannister guards. And I have killed no one, I swear. These are filthy lies.”

“These are no lies!” It was Ser Valar who spoke now. “I saw her with one of my friend, Damien, one night in the gardens. He disappeared after this night.”

Sansa was next to speak. “This is no proof that she killed him. You said they met in the gardens, but you just said she brought them in her bed. How can you know she’s the one who murdered him? How could a simple handmaiden murder a trained soldier sworn to House Lannister? She wouldn’t stand a chance against him.”

Again, Sansa had the impression she hit something with Ser Rowan, and even with Ser Valar this time. She saw doubts in his eyes for a moment, but he was again roaring again a moment later. “We found Damien’s dagger in her rooms. This is the proof she killed him.”

Ser Rowan spoke now. “My lady, we received orders from our Commander to bring the girl for an interrogation. Please, stand aside, we must perform our sworn duty as Lannister men.”

Sansa had to find a way to stop them. She understood now what she saw before. These men were searching Mira’s rooms. Mira was a Northerner just like her, and it was obvious she was in trouble. She would surely get killed if they arrested her. She couldn’t let them do that. Furthermore, she was Margaery’s friend. If she was arrested, Margaery may have some problems, and it wasn’t the time for it. Sansa needed Margaery to distract Joffrey right now. Who knew what could happen to her if Joffrey was bored and without anyone to control him?

She had to do something. At least, she could gain time. “May I see the dagger? I know Lady Mira, so perhaps I’ve seen it before. I could help you.”

Valar grew impatient at Sansa, but again it was Rowan who answered positively. “Of course, my lady, if you think you can be of any help, Valar, give her the dirk.”

After a moment, Ser Valar reluctantly gave the dagger to Sansa. She unsheathed it from its scabbard and looked intently at it. It was a very simple dirk. There was no ornament, no symbol, no writings on it. Sansa turned to Brienne. “What can you tell me about this, Lady Brienne?”

The tall woman leaned to look more closely at the weapon. “There is no way for me to tell you to who it belongs, my lady. This a very common dagger. There are tens of thousands of this model through all the Seven Kingdoms. There is no way to tell to who it belongs.”

That was what Sansa needed. She faced the two guards again. “How can you be sure this dagger belonged to this Damien? There is no way to differentiate it from all the other daggers of this type.”

Ser Valar was angrier than ever. “I know this one belonged to Damien. Now step aside, or I’ll arrest you as well for impeding us in our duty.”
Ser Rowan looked at Sansa with pleading eyes. “Please, my lady. We have orders. You are not involved in this, so please don’t involve yourself. Let us accompany Lady Mira Forrester to our Commander.”

Sansa couldn’t hold them any longer. She had to find another way. She had to convince them they couldn’t arrest Mira. But how? Ser Valar was angry because of the death of his friend and determined to get his hands on the Forrester girl. As for Rowan, he was only carrying out his duty. The only thing that could convince them to give up was fear. What could they fear? An idea came to Sansa. She knew what to do.

“Sers, if I were you, I wouldn’t arrest Lady Mira without irrefutable proofs. It could end not very well for you.”

Sansa said it on a soft tone, a sorry one, to make it look that she was afraid for them. The two men were dumbfounded by her statement. Valar was the first to react. “Is this a threat?”

“No, this is a warning. Lady Mira Forrester is the handmaiden of Lady Margaery Tyrell, our future queen. Even more, she is her favourite handmaiden. She told me herself one day that she considered her more like a friend than a servant. If you arrest her without good cause, what do you think will happen? As soon as she learns it, she will talk about it to King Joffrey. And as soon as the king learns this, I fear what he might do for his betrothed. I fear what might happen to the men who arrested the friend of his betrothed.”

Sansa had continued to speak on a concerned tone. The guards weren’t to believe she was threatening them. She didn’t know if Margaery would really use Joffrey to free Mira if she was arrested, but the simple thought of how Joffrey may react if she did could bring the two men to reconsider it. Everyone knew what Joffrey could do when he decided to punish someone. As a matter of fact, the two seemed to think exactly about this. Sansa could see the fear overwhelming them. They looked at each other. It was especially Valar who seemed indecisive about all of this, but Rowan was the first to speak.

“We thank you for your advice, my lady. You are right, our Commander surely didn’t think about this when he decided to arrest Lady Forrester. We will leave you. Come Valar.”

Valar still took some time before he moved, but he moved all the same. The two men left the same way they came from. Sansa was relieved. It had worked. She realized she still held the dagger in her hands. The men forgot to take it back. That was good. They had no more proof against Mira.

“Lady Brienne, keep this on you.” Sansa gave the sheathed dirk again to Brienne who put it at her belt. She then turned to Mira. Her face was full of gratitude, but Sansa knew they weren’t safe for a long time. They needed to get out of here now, before other guards came. “Come with me. We have to talk.”

Brienne and Mira followed Sansa through the Red Keep as they headed back to her rooms. Sansa didn’t know if what she did was wise. To be seen with someone suspected of murder really wasn’t a good idea, but she couldn’t resign to abandon Mira to her fate. Sansa knew Mira was in a situation in some way like her own. She had heard rumors about House Forrester these last times. She knew Mira lost her father and a brother to the Twins, where Sansa lost her own brother and her mother. She also heard about the murder of another Forrester later. She couldn’t abandon the girl. They were both from the North and, even though she didn’t know Mira quite well, Sansa didn’t believe the girl was capable of murder. It was like to imagine Margaery killing someone.

Finally they reached her chamber. Sansa turned to Brienne. “Guard the door. Let no one enter.” Brienne nodded to mean she understood. Sansa entered with Mira on her heels and closed the door
behind them. Sansa realized then she was out of breath. Did they run up to here? She couldn’t know for sure. Mira also was panting. Sansa had some questions to ask her.

“Can you tell me what is going on? Why are the guards looking for you? What is this story about you killing Lannister guards?”

“Lady Sansa, I shouldn’t stay here. The guards are going to come back for me here sooner or later. I must leave the Red Keep as quickly as possible.”

“You’re not going anywhere until you answer me. I just saved your life. What is going on?”

Mira hesitated for a moment, but finally she explained. “I don’t know where this is coming from, but there are rumors about me bringing Lannister soldiers in my bed and murdering them. Someone sent a message to the Commander of the guards that I would have killed one of his men. I don’t know what’s happening. I think someone is trying to get rid of me, but I don’t know the reason nor who is behind this.”

Mira’s explanation left Sansa quite puzzled. Why would someone want to get rid of her? Mira was only a handmaiden. Who could have an interest to plot against her? There was something that didn’t hold.

“Are these accusations true?” Sansa didn’t think Mira was guilty of these crimes. She had talked with her on a few occasions, and she didn’t seem the kind of girl to kill people, but Sansa knew no one could really be trusted here in King’s Landing. She had her lesson with Ser Dontos.

“My lady, you must promise me that you will not repeat it to anybody.”

Sansa wasn’t sure what to make of it. Lady Mira was a Northerner just like her. Maybe she thought she could trust her, but Sansa didn’t know if she could trust her as well. All the same, she didn’t think Mira would tell her the truth unless she promised to never speak about it. As to know if she would hold up to her promise, Sansa couldn’t be sure right now. But she had to promise if she was to know the truth.

“I promise.”

Lady Mira told her everything. Her problems with the queen after the Red Wedding. Her meetings with Tyrion about the ironwood business. The conflict between her family and the Withehills, Bolton’s bannermen who wanted to seize control of the ironwood business and destroy the Forresters. The death of her father and her brothers Ethan and Rodrik. An attempt of murder against her by a Lannister soldier and the fact she killed him in self defense. A certain Lord Andros who tried to hire sellswords to fight against her family and whose plans she routed. Her temporary alliance with Cersei and her visit to Tyrion in his cell during his first week of imprisonment. The open war that recently started between her family and the Whitehills. Her dismissal by Margaery a few days ago. Finally, the false rumors about her and the message sent to the Commander of the Lannister guards.

Sansa went through a lot of emotions and feelings as she listened to Mira’s explanations. She didn’t know Tyrion had talked with her. Though when she thought about it, this was no surprise since she and Tyrion barely spoke after her family’s death. The tale was far too complicated and detailed to be an invention. Lady Mira had to go back a few times to make sure Sansa understood everything. When she was done, Sansa believed she told the truth, or else Mira Forrester was very good to feign emotions and to invent stories.
“You have no idea who may be behind the accusations against you?”

Mira Forrester seemed to take some time to think about it, but finally she only said: “No. Lord Andros is in a cell, he cannot be at the origin of all this. He is the only one I can see who may really have done it if he could. The queen hates me, but she doesn’t care enough about me to lose her time spreading rumors. If she had wanted to kill me, she would only send one of her men to take care of me quietly. She wouldn’t cause such a commotion only for a handmaiden. As for Lady Margaery, she would never do such a thing. She removed me from her service, but she would never do something like that to me all the same. Anyway, it doesn’t give her a good image to have a former handmaiden accused of such things. She had no interest in that.”

Sansa could only agree with Mira’s summary. Cersei wasn’t behind it, neither Margaery. As for the lord she was talking about, Cersei may have released him, but why? There was no way to know the truth right here. However, before Sansa could say anything, Mira talked again.

“My lady, I must leave the Red Keep and King’s Landing as soon as possible. I have no one to protect me here anymore. Every guard will try to kill me as soon as they glimpse me. And the longer I stay in your company, the more dangerous it becomes for you. People may believe you are helping me in all this. The longer I stay, the more in danger I am, and the more I may taint your image and the one of Lady Margaery.”

Sansa was quite surprised by Mira’s declaration, especially the part about her former mistress. “Margaery just removed you from her service. Why do you care so much about the impact you may have on her any longer?”

“I don’t blame Lady Margaery for her decision. I know King’s Landing is a dangerous place, and that she can’t allow herself to be involved in any scandal. I regret to be no longer her handmaiden, but perhaps I would have been obliged to take the same decision in her stead. It doesn’t matter now. I must leave, for my sake and the sake of everyone.”

“Where will you go?” Sansa was worried about Mira. The Forrester girl’s situation remembered her of her own not long ago.

“I don’t know. My family is fighting, so I guess I will try to go back to Ironrath, and hope to see them one last time.” Sansa could hear the sadness in Mira’s voice. She was about to lose everything and had not much chance to survive very long. She had already lost her father and two brothers, and the other members of her family may end up dead as well very soon. Sansa had the impression Mira was facing a situation quite similar to her own after her father’s death and the events at the Twins.

Mira talked again. “My family may be doomed, but if that’s the case, I will bring the greatest number of my enemies with me in the grave. But I won’t bring innocent people with me, and I will if I stay here any longer. I must leave, now.”

Sansa looked in Mira’s eyes as the girl turned toward the door. There was sadness, but also determination on her face. The girl wasn’t fleeing. She was only going somewhere else to fight for her family. Her situation was far worse than Sansa’s had ever been. Sansa always had someone who could look over her or help her in the worse situations: her father, the Hound, Tyrion, Margaery, Brienne, Ser Jaime… Mira could only count on herself, but instead of cowering in a corner as Sansa had done so often, she was fighting. She would never abandon. Sansa felt ashamed. Mira was behaving the way Sansa should have so long ago. It had taken Tyrion’s words after the death of her mother and Robb, and the necklace he gave her, for her to decide she would fight. Ever since Lady’s death, she had been a victim, and she had accepted to be a victim. Only recently she decided to be a victim no longer. And there Mira was, still brave despite the tragedy happening to all her family. To the opposite of Sansa, the girl was a true Northerner. She acted more a like a Stark than Sansa ever
did in her whole life. That caused Sansa to admire Mira, but also to fear for her. She knew Margaery’s former handmaiden wouldn’t survive very long on her own. As Lady Mira put her hand on the doorknob, Sansa stopped her.

“Mira, you won’t be able to get out of here. You won’t help your family outside.”

Mira Forrester interrupted her movement to open the door and turned to face Sansa again. “My lady, there is nothing more I can do here for my family neither. The guards will find me sooner or later, and then it will be over for me. It is better that I leave now to prevent the others from suffering.”

“You cannot escape King’s Landing. The only way for you to reach the North would be by ship, the Kingsroad is too insecure with the war still going on, and there will be guards in the docks. They will see you. There is no way to escape. Your only choice is to remain here if you want to live.”

“I will die here anyway. The Lannister men won’t stop looking for me. You already have enough problems like that, my lady. I don’t want to cause you anymore. There is nothing you can do for me.”

“You’re wrong.” Mira looked in a puzzled way at Sansa. “Podrick will come very soon for dinner. I will send him to Ser Jaime to arrange that. I will tell him that the guards are trying to kill a friend of Margaery only because of rumors and of a strange note sent to their commander. He will do something against it. He’s not like Cersei, he knows the Lannisters need the Tyrells, and he won’t risk that alliance. Furthermore, if he is to discover that a bribe is behind all of this, the Commander of the guards will have some problems with him, believe me.” Sansa knew from her conversations with Brienne that Ser Jaime didn’t appreciate that knights accept bribes.

Mira seemed to consider what Sansa just said. “Even if it works, my lady, the rumors are still going on. One of the guards may decide to kill me in secret to avenge their fellow. Anyway, I couldn’t help my family here even if I tried. I have no more allies in King’s Landing.”

“You have one now.” Mira looked surprised by Sansa’s words. “Look, you have to survive. I won’t lie to you, your family may all die against the Whitehills. I know it’s not easy to accept, but that’s the truth. I would rather have been prepared to that when I learned about the wedding at the Twins. If your family dies, you are the only Forrester left alive. Your survival is no longer only about you. It is about the survival of House Forrester, just like the survival of House Stark now depends on my survival. If you want the name of House Forrester to live on, then stay.”

Sansa thought she convinced Mira with her speech, but at the moment she believed it, the girl counteracted again. “I thank you, Lady Sansa. I really appreciate it, but I don’t want to cause you any more problems. You already have a lot. To intervene for me will only make it worse for you.”

“Then I accept to make it worse for me. And since you are no longer in the service of Lady Margaery, I take you at my own service.”

Mira Forrester was staring at Sansa with big eyes full of surprise. She seemed to be searching her words for a moment, but she finally managed to do it. “My lady… you would take me… as your handmaiden?”

“Yes, one of my handmaidens left a few weeks ago.” Sansa felt a little pang at the memory of Shae. She missed her friend so much. “I don’t think it would be strange that I take someone from the North to take her place.”

Sansa knew she was taking risks by bringing Mira into her service. However, she had some feeling she was doing the right thing. The girl was obviously loyal. Even after being removed from her
service, she continued to defend Margaery. Loyalty was so rare here in King’s Landing that Sansa was ready to take the risk to have someone loyal on her side. Also, she was a Northerner and Sansa felt she had some responsibility to help her. She didn’t want another family to be destroyed because of the Lannister’s doings. She also believed Mira could be useful. She seemed quite clever and determined. Perhaps it wasn’t a coincidence that she had been so close to Margaery during her service. Sansa couldn’t let the opportunity to have someone probably resourceful and loyal at her service. And Tyrion looked like he had been ready to help and work with her. If Tyrion had been ready to work with Mira, Sansa guessed she could trust her.

Mira stood agape for a moment. “My lady, it will be an honor to serve as your handmaiden.”

Mira was smiling and Sansa had to smile in return. “Very well. We’ll wait here for Podrick to come and we will explain him the situation.”

An hour later, Podrick entered the room with the dinner. He seemed surprised to see Mira and he flushed from head to toes as soon as she looked back at him with a timid smile. After he was done serving them, Sansa told Podrick about the situation and commanded him to speak about it to Ser Jaime. She didn’t talk about the fact Mira really killed a Lannister soldier. She only talked about the fact she was Margaery’s friend, that this story could deteriorate the already tense relations between the Lannisters and the Tyrells, that there was no proof of Mira’s guilt, only rumors, and that the Commander of the Lannister guards may have been corrupted. Podrick went to carry out the instructions as soon as Sansa finished.

Sansa shared the spread of food with Mira. There was more than enough for two people anyway. Sansa could never eat it all, even now that she stopped to starve herself. Not long after they were done, Podrick came back to clean everything. He told them he spoke with Ser Jaime and that he would investigate on the matter. After he left, Sansa and Mira spent most of the evening talking about the North. Mira told Sansa everything about Ironrath. The way Mira was talking about it, it was the most beautiful place in the world. Sansa was very interested by what she told her. Mira was feeling the same way about her home that Sansa felt about her own. She never really visited places in the North before she came to King’s Landing. Her father and Robb, along with her mother sometimes, would often visit their bannermen, but she wouldn’t come with them most of the time. She wasn’t going to be the Lady of Winterfell, so it wasn’t so useful for the people of the North to see her, or even useful for her to see so many things of the North. She hadn’t complained about that back then. She preferred to stay at Winterfell and learn to be a proper lady, or read stories from the South about knights, lords and princesses. She should have visited the North with Robb. She would have known better how the world was outside the walls of Winterfell. She thought she remembered that her mother didn’t think it fit for a becoming lady to travel so much. Sansa regretted now that her mother believed she should stay inside a castle until she was a woman.

As they talked, Sansa began to talk about her own family. Mira didn’t insist too much on it, but she asked many questions about Winterfell all the same. She had never seen it. Sansa described it in all its details and Mira really seemed fascinated by what Sansa was telling. It made Sansa sad to talk about her home since Winterfell was in ruins now. She also talked about her family, about Robb, Bran, Rickon, Jon, Arya, her mother, and her father, but not too much. Mira didn’t try to know too much about them, but Sansa tried to talk about them all the same. Mira had talked about her family too, and she talked a lot about them. Sansa thought she might like to meet Mira’s sister, Talia, if she ever could. Mira told her how her sister had a beautiful voice. Sansa sang before as well. She talked a lot about her brother Asher as well, the rebel of the family who was sadly exiled in Essos because he fell in love with the daughter of Lord Whitehill and couldn’t marry her. Sansa thought Arya would have liked this one. They both looked like savage people. She talked less about the members of her family who were dead, but all the same Sansa learned a lot about Mira’s family, so she made an effort to talk about her own. They spoke until very late in the night.
When they realized how late they were, Sansa decided it was time to sleep. With everything that happened today, they needed some rest. She told Mira to stay here. It wouldn’t be safe for her to leave until Ser Jaime Lannister dealt with the guards. Mira decided to sleep on the couch where Tyrion was sleeping before his arrest. She helped Sansa to prepare for the night, despite Sansa’s protest. Sansa discovered there was no way to order Mira to not begin her service yet. She already considered herself as Sansa’s handmaiden. Sansa went to sleep while Mira laid down on the couch, still wearing her clothes from the day. She had none else with her. As she climbed into her bed, Sansa played with her necklace with a lion on the surface and a direwolf inside. She always wore it since Ser Dontos’s failed kidnapping. It helped her to remember who she was and why she had to fight. Sansa slept well this night, and the dream of her marrying Ser Loras came back. However, the dream now seemed stupid to her. The way her family looked smiling at her and the words of the bard seemed so silly. She was nearly happy in her dream when she discovered Ser Loras wasn’t there anymore. The dream bored her, even bothered her, but it didn’t make her sad anymore.

When Sansa awoke, Mira was already up. She was reading, but as soon as Sansa rose from her bed, she put her book aside and helped her to get ready for the day. They didn’t speak very much. Mira didn’t show much emotion, but Sansa knew that deep inside she was probably very nervous. She was still in danger after all. She hid her feelings, just like Sansa did. Sansa cursed King’s Landing for making life so difficult for Northerners.

“That’s a beautiful necklace you have, my lady,” Mira observed.

Sansa looked at the golden necklace around her neck. “Yes. It’s Tyrion who gave me this for my fifteenth name day.”

“He’s very kind. I hope he won’t die.” Sansa could only agree with Mira. “He told me once that he met my father at a tourney at Lannisport. He told me he was a good man from the short time he talked with him.” Sansa didn’t know Tyrion had known Mira’s father. Perhaps it was a reason why he helped her. However, Sansa saw in the glass the pained expression on Mira’s face as she talked of her father.

“I’m sorry for your father.”

Mira sighed behind Sansa. “He’s not the only one who died there. And I’m not the only one who lost very much.”

She didn’t need to tell more. Sansa knew what she was talking about. “We can only count on ourselves now.”

Mira nodded. “Yes. Only on ourselves.” Sansa never thought she would meet someone so alike her in King’s Landing. Perhaps she found a new friend. A real friend this time.

After they were done with Sansa’s hair, they could only wait. Strangely, no one had brought food for the breakfast. Sansa didn’t know what to make of it. Did something wrong happened? Mira went back to reading. Sansa looked at the cover and saw the title written in gold. Comments on the Volantenes Wars, by triarch Gaius Julius Caesar. She only had the time to read it when the door opened and Podrick went inside.

“My lady. My lady.” He bowed to both of them. Mira put down her book on the couch and rose up.

“Podrick,” Sansa greeted him.

“My lady, I just had a word with Ser Jaime. He discovered what the commotion with the guards was all about. Someone sent information to arrest Lady Forrester with a bag of gold to the Commander of
the Lannister guards. Ser Jaime questioned him this morning and discovered it came from a certain Lord Morgryn.”

“Lord Morgryn!” Sansa turned to Mira as she heard her shout of surprise. The girl’s mouth was wide open. “Of course, how stupid I was! He was the only one with a good reason to get rid of me.”

“What are you talking about? Who is this Lord Morgryn?” Sansa asked.

“He’s a merchant. He was the partner of Lord Andros. They were both working for Lord Whitehill to make a deal with the Crown about the ironwood, but Andros pushed him aside. Now that Andros is in a cell, he’s probably the representative of House Whitehill again. No wonder he tried to get rid of me. I’m the last obstacle between him and a contract with the Crown. I should have thought about it before.”

Podrick spoke when Mira was done. “I’ve seen this Lord Morgryn a few times, discussing with Lord Tyrion. He told me to not trust this man. That he was probably more dangerous than the other one, Lord Andros.” For Sansa, it seemed Mira had made quite a few enemies here in King’s Landing. If she hadn’t stepped to protect her, Margaery’s friend would probably be dead right now. “Ser Jaime put him under arrest a few minutes ago. He sent two kingsguards to arrest him. It seems the man had many Lannister guards in his pocket. He is in a black cell now.”

Sansa turned to look at Mira. She could see relief on her face. Finally, they had some good news. However, it didn’t last long since Podrick had something else to tell them. “Lady Mira, Ser Jaime wants to see you. He says he has some questions for you.”

Sansa looked with fear at Mira. The other girl was better in hiding it, but it was plain all the same that she was afraid. What would Ser Jaime do if he discovered she killed a Lannister soldier?

“Very well.” Mira’s answer was short and resigned. She looked a second at Sansa, then she followed Podrick to meet her fate. Sansa feared for her. Mira had done nothing wrong. She killed this man in self defense. What would happen to her now? Had Sansa only delayed her death for a day? Perhaps she should have helped her to get out of the city instead. It was a mistake to trust Ser Jaime. Well, perhaps not to trust him for Tyrion’s situation, but with Mira? If Mira was sentenced to death and that people knew Sansa helped her, there would be consequences for her as well.

An hour went by as Sansa waited to learn about Mira’s fate. Right at the moment she thought she found a friend and that she saved her, this new friend may end up at the chopping block. Someone else would die because of her. Sansa was pacing the room anxiously. What would happen to Mira? She finally had her answer when the door opened.

Mira entered and, at Sansa’s great astonishment, she was carrying a great tray of food. Sansa was dumbfounded. “What are you doing?”

“I’ve been formalized as your handmaiden, my lady. I knew you had no breakfast, so I stopped at the kitchens to bring you one.”

As Mira put the plates on the table, Sansa still had some hard time to understand this. “Ser Jaime released you?”

“Yes.” Mira had a great smile upon her lips. “And he will make sure Lord Morgryn doesn’t trouble me anymore. Apparently he’s going to spend a very long time in the black cells.”

Sansa exulted. “How did you do it? How did you convince Ser Jaime?”

“I told him the truth.”
Mira’s simple answer left Sansa puzzled. “The truth? All the truth?”

“Yes. Podrick and Lady Brienne were with us. They told him everything they knew about it. He also left during my questioning. When he came back he told me he had talked with Lord Tyrion, and that he believed me. He said he didn’t need to inquire on the soldier’s death since his body was never found and nothing was found in my chamber.” Nothing was found in her room? But what about the dagger? Mira answered Sansa’s question before she asked it. “Lady Brienne got rid of it. Ser Jaime is also sending most of the bribed guards and the one who saw me that night in the Riverlands for the war. I won’t have any problem for a long time.”

Sansa couldn’t believe it. Perhaps she really needed to review her opinion of Ser Jaime. Mira was safe. “Well, I guess it calls for a celebration. Let’s eat.”

It was good to have someone to eat with again. Sansa had spent so much time alone these last days. Mira wasn’t very talkative, but she was good company all the same. Sansa asked Mira questions about the book she had been reading this morning. Apparently, it was a record from a general who led the armies of Volantis against the other Free Cities after the Doom of Valyria in an attempt to create a new empire. He conquered Lys and Myr, but later attempted to proclaim himself King of Volantis. The other noblemen of Volantis conspired against him, and he was stabbed with daggers twenty-three times, at the moment he was about to launch an invasion against Tyrosh. The Freehold of Volantis didn’t survive him, and was ultimately defeated by an alliance between Tyrosh, Myr and Lys in rebellion, Pentos, Braavos, Dothrakis, Aegon the Conqueror and the King of the Stormlands. Sansa had the impression she needed some history lessons, something else she lacked in her education.

When they were done eating, Mira didn’t clean the table immediately. “My lady, there is something I should tell you. When I left Ser Jaime, Podrick gave me this.” Mira produced a letter. It bore the seals of the Hand of the King, the Master of Coin, and the king. “It is a royal decree. Lord Tyrion made it right before he was arrested. It makes my family the sole supplier of ironwood for the Crown. Podrick saved it from your husband’s chest not long after his arrest.” Sansa remembered Podrick emptying the coffer this very morning, and she remembered Tyrion had put a document in it the precedent evening. Could it be this decree?

Mira was now deeply staring at Sansa. “My lady, I know you’re trying to have your husband cleared of the charges against him. I want to help you. Lord Tyrion helped me, I can’t stay idle while he is falsely accused of murder. And without him, this decree will have no value. I need him to be alive if my family is ever to survive. If there is any way I can help you with this, just tell me. I’ll do what you want.”

Sansa looked at her new friend and saw the sincerity and the determination of her words. Now, she knew she did well by saving her. She already had an idea how Mira could help her to free Tyrion.

Chapter End Notes

I always hated the end for Mira Forrester in Telltale Game, whether we chose to have her killed or married by force to Morgryn. And I love so much her storyline and how we can make the character that I wanted to give her some role in this story. I was also very interested by making her meet Sansa. The two girls have a lot in common.

Please review
Next chapter: the Hand of the King

Exult and rejoice with me. JON SNOW CAME BACK FROM THE DEAD!!!! I love this show!
First chapter from Kevan Lannister's POV. Kevan arrives in King's Landing and begins to rule. He also meets someone who troubles him.

By the way, sorry for the spoiler in the last chapter. Many complained about it since they didn't already know what happened in Season 6 Episode 2. I won't spoil you this way again.

They entered King’s Landing by the Lion Gate, where the Goldroad began and continued to Casterly Rock. Kevan was tired. It was the end of the afternoon. The trip had been wearisome, but soon they would reach the Red Keep. Not that it would mean any rest for him. He received a raven from Deep Den on the road that King Joffrey had named him Hand of the King. He thought the king would wait for his arrival before that, but it seemed the family and the Realm needed him sooner than he thought.

Kevan had left Casterly Rock a month ago with a small escort and his son as soon as he received Jaime’s message. Kevan would never forget the content of the scroll. It was addressed to him and Genna.

Dear Uncle. Dear Aunt. Father is dead. He died peacefully in his sleep from a heart failure, the night before the royal wedding. Things have gone out of hands. Cersei arrested Tyrion and accused him of murdering Father. She delayed the wedding indefinitely. She’s gone mad. I need your help Uncle. Come to King’s Landing as quickly as you can. Tyrion may not live for long.

Jaime

Kevan had been with his wife and their daughter when he received the message. He had been utterly destroyed by the news. His elder brother, his lord, Tywin, was dead. He was near tears when he learned it, so much that he forgot the other news the message brought. Dorna had done her best to support him. She always supported Kevan when it was difficult. However, when Kevan read again the scroll he had crumpled in his fist, he realized something else had happened. Tyrion was under arrest. He was accused of murdering Tywin. Kevan couldn’t understand. He needed to read Jaime’s words three more times to catch up everything. He stopped at his nephew’s words about Cersei. She’s gone mad. Kevan wanted to agree. Tywin died of a heart failure according to Jaime, and Cersei had accused Tyrion of killing him. Kevan had feared a few times before what might happen to House Lannister when Tywin would be gone. Would they survive his brother? He feared at this moment they wouldn’t.

When he told the news to Genna and showed her the scroll, she looked like she was about to cry. But she didn’t. She composed herself very quickly. Of all the children of their father, Lord Tytos, Genna always was the one who was the closest to a true lion, except for Tywin. Kevan knew Genna
loved Tywin as much as he loved him himself. She had been their father’s princess before she became Tywin’s princess as well. However, she wasn’t a wailing princess, but a proud one. She had been even more at this moment, strong like Casterly Rock itself in this difficult moment. Kevan always admired her, nearly as much as he admired his late brother. He still remembered word by word what she told him at this moment.

“Cersei must be mad! Arresting Tyrion! I hope she has very good reasons. What would Tywin think of it if he was still alive? You must go to King’s Landing immediately, before she allows someone else to be beheaded or beheads him herself. The last time she did it, it nearly caused the fall of our house.”

Kevan had left the next morning along with two hundred knights. He and Genna had sent messages to Lannister bannermen and other knights and many joined him on the road. They came officially to pay their respect to their liege lord, but they were also loyal men to Kevan who would serve him in King’s Landing. With Tywin dead and Cersei ruling, he preferred to take precautions. With the announcement of his appointment as Hand of the King, many other men were encouraged to join him. Today, they were in King’s Landing, Kevan and two thousand men under his orders.

As they travelled to the Red Keep, Kevan realized things seemed very normal. Whores showed their breasts from the windows of brothels, butchers shouted about how good their sausages were, bakers about their bread, children were running in the streets, thousands of people were walking slowly, stepping aside when Kevan and his men came into their way, and they didn’t receive any condolences for the death of the Hand of the King. No one seemed to mourn his brother or to care about his death. That made Kevan sad, but he couldn’t say he blamed or didn’t understand the inhabitants of the capital. His brother sacked their city about twenty years ago, and Tywin never cared about being loved, nor by the smallfolk, nor by the noble people, whether they were high lords or minor lords, nor by his own family. He never cared about the love of everyone but Joanna. Kevan was one of the few to know it, but Tywin cried the day she died. He never smiled afterwards. Now he was dead, and only a few people would mourn him. Kevan wasn’t even sure Tywin’s children would be sad about his death, especially Tyrion.

When they reached Maegor’s Holdfast, the portcullis opened as soon as one of Kevan’s men announced him. Kevan wanted nothing but to sleep. He wanted to weep for his dead brother, to see his body and stand vigil for him, but he couldn’t. Tywin wouldn’t agree. He was Hand of the King now. He had to serve House Lannister and make sure that what Tywin built for decades wouldn’t turn to ashes. The first thing to do was to restore order in the Red Keep and to get informed of everything that happened since he left Casterly Rock. He ordered one of his men to call a meeting of the small council and went to the chambers assigned to him to wash quickly. As he was done and prepared to go to the small council room, his squire came to announce him that his nephew wanted to talk to him. Kevan told to let him enter. A few seconds and the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard was standing before him, clad in his golden armor and white cloak, a golden hand instead of the bones and the skin that once were there.

“Uncle. I’m glad to see you,” Jaime said.

“I’m glad to see you too, Jaime. I’m sorry for your loss,” Kevan told him.

“I’m sorry for yours.”

Kevan saw pain on Jaime’s face, but he wondered if Jaime was really pained by Tywin’s death, or if it was only because he knew his uncle was pained by it. Even if that was only for the latest reason, Kevan was thankful. “Has the small council gathered?”

“Yes, but I wish we could have a conversation before. It’s about Tyrion.”
“I understand Jaime, but first I must attend my duties as Hand of the King. We will have this discussion right after the small council meeting.” Jaime agreed with a sign from his head. “Please follow me."

They walked together to the small council chamber, the ancient one. Kevan had convened the other members of the small council there instead of the Tower of the Hand where Tywin had decided to hold the meetings of the council when he was alive. Kevan didn’t feel he was worthy to do like Tywin and to pretend he was the real power. Tywin was ruling, but Kevan only served the king. He served all his life and he wanted the others to understand what Tywin’s death meant. However, he would also show everyone that he would continue the work of his brother and that they had no more interest in rebelling than when the Old Lion was still alive. Kevan wasn’t his brother, but he had been his advisor for decades and carried out with efficiency Tywin’s decisions. He didn’t have the presence of his brother, but he was just as dangerous.

They were all there when he entered the room with Jaime on his heels. They all presented their condolences for Tywin’s death, even if most of them weren’t sad at all that he was dead. He knew most of them. Varys, the Spider, already Master of Whisperers under the Mad King, always to mistrust with his soft words and mysterious ways. Grand Maester Pycelle, a standing supporter of House Lannister since the very beginning when Tywin was Hand of King Aerys, but Kevan knew he had to beware of him as well. Lord Mace Tyrell, the Lord of Highgarden, always eager to please and demanding, the most powerful ally of House Lannister and the Crown, but also the most dangerous one if they weren’t careful. He was now Master of Ships. Finally, Lord Gyles Rosby, coughing all the time, who told Kevan he hired a master stonecarver to build a great statue of Tywin Lannister to stand eternal vigil beside the Lion Gate. Kevan and Jaime completed the small council. After the rain of words for the late Lord of Casterly Rock was over, the meeting could begin.

“I want you to tell me what’s happening for the war right now. When I left Casterly Rock we still had two ongoing sieges, at Storm’s End and Riverrun. Is there any progress there?"

Kevan stared at both Jaime and Lord Tyrell for an answer. Jaime was the first one to answer.

“From the recent news we had, Riverrun is still holding. The Blackfish is leading the resistance and he’s an experienced soldier. The fortress is very strong, our forces couldn’t breach the walls up to now. The besieged have enough food to hold a very long siege.”

“We will have to take care of that matter very soon. We cannot allow Riverrun to hold our forces for too long. Autumn has come, and it is only a question of time before winter reaches us. What on the side of Storm’s End?”

Lord Mace Tyrell took some time to answer. “The Tyrell army will deliver this great castle to our king very soon.”

“When?”

“Very soon, my Lord Hand. We have built every siege engines necessary. This is only a matter of time.”

“Just make sure the siege doesn’t last years.” Kevan could see Tywin was right about Mace Tyrell. He wasn’t called the Fat Flower for nothing. He didn’t manage to take Storm’s End during the rebellion against the Mad King when Stannis held it, and it seemed this second siege was going to last long. At least, the Tyrell army would be the one to pay for it, not the Lannisters. All the same, he wished he could speak to Randyll Tarly or Lord Redwyne, they would give him more details about the siege and the time it would take before the castle falls. Kevan knew Tywin wanted to grant it to Tommen as soon as he would be of age. Kevan would have to train the boy himself if he didn’t want
Cersei to repeat the mistakes she did with Joffrey.

“Ser Kevan, I have some news of Sandor Clegane.” The Spider was the one talking. “He has been spotted in the Riverlands. My birds tell me the Hound slaughtered five of our soldiers. I believe the phrase *fuck the king* was uttered.”

“Disgraceful”, the Grand Maester muttered. Lord Mace Tyrell’s face showed disgust as well.

Jaime spoke. “We must take care of Sandor Clegane as soon as possible. He was a member of the Kingsguard and he deserted. We cannot allow him to ramble freely this way, but that won’t be easy to get rid of him. My father didn’t choose him to serve as Joffrey’s sworn shield without reason. He is a skilled and dangerous warrior. It would take a lot only to persuade men to try to arrest him.”

Kevan could only agree with Jaime’s words. They couldn’t let traitors go this way, even less when they were murdering their own men. “What would it take to make the common soldier wishful enough to try to kill the Hound?” His question was directed towards Varys.

“Ten silver stags seems a generous bounty.”

“Make it a hundred then, to make sure people understand what it costs to turn against the king.” Kevan knew Tywin would have done this. He didn’t mention there were even more reasons to kill Sandor Clegane because he was a kingsguard who turned against the king he swore to protect. That wouldn’t do when Jaime was present.

“There are also more whispers from the east, my lord. This is about Daenerys Targaryen. She has taken up residence in Meereen. She has conquered the city and rules as its queen.”

Kevan knew the last survivor of the Targaryen family was in Essos. There were rumors she hatched dragon eggs and now had three dragons with her. These were only rumors, and Kevan doubted she really had dragons, but if she conquered the biggest city of Slavor’s Bay, that meant she could become a threat. “How did she conquer the city? Don’t tell me it was with the supposed dragons she had.” He said it on a serious tone so that everyone would understand he wouldn’t believe easily such things.

“She commands an army of Unsullied, my lord. Some eight thousand strong. She has a company of sellswords, the Second Sons. She has two knights advising her, Jorah Mormont and Barristan Selmy. And she has three dragons. I’m afraid they are real according to my little birds. They may be babies for now, but they grow larger every year.”

“Barristan Selmy is at her service?” Jaime’s question startled Kevan. There was fear in his voice. “The man was the best member of the Kingsguard. Even at his age he is one the most skilled warriors of the Seven Kingdoms.” Kevan’s nephew sighed. “We should never have dismissed him.”

“It would seem he took his dismissal from the Kingsguard a bit harder than anticipated,” Varys added.

Tywin had found the dismissal of Barristan Selmy quite stupid, and Kevan had agreed with him at the time. Now it seemed even more stupid than ever. One of the most respected and skilled knights of Westeros joined a woman with a powerful army and three dragons under her orders. The Hand of the King had to dig into this. “May I know who advised the king to send away the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard? And to replace him with who? The Hound? The man wasn’t even a knight. I don’t think this idea came from Joffrey alone.”

They all stood silent for a moment. Finally, it was Lord Varys who spoke. “The idea to appoint
Sandor Clegane to the Kingsguard was from the king. I am afraid however that the idea to dismiss Ser Barristan was first proposed by the queen.”

Kevan sighed. He should have known. Cersei had Jaime named Lord Commander of the Kingsguard this way, and Joffrey accepted since it allowed him to name his pet dog on this renowned institution. How many mistakes did she make ever since she began to rule the city? No wonder Tywin thought she should marry again. Kevan knew another reason to send Cersei away from the capital, but luckily Tywin hadn’t known it. If Tywin had learned the truth, it would have destroyed him.

Pycelle was the next to speak. “Jorah Mormont is spying on her for us.”

The Master of Whisperer deceived the Grand Maester. “No longer. He appears to be fully devoted to her.”

Kevan sighed internally this time. They could have used this Jorah Mormont to get firsthand information about this new threat, but now they couldn’t. However, it also gave them an opportunity. Kevan knew what Tywin would have done, so he knew what he had to do. He spoke to Varys once more.

“Can your little birds find their way into Meereen?”

“Most certainly, my Lord Hand.” That was the answer Kevan wanted. He would take care of that later. For now, they had other matters.

“What is the state of the city? There were a lot of damage during the Battle of Blackwater, and even riots because of the scarcity of food. How are the repairs going on?”

“The repairs are over.” Surprisingly, it was Jaime who spoke. Kevan would have thought it would be Lord Tyrell or Lord Rosby, their positions were far more in link with this. He understood why Jaime intervened with the next words he spoke. “Tyrion saw to the repairs on the Mud Gate and the docks when he was acting as Master of Coin.”

Pycelle coughed before he spoke with disgust. “Uh. A man who murdered his own father.”

Jaime stared at the Grand Maester and retorted. “You said yourself my father died of a heart failure. Furthermore, Tyrion is only accused of murder. His guilt is yet unproved.”

The Grand Maester spluttered. “Lord Commander… I know, I said it, but… but I hadn’t looked close enough. I… I examined Lord Tywin’s body closer later… and I found…”

“That’s enough!” Kevan wouldn’t have such a discussion here. He would speak separately with Jaime and the Grand Maester later. “We have more important matters to attend. I am in personal charge of this trial, this is no business for this council. Furthermore, I forbid everyone to proclaim my nephew’s guilt until the trial is over.” No one dared to reply. “So, what about the state of the finances? Lord Rosby?”

The man coughed all along as he answered. “The Crown is tens of millions in debt. We had to stop the payments on the debts we had towards the Holy Faith and the Iron Bank of Braavos in order to rebuild the royal fleet.”

Kean stared at the man. “Are you the one who made that decision?”

“No, my Lord Hand. We didn’t have enough gold to pay for the construction of the new fleet because of the great number of gold cloaks, so the queen decided to postpone the payments on the
Crown’s debts, and the small council agreed.”

“Start back the payments immediately. The construction of the royal fleet will wait. We cannot risk problems with the Faith or the Iron Bank.”

“My lord,” began Lord Tyrell on an outraged tone. “I already began to build the ten new dromonds to add to the few ships we have actually. Without the money, I cannot build them. Also, I would like to point out my daughter is still waiting impatiently for her marriage with the king to join our houses.”

“Lord Tyrell, I am really sorry about this whole situation. The death of my brother surprised us all and created many complications. The royal wedding will take place exactly in two weeks. You have my word as a Lannister on that, and a Lannister always pays his debts. As for the royal fleet, it will wait until the Master of Coin finds new money to build it.”

Lord Rosby coughed again, perhaps in surprise this time, but he said nothing. It meant he agreed. Lord Tyrell seemed about to protest again, but Kevan spoke before he could. “As for the other matters, the trial for my nephew Tyrion will take place in a few days. We must deal with it before the wedding takes place. Also, I will need your assistance in this, Lord Mace. You are to be judge on this trial, so you won’t have the time to prepare the wedding or to build the royal fleet. You will be more needed to serve the justice. I think this will be all for today. I am tired and in need of rest. You may go, except you Jaime.” This calmed the Lord of Highgarden. He received an honor he already received before, but that was enough to keep him quiet for the moment. Kevan was very careful to make no mention of Lord Rosby however. He didn’t think it would be good to have him as a judge. He feared he may be working for Cersei, and considering her recent and older decisions, Kevan didn’t trust his niece’s choices.

The members of the small council all left until only he and Jaime remained. Kevan turned to face his nephew. “Jaime, I need to know. How did he die?”

Jaime answered slowly. “In his sleep. He didn’t suffer. According to the Grand Maester, his heart just failed during the night.”

Kevan lowered his head. “Was there any funeral?”

“No. I thought it would be better to wait for your arrival. I made arrangements with the Silent Sisters and the Grand Maester to preserve the body. Anyway, Cersei was too occupied to organize a trial against Tyrion and to make the Tyrells angry to care about it.”

Kevan studied Jaime’s face. He was angry at his twin sister, obviously. He thought he knew why. “Why did Cersei arrest Tyrion? Was there anything to make believe he killed Tywin?”

“No, absolutely not. Cersei entered his chamber and didn’t believe me when I told her our father was dead. When Pycelle told us he died of natural causes, she just denied it, declared there would no wedding before his assassin was found and left the room. From what I learned later from other kingsguards, she went with three of them right away to arrest Tyrion and sent him to the black cells. She also immediately confined the Tyrells and everyone else in the castle to their rooms.”

Kevan rolled his eyes. Now he understood why Jaime said in his message that Cersei had gone mad. “You did well to summon me here. However, I would have a very important question to ask you Jaime.” Kevan stared directly in his nephew’s eyes and asked the question on the most serious tone. “Do you think Tywin was assassinated?”

Jaime took some time before he answered. “I think that might not be impossible, though I don’t think
he was killed. Most likely he died in his sleep because of his heart, but his death is very sudden, so that’s not impossible. But I know Tyrion didn’t do it. I would bet my money on someone else if I had to guess who killed my father.”

“Who do you think might have done this?”

Jaime needed some time to answer his question once again. His words surprised Kevan. “Sansa Stark.”

Kevan was confused for a moment. It wasn’t a name he was expecting. “Why do you think she may have killed Tywin?”

“She had more reasons than everyone else to have him killed. After the Twins and the death of her father, not to mention her forced marriage to Tyrion. I think she may have done it. After all, people don’t say that poison is a woman’s weapon for nothing. There is some truth in that. And the Grand Maester now believes Father was poisoned.” He made a break, then added hesitantly. “Also, she tried to escape not long after his death.”

That brought Kevan’s attention. “She tried to escape? Are you sure about that?”

“There are a few people who are watching over her, and they told me that she met someone in the godswood one night, and that this someone wanted to help her to escape. They told me she refused to leave King’s Landing with the man, but the simple fact she went to see him shows that she might have been inclined to accept the offer before, and that she trusted the man. Sadly, the man is dead. He tried to kidnap her when she refused to follow him, and the people protecting her killed him.”

“Who was this man?”

“Ser Dontos Hollard, a drunken knight Joffrey turned into his fool. I don’t think he was acting alone, he seemed too stupid for that. Apparently he said something about someone who was paying him.”

Kevan sighed. “Too bad he’s dead, we might have known who was behind this. Someone has taken an interest in Sansa Stark and tried to use the situation to get her out of the city. She is the key to the North, so other people might want to use her instead of us. We’ll have to watch her closely.”

“We can trust the people protecting her. Some are paid by me, the others are loyal. Anyway, my new sister-in-law doesn’t seem eager to leave the capital now. She spent the last weeks building a strong defense case for Tyrion.”

This information surprised Kevan. Why was Sansa Stark trying to defend Tyrion at his trial? He would have to talk to this young woman tomorrow. For now, he needed some rest. “Thank you Jaime, I will take into consideration what you told me.”

As Kevan raised, Jaime interrupted him. “Are you really going to put Tyrion on trial? He did nothing. Cersei imagines that he killed our father because she hates him.”

“I don’t believe Tyrion killed Tywin me neither, Jaime. Sadly, Tyrion spent more than a month in a cell now. I cannot just release him like this and say it was a mistake. He was arrested by the Queen Regent. We will have a trial in a few days, and if Tyrion is innocent, he will not be declared guilty. I will not allow him to be executed, exiled, or sentenced to anything if he is found innocent. Now please excuse me, but I have other important things to do.”

Kevan left and went into the Tower of the Hand to update on the reports of the Crown. He also wrote a message he sent to Varys. Afterwards, he quickly visited Cersei in her chambers. She looked quite happy when she saw him, but turned very sour when she learned he wouldn’t free her of her
confinement. This confinement was Joffrey’s orders, and Kevan couldn’t go against an order from the king. She tried to argue with him, but Kevan stopped her. He had to lecture her as Tywin would have done, about her mistakes with the Iron Bank and the Faith, her wrong choices of members of the small council, her foolish decisions with the Tyrells and Tyrion right after Tywin’s death. She had shamed House Lannister by arresting Tyrion without any proof, even more since Kevan saw nothing indicating seriously Tyrion as the responsible for Tywin’s death. She then entered a great rage and accused Tyrion of all the horrible things she could imagine, from the death of her mother when he was born to Tywin’s death, accusing him at the same time to try to have her and Joffrey killed. She really looked mad as she threw all her accusations, most of them more stupid than each other. Kevan soon had enough of it and stated firmly the trial would decide if she was right. However, he allowed her to receive all the visitors she would ask before he left.

Kevan slept in the Tower of the Hand, in the bed that belonged to Tywin not long ago. He didn’t feel right in it. He wasn’t supposed to be Hand of the King. He had always been Tywin’s advisor, but was never meant to be the head of House Lannister. Sadly, for now, it seemed he was. He hoped it wouldn’t be for long and that this situation was only a transition. There would a new Lord or Lady of Casterly Rock soon. Who it would be, he had no idea however.

Next morning, Kevan visited Prince Oberyn Martell. Without any surprise, the prince was in a brothel, and Kevan felt quite uncomfortable in such a place. Kevan never visited whores in his whole life, not even before he was married. The memory of his father’s mistress had marked him for life, and now he had a wife and children. He would never shame Dorna for anything in the world. The prince accepted the proposition he made to him very quickly, even though he was quite surprised of it. Kevan had to reinforce the fragile alliance between the Martells and the Crown, so to offer him a seat on the small council and the place of third judge on Tyrion’s trial seemed an appropriate decision. He knew the Red Viper had no love for the Lannisters, but it wouldn’t matter there. Lord Mace Tyrell would vote as Kevan would tell him at the trial, so if Prince Oberyn was decided to vote against Tyrion even if he was innocent, it wouldn’t matter.

Later in the morning, Kevan went to see someone else. As he walked, he thought about Cersei’s accusations against Tyrion. He didn’t know everything that happened while he was fighting in the Riverlands against Robb Stark, so he couldn’t be sure of anything. Could Tyrion have killed Tywin? It seemed so unreal to Kevan. He knew Tywin had no love for Tyrion, and Tyrion probably had no love for his father, but to kill him? It would need something very grave for Tyrion to do such a thing. Lancel told him how Tyrion had fought bravely at the Battle of Blackwater. Kevan couldn’t really bring himself to believe that Tyrion had done such a thing. He couldn’t believe a Lannister killed another Lannister. Jaime didn’t believe Tyrion to be guilty, and Cersei really seemed mad in some way. However, the Grand Maester now seemed to believe Tywin had been poisoned. If Tyrion didn’t do it, who then? His wife? Kevan may have a better opinion of it in a few minutes. He couldn’t visit Tyrion. He was one of his judges after all. To talk with him before the trial could be misinterpreted by the others. He had to keep the respect the other houses had for House Lannister, especially after what Cersei did. However, he would speak with Tyrion’s wife.

When he arrived before the Lady Sansa’s rooms, a woman clad in armor and with a sword at her belt was standing before the door. She was probably the one who brought Jaime back to King’s Landing. “I wish to speak with the Lady Sansa,” he said.

“Ser Kevan.” She gave a little bow with her head. It seemed she already knew who he was. “Please wait a moment. I’ll see if my lady is disposed to receive you.”

She went through the door and came back after a few seconds. “You may enter, ser.” Kevan went into the room.
He didn’t know what he expected from Lady Sansa Stark. His two sons, Martyn and Willem, had died in the hands of a Stark bannerman, so he wasn’t very eager to meet a Stark in person, especially not after Kevan’s family arranged the death of her last remaining siblings and forced her to marry a member of this same family. Kevan had been shocked when he learned about the Red Wedding. These Freys were really animals. Kevan hadn’t been so surprised afterwards when he discovered Tywin was behind this. Tywin always did what was necessary for House Lannister, no matter what it was, but it didn’t stop Kevan from being disgusted by some of his decisions. Still, they were necessary decisions for Tywin, and even if Kevan had some doubts about them, he couldn’t question his brother’s motives. He didn’t blame him. After the follies of his father Tytos, Kevan understood why Tywin took these decisions, as horrible they could be.

When Kevan looked for the first time at the Lady Sansa, he saw a tall young woman with blue eyes and red hair staring at him. She was very beautiful. She could even compete with Cersei. She looked more like a Tully than a Stark. In some way, it was a luck for Tyrion they had her as a hostage. Tywin had failed so many times to find Tyrion a suitable wife. This war at least gave them that opportunity. However, he also remarked something else. Her face was expressionless. She showed no sign of any emotion or feeling when he gazed at her. She stood tall and calm, her hands folded before her. She was looking at Kevan straight into the eyes. With her calm, it was intimidating in some way.

“Ser Kevan.” Her voice didn’t show any emotion either. It was calm, soft, and low. Not an unpleasant voice, but it had no joy nor sadness to it.

“My lady.” Kevan bowed his head lightly. “I hoped I could talk with you.”

“Of course. Do you want to sit?”

“That would be welcomed.”

Kevan sat at the round table before him and Lady Sansa did the same on the opposite side. She continued to fix him with eyes that showed nothing. He couldn’t even see curiosity or interest on her face. He also noticed a golden necklace with a lion on it around her neck. That was quite unsettling. Kevan tried to engage the conversation. “My lady, you surely know I arrived yesterday to perform my duties as Hand of the King. You probably know as well I am to act as main judge for your husband’s trial.”

“Yes, I know. Ser Jaime already informed me of all this. I’m sure you will prove to be an impartial judge.”

Kevan didn’t know if he had to take this as a taunt or as a compliment. The voice and the face of the young lady were so inexpressive that he couldn’t tell. “My lady, I also discussed with my nephew Jaime and he told me you are organizing the defense of your husband.”

“This is my duty as his wife.” No emotion pierced through her voice again. It would be quite difficult for Kevan to build an opinion on this woman. Or was she a girl? She was the young sister of Robb Stark, and the young wolf had been barely eighteen when he died. How old could she be? She probably looked much older than she was in reality, and not only because of her physical appearance. Her demeanour showed a maturity few women had at this age. Kevan remembered Dorna not long after they married. She was more childish back then than this girl was now.

Kevan crossed his fingers on the table. “My lady, I am not your enemy. In fact, I may be your best ally here. My niece, the Queen Regent, wants to see your husband dead and built a strong case against him. The judges she chose weren’t… the best choices for a fair trial. The two judges accompanying me are. I am not here to sentence your husband to die, but to determine if he really
murdered his father. If the testimonies cannot prove he is guilty, I won’t declare him guilty.”

“So you’re telling you will be the one to judge my lord husband while the other judges do what you tell them to. I hope you don’t have prejudices against Lord Tyrion.”

Kevan was exasperated by this statement. “I have nothing against Tyrion, my lady. I can’t pretend I have ever been close to him, but he is a member of my family. If you asked me right now if he was guilty, I would say no, but he was accused by the Queen Regent, and we need a trial for that. I will hear both of them and decide with what they give me as proofs, but I will not sentence Tyrion without solid proof of his guilt.”

Lady Sansa continued to stare at him without blinking. Her face was a mask of impassivity. How could she hold this way all the time? Kevan continued. It was time for him to ask her the questions he came for. “My lady, I would like to have your opinion about all of this. You said that you were arranging your husband’s defense because it was your duty. Do you really think he is innocent?”

“I don’t believe he is innocent. I KNOW he is innocent.” This time Kevan thought he perceived a spark of anger in her voice.

“How can you be so sure, my lady?”

“I simply know it.” She stared defiantly at Kevan, and that unsettled him again.

“Do you have any idea who could have done it then, if we admit my brother was assassinated? I have to confess I don’t even know for sure if he died of natural or unnatural causes.” Kevan wanted to see how she would react to the bait he set for her.

“I don’t know. Many people had reasons to kill Lord Tywin. We make a lot of enemies when we are here in King’s Landing, even more when we are Hand of the King. My own father learned it at his expenses, just like my lord husband.”

That wasn’t the answer Kevan expected. He thought she would use his uncertainty to support the hypothesis Tywin died of natural causes, but she didn’t. She was a Stark and honor mattered very much in this family. Perhaps she really said what she thought. He rose from his seat. “I see. I thank you for the time you gave me, my lady, but my duties await me. I would like you to send me the names of the people who will testify for my nephew as soon as possible. Do you allow me to leave?”

“I don’t think you need my permission. I’ll send you the names as soon as possible.” Kevan made a little bow with his head and walked away. However, before he could leave the room, he heard the young lady speak to him. “When Tyrion was arrested I was with him in this room.” Kevan turns to face the woman. “We were sleeping together in the early morning when the queen erupted with three guards. One of them knocked out my husband with a punch at the head. He then slapped me on the cheek and brought Tyrion, bleeding, to the black cells, without a word of explanation. The queen remained with the two other guards in the room and ransacked it. They gave me no more explanation about what was going on. Your niece only told me that I would be a widow very soon, and then left while her two men continued to search everywhere for who knows what. I only learned what happened hours later when my husband’s squire came with my dinner in the evening. Don’t be surprised if I don’t trust every Lannister.”

Kevan stayed still a moment after Lady Sansa was done with her tale. He didn’t know about this. He knew Cersei arrested Tyrion immediately after she discovered Tywin’s death, but he didn’t know about these details. He would have to inquire on this. “I’m sorry, my lady. I am not my niece.” He left without another word.
As Kevan walked to the Tower of the Hand, he thought about his conversation with the Lady Sansa, especially about the things she told him right before he left her rooms. If what she said was true, then Cersei was really to be watched. When she would come out of confinement, he would need his men to keep an eye on her. He couldn’t allow things like this to happen. He also had to discover which guard hit Tyrion and Lady Sansa. However, it was the lady’s behaviour as she talked about it that puzzled Kevan. She had seemed angry, insulted as well, no surprise in that, but as Kevan thought about it something stood out from the few things she told him. She hadn’t been outraged only by the way she was treated, but most of all by the way Tyrion was treated. She was organizing his defense for the trial. She was persuaded he was innocent of this crime. There was a determination in her, a sureness he didn’t see in many women, and it was oriented toward Tyrion. Could it be possible that she cared for him? She said she was sleeping with Tyrion when he was arrested, which was strange considering Kevan already knew, by Tywin’s letters and the information he collected on the road and here since he arrived, that Tyrion’s marriage was unconsummated. Kevan really didn’t know what to think about the young lady. Could it be possible she killed Tywin? Kevan understood now why Jaime suspected her. He rarely saw people who displayed so few emotions. However, there was no proof about her or Tyrion’s guilt. Kevan would make his opinion about it at the trial once he would have all the facts before him. This meant he would get fixed in four days when the trial would begin. He hoped he wouldn’t have to sentence his own nephew to death. He hoped Tyrion didn’t kill Tywin.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: another Hand of the King
Davos I

Chapter Notes

We take a look in Davos's mind now.

I know there may be some people who find this chapter useless (like the one with Daenerys) because they are mainly scenes from the TV show with a few alterations after Tywin’s death, but that don’t change much to their storylines. These chapters are in some way some sort of preludes to introduce these characters later in the story. There will be a point where Daenerys, Davos, Jon, Arya, Bran, Melisandre, Yara, Sam... will join the story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Davos I

“Your Grace, if you’d like to sit, I’m sure that…”

“We’ve been here since midday.”

His king was perambulating in the great hall. His footsteps were echoing on the marble of the floor and the walls. Davos knew his Grace had every right to be unsatisfied. Davos convinced his king to accompany him to Braavos in order to get a loan from the Iron Bank. They needed the loan, or else Stannis Baratheon would never sit on the Iron Throne. Davos would have travelled all the way to Braavos alone, but they had a better chance to get something from these bankers if the king came himself. They needed the money to buy weapons, ships, to hire pirates and sellswords. However, they had to wait if they were to get it. The Iron Bank of Braavos didn’t comply with orders of the kings of Westeros, whoever they were. Furthermore, since King Stannis’s position wasn’t good, they probably felt no emergency to meet him. So, they had to wait, and the king grew impatient.

He was growing more impatient than ever these last months, and he was also angry at Davos for freeing the boy, Gendry. Davos had no choice. To unite Seven Kingdoms with blood magic was evil, and King Stannis wasn’t an evil man. As King of Westeros, it was the duty of Stannis Baratheon to protect his people. A king who didn’t protect his people was no king, and so if Stannis had sacrificed the bastard boy, he would have been no king at all. Davos did it for Stannis. He always told the truth to his king, even if it was hard. It was better to tell hard truths than pleasant lies. The boy was innocent, and it would have been unfair to kill him. He understood that killing a man for his crimes could be necessary for justice, but there would have been no justice in killing Gendry. That would have been murder. Davos deserved the loss of his phalanxes for his years of smuggling. It had been a small price for his knighthood and a better life for his son and his wife, but the boy had done nothing wrong. Davos did what was necessary. Stannis probably didn’t realize it, but Davos saved him by freeing Gendry against his will. He served his king, and he saved an innocent boy. Now, he served Stannis again and was trying to get him his army.

“You need someone to rebuild your army for you, someone to convince this lord and that lord to fight for you, to bring sellswords and pirates to your side.” These were the words Davos told Stannis when he revealed him the threat against the Wall. Unexpectedly, the red woman convinced Stannis
to not execute him, stating Davos had a part to play in the war to come. If there was something Davos hadn’t expected, it was this. He knew Melisandre had real powers, he saw some of them with his own eyes. The woman was so mysterious, the former smuggler still didn’t know what to make of her and mistrusted her, but he had to admit Stannis was right, he had been saved by this red god he mocked. Or at least, he was saved by a woman who believed she was serving this god. He wouldn’t trust Melisandre all the same. She was a danger, and if he promised he wouldn’t do anything against her, Stannis wouldn’t stop Davos from speaking and warning against her.

“Easterners have a different sense of time, I’ve often found. Once I was waiting for Salladhor Saan here in Braavos. Together we were going to run three shiploads of the finest…”

Davos tried to tell one of his smuggler’s stories to spend time, perhaps more for himself than for the king, but the king made it quite obvious with a single stare that he wasn’t interested to hear it. Davos should have known better. Right now he wouldn’t have disdained the company of someone else. The king was good for leading armies, but not for conversations. He wished Salladhor Saan was here, but Davos had the impression the pirate lord was somewhere much more interesting for him than the Iron Bank. A place that King Stannis wouldn’t have approved, and that Davos didn’t approve either, but Salladhor was his friend, and Davos was more amused by this fact about his friend than anything else. More funny even had been the dumbfounded reaction of his friend when Davos revealed to him there was no brothel on Dragonstone. King Stannis was probably the only king to allow no such establishments on his lands. Davos hoped he wouldn’t do the same to all Westeros when he would seize the Seven Kingdoms, or else every sailor in the world would refuse to make any trip to King’s Landing, Oldtown, Lannister, White Harbor, Gulltown or the Iron Islands. That would put an end to the smugglers, but also to legal trade. No sailor wanted to go somewhere there were no whores.

Finally, the massive golden doors behind the massive marble table opened and allowed three men to enter. They sat at the three cushioned chairs behind the table. They wore usual clothes for Braavosi rich men. Davos only recognized one of them, Tycho Nestoris, at the center. He had met him once, a long time ago, when he was still a smuggler, to get a loan for a rich merchant of Braavos. The loan back then had been to give Davos a ship in order to bring special spices from Meereen. A dangerous trip that nearly cost Davos his life, and the life of the merchant, if Davos hadn’t come back with the wares. But he did, the merchant was able to pay the Iron Bank its due, and the merchant made money. If he hadn’t, the Iron Bank would have gotten its due all the same. One way or another, they always get their money back.

This time, however, the stake was much higher. Davos would have to be very careful in the negotiations to come. “Welcome to the Iron Bank. Please, sit.” Nestoris invited them to take the marble seats right before them. Davos waited for his king to sit first. He feared how he may react to this. King Stannis ordered the respect that was owed to him as Lord of the Seven Kingdoms in all circumstances, but here he couldn’t. Before the Iron Bank, he was only someone seeking a loan like any other. Davos had explained it to his king on the way to Braavos so he may not be insulted by the way the bankers would act with him, but Davos knew he was insulted. No wonder, since they waited for two hours in this hall after a long journey through the Narrow Sea. The king took his time to sit and shot a stern look at Davos as he did so. Davos hoped his king would make no mistake. However, he also feared that he may make mistakes himself.

“What can we do for you, Lord Stannis?”

Davos answered to Tycho Nestoris before the king could. “This is Stannis of the House Baratheon, King of the Andals and the First Men, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm.” Nestoris fixed Davos with stern eyes, without a hint of emotion, and moved his arm to invite him to sit as well. Davos complied.
The Iron Throne is currently occupied by Joffrey of the House Baratheon, King of the Andals and the First Men, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm.” Nestoris ended his words with a little smile. King Stannis chose this moment to speak.

“He shares no blood with me. He is a bastard born of incest. As was his brother before him.”

“Yes, we have heard this story.”

“It’s not a story. It’s the truth.” Davos didn’t like the direction the conversation was heading. It wouldn’t help them to discuss about questions of legitimacy. The Iron Bank wasn’t interested by these things.

“The king’s grandfather tells a different story. A story about a jealous uncle whose attempts to usurp the throne from the rightful king cost the Seven Kingdoms dearly in blood and gold.”

“Gold you loaned him,” Davos’s king countered.

“And you feel your blood gives you a claim on our gold?”

“More than any man living.”

That wasn’t good. Davos warned King Stannis about it. We couldn’t claim anything from the Iron Bank. It wasn’t blood right that decided the Iron Bank to lend you money or not, it was your ability to pay them back. Stannis would never convince the bankers to grant him any loan by speaking this way. Davos’s thoughts were confirmed by the next words of Tycho Nestoris.

“Across the Narrow Sea, your books are filled with words like usurper and madman and blood right. Here, our books are filled with numbers. We prefer the stories they tell. More plain. Less open to interpretation.” Tycho Nestoris granted them another one of his little smiles. He then turned to Stannis. “How many fighting men remain loyal to you?”

“Four thousand,” Stannis replied.

“And how many ships do you have? The ones still afloat, Ser Davos, not at the bottom of Blackwater Bay.”

The mention of the battle brought back painful memories to Davos. The burning of hundreds of ships with their crew. Brave men who had wives, children, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, cousins, friends, even lovers who would never see them again. A hell of wildfire burning everything. A green fire that nothing could extinguish, not even water. His son, Matthos, who died in front of his own eyes. Davos gulped before he answered.

“Thirty-two.”

“And how much wheat and barley and beef and pork do you produce on Dragonstone to feed your four thousand men on your thirty-two ships?”

After a moment, the king answered with the truth, as he always did. “None.”

“You can see why these numbers seem unlikely to add up to a happy ending from our perspective. I’m afraid we must respectfully decline your request. But we thank you for paying us the honor of your visit.”

Tycho Nestoris was always smiling as he talked. Davos couldn’t blame the Iron Bank. Many of his friends from the time he was a smuggler only cared about money as well. If they didn’t see a profit to
something, they wouldn’t contribute. Right now, however, it was the look King Stannis gave to him that made him fear the worse. Davos knew what it meant. He was running out of time as much as Stannis was running out of time if he didn’t want to become a page in the history book of someone else. He had to do something, to convince these bankers with their own arguments, with the only reasons that could convince them. He had to provide them a way to get their money back, to show them Stannis was the best investment for them. Stannis raised from his seat, and Davos did the same, but as his king was heading to the window, Davos directed his attention to the three men sitting in front of him.

“My lord,” he began, addressing Tycho Nestoris.

“I’m not a lord, Ser Davos Seaworth. You would not be either here. In Braavos, thieves are not rewarded with titles.”

Davos sighed internally at Nestoris’s comment. As usual, people saw him as a thief. There was a difference between stealing, and selling what others stole. “Well, strictly speaking, I didn’t do the thieving. That would be the pirates. I just moved what they stole from one place to another.” Davos took off his glove from his right hand and showed it to the bankers. The missing phalanxes seemed to surprise them. For the first time in the meeting, Tycho Nestoris didn’t maintain his patronizing attitude. “This is the payment that was demanded by King Stannis for my crimes. I consider it an honest accounting. He’s an honest man and he’s your best chance to get back the money you’ve sunk into Westeros. Which is a lot, I imagine. Wars are expansive.”

“The war is over,” the banker observed.

“As long as Stannis lives, the war is not over. Who’s the real power in King’s Landing?”

“Ser Davos…” Nestoris began to rise, but Davos stopped him.

“Humor me.”

The bankers remained silent for a moment. Davos knew why, so he explained what he knew the bankers already knew. “You don’t know. No one is in command anymore in King’s Landing. Tywin Lannister was the real power, and Tywin Lannister is dead, killed by his own son, the Imp, his Master of Coin. Who will pay you back now? Who will you back? Joffrey Baratheon, a bastard born of incest, who is as mad as the Mad King was? Cersei Lannister, a queen whose people despise and have no respect for her? Jaime Lannister, a man best known for killing the king he was sworn to protect? Tyrion Lannister, the Imp, who’s rotting into a cell and most likely will be executed before the next moon? Who do you back now?”

“This problem is not of your concern,” answered Nestoris, again with a smirk.

“Begging your pardon, I think this is a problem for all of us. There’s only one reliable leader left in Westeros. Stannis.” Davos pointed to his king who was still looking in another direction. “He’s got the birthright. He’s in his prime. He’s a tried and tested battle commander. And he doesn’t just talk about paying people back, he does it.”

Davos showed again his hand, now covered again with a glove, to emphasize his words. He saw Tycho Nestoris and the other bankers look at Stannis with cold eyes. Davos hoped it was enough to convince them. Davos was honest with these bankers, he believed his words. The Lannisters would never be able to pay back the Iron Bank without Tywin Lannister. Among all of them, there was only the Imp that Davos believed eventually capable of giving the Iron Bank its due. He and Tywin Lannister had defeated Stannis at Blackwater together, and he had held a corrupted and starving city on the brink of insurgence for months. Davos didn’t think Tywin Lannister would have named him
Master of Coin if he didn’t have certain capabilities. However, he had killed his father and would be executed very soon. If the Iron Bank wanted its gold back, they needed Stannis as much as Stannis needed them.

Finally, after a moment, one of the two other bankers, who remained silent for the whole meeting up to now, spoke. “You told us the truth, Ser Davos. You are right, Tywin Lannister would have paid us back, but we have no guarantee that his son, his daughter, or his grandson will. In fact, after his death, one of the first decisions of the Queen Regent was to stop the payments the Crown owes us.” Davos couldn’t believe what he heard. So soon? “If King Stannis is really able to pay us back…”

“He will. As soon as he takes the Iron Throne. But King Stannis will not be able to take the Iron Throne without gold. If you don’t lend him money right now, you may never see your gold back.” He cut the banker and put weight to make them understand they needed to support Stannis immediately, or else they could lose everything.

Tycho Nestoris smiled at the comment. “The Iron Bank will have its due, one way or another, but King Stannis, as you call him, may be a good way to get it back. How much do you need?”

Davos and Stannis, but mostly Davos (the king wasn’t good for negotiations), spent the next two hours discussing with the representatives of the Iron Bank. When finally they reached an agreement, King Stannis disposed immediately of five hundred thousand golden dragons, and would be able to obtain the same amount later when he would have seized one of the Seven Kingdoms or King’s Landing. Davos was able to lower the interest rate from 20% to 10%, convincing the Iron Bank that the capacity of Westeros to pay higher rates wasn’t certain with winter coming and the many devastated lands.

When they left the Iron Bank, they had more than enough gold to make their next move. The war was about to start again. Davos went to see Salladhor Saan and without surprise, his friend was in a brothel.

Chapter End Notes

With Tywin dead, the Iron Bank has high doubts about the hability of the Crown to pay its debts. And you can see now how Cersei’s decisions have dire consequences and only confirm their worries.

Please review

Next chapter: the trial begins
Sansa VIII

Chapter Notes

Tyrion’s trial begins. Remember he is not accused of Joffrey's murder, but of attempt of murder against Joffrey AND the murder of Tywin. And if Tywin isn't there to judge him, Joffrey is still alive and we know what kind of justice he gives.

The trial is covering seven chapters and this is the first one. A lot of things are going to happen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

SANSA VIII

Mira was brushing her hair. It was the beginning of the afternoon, so normally Sansa wouldn’t have her hair brushed at this hour, but this day was different. In less than an hour, Tyrion’s trial would begin. Uncertainty and anxiety filled Sansa’s head and body. She was afraid. Afraid for Tyrion, and afraid for her. If Tyrion was sentenced to death, things would turn worse for Sansa than they ever were. If Tyrion was dead, she would be forced to marry another Lannister, and who knew what he might do to her. Tyrion was kind, he never mistreated her, showed her more respect than everyone else ever did since her father died. She didn’t want him to die. He didn’t deserve it. Sansa knew he was innocent of the crimes Cersei accused him. She hoped the judges would believe it, and if they believed it, that they would be prone to exonerate her husband.

Mira put down the brush. “Do you want to wear any jewel, my lady?”

“No. I’ll be alright like this.” Sansa played a little with her necklace. She only took it off when she took a bath now.

Mira stood away from the glass. Sansa looked at her image. She had to make a good impression at the trial, but she knew it counted for little in the outcome. Everything would depend on the testimonies on both sides, and the willingness of the judges to spare or sentence Tyrion. She didn’t know what to expect of the judges. Ser Kevan Lannister had come to visit her when he arrived in King’s Landing a few days ago. The knight didn’t seem as ruthless as Tyrion’s father, he even seemed sincere when he said he would judge Tyrion fairly. Tyrion was the one who had the idea to call him here, so perhaps he really trusted his uncle. However, Sansa couldn’t be sure of anything. Tyrion might have done this in despair and only because Ser Kevan was a little bit better than his sister. It wasn’t difficult to find someone better than the Queen Regent. Furthermore, she knew Ser Kevan had been Lord Tywin’s main advisor for many years, and she wasn’t ready to trust someone who advised the man behind the slaughtering of her family. As for Lord Mace Tyrell and Prince Oberyn Martell, she didn’t think the first would have any favorable prejudice toward Tyrion, and the second would surely want to see him dead for the atrocities the Lannisters committed against the Martells during the last rebellion. She could only hope to convince Ser Kevan and Lord Mace.

Sansa looked at Mira. The Forrester had become Sansa’s closest friend these last weeks, taking Shae’s place as her confident. Mira came from the North and her situation was so much like Sansa’s that she felt a lot of sympathy for the girl. Sansa could also speak of things she had never been able
to talk about with Shae or Margaery. With Mira she could talk freely about the North, and she had someone who could really understand her. Mira was also an ally in Sansa’s fight to get Tyrion free. Both of them needed Tyrion alive, Mira for her family, Sansa for herself. She thought she understood better now why Tyrion had tried to help Mira. She hadn’t cared about it after her family’s death, but now she realized Tyrion had been ashamed by what his family did at the Twins. Perhaps it had been an attempt to mend the horrors his family was responsible for. She remembered Margaery’s words. *I think he has nothing to do with it. He looks ashamed by what his family has done, he has bad relationships with his father and his sister, he obviously hates Joffrey, and he never caused you any harm.* And she remembered as well the words he told her not long after. *What happened to your family was a terrible crime. I didn’t know your brother. He seemed like a good man, but I didn’t know him. Your mother, on the other hand, I admired her. She wanted to have me executed, but I admired her. She was a strong woman. And she was fierce when it came to protecting her children.*

The memory nearly brought tears to her eyes.

“My lady, we should go now. The trial will start very soon.”

Mira was right. Sansa restrained herself and pushed back her tears inside. She had to be strong today. She couldn’t allow herself to look weak. If she wanted to save Tyrion, she had to stay focused on the trial and find a way to have him cleared of all charges. She rose from her chair.

“Let’s go then.” Mira followed on her heels.

Outside the door, Brienne was waiting for them. They walked in silence to the Great Hall where the trial was to take place. No one had anything to say. They had already talked about this day long enough before, they all knew what they had to do for the trial. Sansa’s heart was pounding in her chest. She wondered if Brienne and Mira could hear it. When they got close enough of the Throne Room, Sansa heard someone whispering on her right.

“Mira.”

Sansa turned to face the person. It was a girl with brown hair and wearing Reach clothes. She had seen her before. She was one of Margaery’s handmaidens. Sansa believed her name was Sera. She was Mira’s friend.

“Sera.” Mira greeted her politely. Her friend told Sansa she had to cut her links with Sera after everything that happened, on Sera’s wishes moreover, but it was strange in this case that Margaery’s handmaiden wanted to speak with Mira.

“My lady.” Sera bowed before Sansa. “Mira, I need to talk to you, it’s very important. Can I, Lady Sansa? It will only take a few minutes.”

Mira looked to Sansa with the question on her face. The other girl looked distressed. Sansa gave her leave. “Very well. Join us on the benches when you’re done.”

Mira went away with Sera and Sansa continued toward the doors. People were entering to assist the trial as if it was a tournament. She heard some making wagers on the verdict. She also heard some whispers on her as she walked. *Imp’s wife. Traitor’s daughter. Maiden wife.* Sansa ignored them. It was no use to take care of what they said. She took a place with Brienne on the benches, in the middle of the right side of the Iron Throne. There were many conversations around she couldn’t understand, but she felt a few eyes on her. She was the wife of the man who was accused of murdering his own father and attempting to murder the king. The accusations were untrue, but people were mocking her all the same. They didn’t know the truth. She would have to show them the truth.
She saw Ser Kevan standing next to the Iron Throne. She also saw Margaery, Ser Loras, their father and Lady Olenna discussing before the dais. She caught Margaery’s eyes and her friend gave her a smile. She also saw Prince Oberyn, his arm around the waist of a woman dressed even more lightly than Margaery. She was probably his paramour. Cersei sat in her own chair, staring right in front of her. That might be the first time she was allowed out of her rooms for weeks. The thought brought a quick smile upon Sansa’s face. Joffrey was nowhere to be seen. With some luck, he decided to not attend the trial. Sansa also spotted Bronn on the other side of the room. She had agreed with him and Brienne that they would both ensure her safety and Tyrion’s safety during the trial, but they weren’t to be seen together. It could attract too much attention. Mira joined her and Brienne at this moment. Sansa saw that her face was quite gloomy, but before she could ask her anything, a voice she always feared thundered in the Throne Room.

“OK, let’s get over with this.” Joffrey was there. He sat on the Iron Throne, looking bored and impatient to get over with this. Sansa feared the worst for a time. What if he decided to judge Tyrion himself? Tyrion had no chance in this case, and Sansa neither. She made a silent prayer to the Mother. Have mercy on us all.

Ser Kevan spoke at this moment. “My lords, my ladies, take your place. The trial will begin very soon.” People rushed to take a place on the several benches in the room. There were too many people and not enough places. One of the benches toppled. Finally, the City Watch had to escort outside the people there was no place for and closed the doors. It took a few minutes to make sure everything was in order. When everyone was seated, they were tighter than in the streets of King’s Landing.

After some time, the doors opened again. Everyone went silent as Ser Jaime entered. Behind him was Tyrion, flanked by two gold cloaks. He seemed in good health, his clothes were clean and in good state, and he was well shaven. She looked at him, waiting for him to return her gaze. He did it after some time, and gave her a thin smile. Sansa returned one to him. At least, he seemed alright for now. Sansa realized as he approached the box of the accused that he wore shackles around his wrists. Sansa was furious about it. As if Tyrion represented a threat. He was innocent furthermore. Anyway, if they really wanted him to represent no threat, they should have gagged him. His tongue was much more dangerous than his hands. She heard someone shouting “Kinslayer” in the crowd. The gold cloaks attached Tyrion’s chains to the box and each of them went to stand guard before one of the two rows of benches, facing the king. Ser Jaime went to the left of the throne.

After a moment, Joffrey raised from the throne, and everyone followed him. Sansa, Mira and Brienne had to do the same, though Sansa didn’t like to imitate Joffrey. Her former betrothed started to speak. “I, Joffrey of the House Baratheon, First of my Name, King of the Andals, the First Men, and the Rhoylnars, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm, do hereby recuse myself from this trial. Kevan of the House Lannister, Hand of the King, will sit as judge in my stead. And with him Prince Oberyn of the House Martell and Lord Mace of the House Tyrell. Once the accused is found guilty, bring me his head.”

At least he didn’t order to bring him his head immediately. Sansa felt very much relieved when Joffrey left the room with two kingsguards. Ser Kevan sat on the Iron Throne, while Lord Mace Tyrell sat on his left and Prince Oberyn on his right. Everyone sat down as they did. The trial began.

“Tyrion of the House Lannister,” started Ser Kevan. “You stand accused by the Queen Regent of the murder of your father, Tywin Lannister, the Lord of Casterly Rock and the Hand of the King. You are also accused of attempt of murder against the king. How do you plead to these accusations?”

“Not guilty.” Tyrion talked as if he was bored by all this.
“Do you have any idea who might have killed your father then?”

“None. I believe we’re not even sure he was killed.”

Tyrion wasn’t wrong about this. Jaime Lannister didn’t believe Lord Tywin was assassinated. This trial was Cersei’s doing, nothing more. His uncle didn’t seem to disagree with him but he said nothing.

“We will start the trial now. The accusation will call its witnesses first, then the defense will call his own. Both the accusation and the defense will have the right to a final speech once the testimonies will be over. The Crown may call its first witness.”

Sansa was already aware of the way the trial would take place. With the number of testimonies, it would surely take more than a single day to go through all of it. First, they would have to listen to Cersei’s witnesses. Sansa didn’t know who would testify against Tyrion, except two kingsguards, but at least the fact Cersei’s witnesses would go first may allow her to adjust her own testimonies afterwards.

Ser Meryn Trant was the first to testify for the Crown, and his testimony filled Sansa with rage. He began to talk about the day Joffrey caused a riot. Of course, he didn’t say Joffrey caused the riot. “Once we’d got King Joffrey safely away from the mob, the Imp rounded on him. He slapped the king across the face and called him a vicious idiot and a fool.” Sansa didn’t know if Tyrion really did it, but if he did she could only agree with his words. “It wasn’t the first time the Imp threatened Joffrey. Right here in this Throne Room, he marched up those steps and called our king a halfwit. Compared his Grace to the Mad King and suggested he’d meet the same fate. And when I spoke in the king’s defense, he threatened to have me killed.”

“Oh, why don’t you tell them what Joffrey was doing? Pointing a loaded crossbow at the Lady Sansa Stark while you tore at her clothes and beat her.” Tyrion decided to speak at this moment, telling the truth Sansa wished herself to shout in this moment.

“Silence!” Ser Kevan shouted. “You will not speak unless call upon, Tyrion. If you want to present a different version of this you will wait for your own time to speak. You’re dismissed, Ser Meryn.”

There was nothing she and Tyrion could do for now. Ser Meryn wasn’t entirely false, but he used words taken away from their context. Tyrion had never meant those words as a threat for Joffrey, more as a lesson. He had protected her this day, and now his sister was using it against him. Sansa was boiling in anger at Ser Meryn, but his testimony had no value. She could easily destroy it with her own witnesses later.

Ser Boros Blount came next. Sansa hated him even more than Ser Meryn. He was crueler. He told the same tale than his fellow companion, adding that Tyrion didn’t only slap Joffrey, but also kicked him, and that the king was covered with bruises when they brought him back to the Red Keep. Sansa knew that if Joffrey had some bruises, he had much less than the ones she had received at this occasion. She could destroy Ser Blount’s testimony as well.

Next came two men called Osfryd and Osney Kettleblack, Ser Osmund’s brothers. They talked about a supper Tyrion had with Cersei not long before the Battle of Blackwater when he threatened to hurt her one day. Afterwards came Ser Osmund who stated supposed words Joffrey told him on the day he was given his white cloak. “Good Ser Osmund, guard me and my father well, for my uncle loves us not. He means to be king in my place.”

Tyrion scoffed at this testimony, and Sansa would have done the same if she wasn’t so used to hide her true feelings behind courtesies. This testimony was so stupid. Even Joffrey wasn’t so stupid to
believe something like that. The whole accusation was a farce.

Grand Maester Pycelle was the next one to speak. He was holding several sheets in his hands and began to enumerate a long list of names Sansa never heard, except for the essence of nightshade. After a moment, Oberyn Martell stopped him.

“I think you have made your point, Grand Maester. You have a lot of poison in your store.”

“Had, Prince Oberyn. My stores were plundered.”

“By whom?” asked Ser Kevan.

“By the accused, Tyrion Lannister, after he had me wrongfully imprisoned. Furthermore, a few weeks before Lord Tywin’s death, he came to me asking for essence of nightshade, saying it was for his wife who had problems to sleep. He took enough to kill a man.”

Sansa knew Tyrion had imprisoned the Grand Maester while he was Hand of the King, but she knew nothing about the stealing of his stores. As for the essence of nightshade, Tyrion really took some to help her sleep, but the little vial was still next to her bed, nearly unused. It was almost completely full. Tyrion couldn’t have used it to poison his father.

“Grand Maester, you examined Lord Tywin’s corpse. Was it without question poison that killed him?” asked Ser Kevan.

“Without question.”

“What poison was used to kill him?” This question came from Prince Oberyn.

The Grand Maester seemed to be looking for his words for a moment. “Tears of Lys.”

Sansa never heard that name before. Strangely, Prince Oberyn asked a very specific question then. “Were his belly and his bowels damaged? Was there an insufferable smell coming from Lord Tywin’s body?” The Grand Maester looked lost for a moment and Sansa too, until Prince Oberyn spoke again. “These are the effects of the tears of Lys. If he was poisoned by this, that’s what you should have observed. Did you observe it?”

The Grand Maester took some time to answer again. “Yes, of course.” He didn’t seem so certain from what Sansa could say. She had some doubts that he wasn’t saying the truth. In fact, she didn’t believe him at all. Cersei’s witnesses obviously all lied or distorted the truth. With his uncertain ways of speaking, she wasn’t about to believe the Grand Maester. Sadly, some may believe him, perhaps Lord Tyrell, or even Ser Kevan. That wasn’t good.

Cersei testified after the Grand Maester. She wore a black gown to show she was mourning her father. She told the tale about a dinner she had with Tyrion. She repeated words Tyrion supposedly told her at this moment. “I will hurt you for this. A day will come when you think you are safe and happy and your joy will turn to ashes in your mouth and you will know the debt is paid.”

“Your own brother said this to you?” It was the first time Lord Tyrell spoke since the beginning of the trial.

“Shortly before the Battle of Blackwater Bay. I confronted him about his plans to put Joffrey on the front lines, and his attempt to assume the function of Hand of the King permanently. He was trying to prevent our father from coming back to the city to save it against Stannis. He intercepted the messages I was trying to send him and imprisoned the Grand Maester when he tried to do his duty. I finally managed to send a rider to my father to inform him about what was going on and he came to
save us just in time. When the attack came, Joffrey insisted on remaining at the battlements. He believed his presence would inspire the troops."

Sansa felt anger rising in her again. That was a disgusting lie. Joffrey had left the battlements like a coward as soon as his mother asked him to. When Lancel Lannister tried to convince the queen to send him back, she hit him right where he had been injured by an arrow. It was Tyrion who saved the city, and she was lying about it in front of the whole court, just like she lied about Sansa’s father. That was unfair. Sansa wanted to shout out the whole truth right now, but she refrained herself. She would have her time to speak.

Prince Oberyn asked a question to Cersei at this moment. “Tyrion said, and you will know the debt is paid. What debt?”

Sansa was surprised by Prince Oberyn’s behavior. Among the three judges, he seemed to be the more skeptical one about Cersei’s witnesses. Why? He hated the Lannisters, what did he have to gain from questioning her witnesses? Tyrion’s innocence? This confused Sansa.

“I discovered he’d been keeping whores in the Tower of the Hand. I asked him to confine his salacious acts to the brothel where such behavior belongs. He wasn’t pleased.”

“Thank you, your Grace, for the courage of your testimony.”

Sansa wanted to laugh at Margaery’s father statement. There was no courage in all this. This testimony was a lie just like the others. Sansa didn’t believe what Cersei said. Tyrion wouldn’t do such threats without good reasons. She knew him enough to be sure about that. If he really said that to Cersei, that was because she had done something really horrible. If she didn’t, he would never have said it. In both cases, Cersei was lying, as always. She always lied. What a hypocrite woman she was, crying when Sansa knew she was happy to talk against Tyrion. She remembered how she told her once that tears were among a wife’s best weapons. However, Cersei wasn’t the only one who could use such things to persuade other people.

Cersei went back to her chair on the dais. Lord Varys was the next to testify. Sansa had wondered on which side Varys was, but after his testimony she had a strong impression he was serving Cersei, though she still had some doubts. *You’re not looking at the right place, Lady Sansa. You must search the army of wolves.* The eunuch’s words came back to her mind. Why did he tell her that?

Varys’s testimony did more damage to Tyrion than all the other ones. He seemed to know everything that was going on in the Red Keep, everywhere, every time. He confirmed many facts of the other testimonies. He confirmed that Tyrion slapped Joffrey after the riot, he confirmed the insults he used against the king, he confirmed his words when he saved Sansa from Ser Meryn (without mentioning her beating of course), he confirmed Tyrion’s words to Cersei during the dinner, even adding that he said at this moment Joffrey’s place wasn’t on the throne. He confirmed that it was Tyrion’s plan to have Joffrey on the battlements during the battle. He confirmed that Tyrion sent no request of help to his father while he was Hand of the King. He mentioned a conversation when Tyrion mentioned he liked to be Hand of the King and wanted to stay at his office. He confirmed the arrest of Grand Maester Pycelle, and confirmed that Tyrion remained in the chambers of the maester for some time after the maester was brought to the black cells by two of his men. He even confirmed that Tyrion had been keeping a whore in his personal service in the Tower of the Hand when he was acting Hand. Sansa didn’t know why, but she didn’t feel right for a moment, picturing Tyrion with another woman. She didn’t like the thought. She banned it from her mind. It was before Tyrion married her anyway. However, the two last facts he mentioned were the ones to catch Sansa’s attention the most.

Varys began to talk about a threat Tyrion made against Joffrey during a meeting of the small council.
“Do you remember the precise nature of this threat?” Lord Tyrell asked him.

“I’m afraid I do, my lord. He said, *Perhaps you should speak more softly to me, then. Monsters are dangerous and just now kings are dying like flies.*”

“And he said this to you at a meeting of the small council?”

“Yes. After we received word of Robb Stark’s death.” Sansa’s attention was caught by this. “He didn’t seem gladdened by the news. Perhaps his marriage to Sansa Stark had made him more sympathetic to the northern cause.” This brought murmurings in the crowd and Sansa felt eyes on her. She was indirectly accused by this last testimony. It was a theory, nothing more, but it was enough to make her Tyrion’s partner. The Master of Whisperers continued.

“When this meeting was over, Lord Tyrion remained in the room and had a private discussion with his father. My little birds were not able to understand everything that was said, but they heard the voices of Lord Tyrion and Lord Tywin rise. It was obvious they had some disagreement. Among the things Lord Tyrion said at this moment and that my little birds could understand, there was a very interesting sentence. The Northerners will never forget.” Again, Sansa felt eyes upon her. Did Tyrion really say this? She would probably have hugged him in other circumstances, but now it was used against him, and against her as well. Lord Varys didn’t stop. “Lord Tyrion had many altercations with his father from the moment Lord Tywin came back to King’s Landing, each one more violent than the previous. He wasn’t happy to be no longer the Hand of the King. The last altercation happened the evening before Lord Tywin died.”

“You say that Tyrion met his father right before he died?” That was Ser Kevan who asked the question this time.

“Yes, my lord Hand. Very strong words were used on both sides at this moment. Lord Tyrion accused his father of many atrocities, including the murder of innocent children and women. Among the names he mentioned on this occasion were those of Catelyn Stark and Talisa Stark. He said that King Joffrey was as mad as the Mad King himself. He said that his brother, his sister, and his nephew the king weren’t fit to rule once Lord Tywin would be gone and that House Lannister would collapse once he would be dead. He said, *I don’t care anymore what will happen to House Lannister in the future.*

“Kinslayer!” The shout came from the benches, and immediately a thunder of insults rained on Tyrion, but Sansa also heard a few for her. She understood what was going on now. Cersei was turning Tyrion into a monster sworn to avenge the North, and she made Sansa the cause of this. If Tyrion was sentenced to death, Sansa would probably end up like him.

“SILENCE! NOW!”

Ser Kevan’s voice resonated through the Throne room with a great force and everyone went silent. For a moment, Sansa saw he was Tywin Lannister’s brother. “You’re excused, Lord Varys.”

As the eunuch left the box of the witnesses, Tyrion surprisingly spoke. “Uncle, may I ask the witness one question?”

Ser Kevan was still standing up after he had brought back order. He sat again in the Iron Throne. “You may, but only one.”

The question Tyrion asked wasn’t what Sansa was expecting. She thought he would try to make Varys contradict himself, but the question wasn’t even about the testimony. “You once said that without me, the city would have faced certain defeat. You said the histories would never mention
me, but you would not forget. Have you forgotten, Lord Varys?” It was asked on a soft and low tone, a sad one even.

“Sadly, my lord, I never forget a thing.” Sansa thought she heard some regret in the man’s voice as he spoke. He had worked closely with Tyrion when her husband was Hand of the King. Perhaps Tyrion had considered him a friend, and this friend betrayed him. The room was entirely silent now. No more accusations were shouted, no one whispered. Sansa believed that in this moment, everyone realized a friendship was over. When Lord Varys was gone, Ser Kevan decided it was time for a pause in the trial.

“We will adjourn for now. Toll the bells in an hour’s time.”

The three judges stood up and people began to leave. “Clear the court!” a guard shouted. Sansa saw Jaime Lannister leaving in a quick pace. He was angry from the expression of his face. Sansa on her side was desperate. She hadn’t expected this. Varys’s testimony made her at least an indirect partner of Tywin Lannister’s death. She didn’t leave the court, nor did Brienne or Mira. Even Bronn remained here. Strangely, the guards didn’t seem to care about their presence and didn’t prompt them to leave. They remained here, all alone, the three women side by side on the right benches, the sellsword alone with a dark face on the left ones, and Tyrion alone in the box of the accused. He was accused of a murder he didn’t commit, believed guilty only because he dared to defend the Northerners and to condemn slaughters. He was judged guilty because of her. Sansa had never felt so much pity for Tyrion than in this occasion. Even worse, she felt responsible for the situation he was in. How could she pity a Lannister so much?

They stayed together in a heavy silence for a very long time. No one dared to speak, not even Bronn or Tyrion, which was quite unusual since they always had some bawdy or funny comment to make in all circumstances. Sansa’s eyes fixed the floor and Tyrion successively. Not a single time Tyrion looked at her. Finally, Sansa rose from her seat and went to him.

“My lord.”

Tyrion raised his eyes toward her. He looked surprised that she was talking to him. “My lady.” That was good to hear. It was the first time they were talking since Tyrion was arrested more than a month ago. Sansa had missed his voice. “Not going well, is it?”

Sansa could only agree with that. “No, it isn’t. But we can destroy some of the testimonies. You still have witnesses.”

“They are more your witnesses than mine.” Tyrion smiled in her direction and Sansa felt forced to smile in return. She felt her cheeks turn red. “You’re right. You can oppose the testimonies about Joffrey beating you. You may even destroy the Grand Maester’s testimony. He didn’t look quite sure about the poison that killed my father.” Tyrion sighed. “I wouldn’t be surprised that he invented it only because he wants me dead. After all, I threw him into a black cell once. However, I’m afraid there’s nothing we can do about Varys’s testimony. Everything he said was true, even if that wasn’t the entire truth.”

Sansa knew Tyrion was right. There was nothing she could do against the Spider’s words. She took some time before she asked Tyrion. She needed to know. “Was it really all true? I mean, everything about the discussions with your father.”

Tyrion looked at her for a long moment before he answered. “It was all true.”

“Why? Why did you do that?” Sansa didn’t understand why Tyrion defended her family and her people, or even herself, before his father. He was a Lannister. She understood he could hate his
Sansa understood what Tyrion meant. Deep inside him, Tyrion was an honorable man like her father. He wanted to do what was right, but at the same time he was loyal to his family. How couldn’t he be? Family, Duty, Honor. Family came first. Sansa and her siblings would have done anything for one another. “This last time, when you talked with your father, was it the time when…”

“It was. He told me then that I only had one night to do it. In some way we can consider it’s a good thing he died this night, or else, who knows what would have happened after the wedding?”

A sudden thought crossed Sansa’s mind when Tyrion said this. She remembered something he told her the last night she saw him. My father won’t do anything. I’ll make sure of that. If my father is ready to do everything for the family, then I’m capable to do the same for my wife. Everything? Could he have done it? A part of Sansa feared it, but she had to admit there was another part of her who wouldn’t be angry at Tyrion if he had done it. “Tyrion, did you…? You didn’t, no? Cersei is lying, isn’t she?”

“Of course, I didn’t kill my father. He was still my father. I hated him, of course, but to kill him? No. I’m not my father. I can’t say I’m sad about his death, but I’m not responsible of it.” Sansa was relieved. The bells rang.

“I’ll go back to my seat.” She began to walk away, but Tyrion stopped her.

“Sansa.” She turned to face him. “Be careful.”

Sansa nodded to tell him she would be. People were coming back, trying to find a place before they were all taken. Sansa saw Ser Jaime talking with Tyrion in low voices. The judges, the queen, Margaery, Ser Loras, everyone who was supposed to take his place on the dais took it. When she thought about it, Sansa wondered why she wasn’t granted a siege on the dais as well. After all, she was the wife of the accused. They could at least have allowed her a reserved seat. Instead, she had to sit with all these people, some of them who now believed she played a part in Lord Tywin’s death.

Everyone was sitting now. Ser Kevan spoke. “The Crown only has one witness left. Considering the hour, we will listen to this last testimony. Tomorrow, we will listen to the testimonies of the defense. The Crown may call its last witness.”

That’s good, Sansa thought. She would be able to prepare the defense in the best way to counter Cersei’s witnesses. They only had to suffer one more lying witness and it would be over. Things
would be different tomorrow.

However, all thoughts about the defense left Sansa’s mind when she saw the witness approach. She recognized her immediately. Sansa had spent so much time with her, she could recognize her among thousands of other people. But that was impossible. What was she doing here? She left King’s Landing weeks ago. She was supposed to be back at Lorath with her sister.

When she took her place in the box of the witnesses, Ser Kevan started to question her. “State your name.”

“Shae.” Sansa didn’t understand. What was she doing here? Why was she among Cersei’s witnesses?

“Do you swear by all the gods that your testimony will be true and honest?”

“I swear it.”

“Do you know this man?” Kevan indicated Tyrion with a little movement of his head.

Sansa turned her head to look at Tyrion. Sansa tried to meet her eyes, but Shae didn’t seem to see her. “Yes. Tyrion Lannister.”

“How do you know him?”

“I was handmaiden to his wife Lady Sansa.”

“Was? You are no longer her handmaiden?” Prince Oberyn was the one to ask the question. If Sansa could be sure the Red Viper would declare Tyrion guilty, at least he asked some relevant questions.

“No. My lady removed me from her service a few weeks ago. She said she didn’t need me anymore.”

That wasn’t true. Shae had left. She was the one to leave without informing Sansa, without a single word to say goodbye. Though suddenly, Sansa realized there was something strange in the way Shae left. Why didn’t she even leave a word for her? She could have given it to Podrick at least. Did Podrick lie to her? But then, who could have Shae believe that Sansa didn’t want her as a handmaiden anymore?

Ser Kevan spoke again. “This man stands accused of murdering the Hand of the King, and of attempting to murder the king. What do you know of this?”

Shae’s words couldn’t have surprised Sansa more. “I know that he’s guilty. He and Sansa planned it together.” Sansa was paralyzed by the words of her friend. She felt the air leaving her lungs. People started to murmur all around the court. She saw many faces looking in her direction, but right now she couldn’t care about it. She was mazed by Shae’s words.

“Silence! Continue.” Ser Kevan allowed Shae to speak again when the noises blew out.

“She wanted revenge for her father, her mother, her brother. She blamed their deaths on Lord Tywin and the king. Tyrion was happy to help. He hated his father. He hated the king. He hated the queen. He stole poison from the Grand Maester’s chamber to poison his father. He and Sansa argued for days about which poison to use against him. She thought it would be better to use the essence of nightshade she had to help her sleep, but Tyrion convinced her the tears of Lys would be better in the end. He poisoned the wine of his father the evening they met for the last time.”
Sansa’s world was crumbling inside her. Shae was her friend. She trusted her. And here she was, lying in front of the whole court. Sansa couldn’t move. In fact, she could barely breathe. She fell into despair. How could Shae do it to her?

“How could you possibly know all this? Why would he reveal such plans to his wife’s maid?” Oberyn Martell’s voice looked distant. It was as if it came from another world for Sansa. It was as if she had become deaf to what happened around her. Shae’s betrayal had erected a wall between her and the rest of the world, and she could barely hear the voices from the other side.

“I wasn’t just her maid. I was his whore.”

The words brought Sansa back from her daydream state. “I beg your pardon? You said you were his…” Sansa could have asked the same question than Mace Tyrell. Surely she didn’t hear well. However, Shae only confirmed what she believed she just heard.

“His whore.”

Sansa was stunned by the statement. Shae was Tyrion’s whore? That was impossible! She knew Tyrion visited brothels, but Shae? His whore? Sansa couldn’t believe it. Tyrion couldn’t even remember Shae’s name, and Shae had always acted with him as if he was a danger for Sansa. She couldn’t be his whore. And so my watch begins. Tyrion had sworn he would go celibate until Sansa wanted him to share her bed, and Sansa could see nothing to doubt his words. If there had been something between Tyrion and Shae, she would have seen it. She spent so much time with Shae and Tyrion, she couldn’t have been so blind. Shae was lying, for sure.

“How did you come to be in his service?” Ser Kevan sounded intrigued by all this.

“He stole me.” Sansa realized Shae answered very quickly. For the other questions she had always seemed to hesitate before she gave an answer. However, this time, she spoke very quickly. “I was with another man, a knight in Lord Tywin’s army. But when Tyrion arrived at the camp, he sent one of his cutthroats into our tent. He broke the knight’s arm and brought me to Lord Tyrion. You belong to me now, he said. I want you to fuck me like it’s my last night in this world.”

People burst into laughs, but Sansa didn’t. That was so… improper. It was disgusting. Ser Kevan had to bring back order once more, but he wasn’t the one to speak next. For the first time, Sansa wasn’t happy the Dornishman asked a question.

“And did you?”

“Did I what?”

“Fuck him like it was his last night in this world.” The prince looked happy about his question, and some people too since there was more laughter.

“I did everything he wanted. Whatever he told me to do to him. Whatever he felt like doing to me. I kissed him where he wanted. I licked him where he wanted. I let him put himself where he wanted. I was his property. I would wait in his chambers for hours so he could use me when he was bored. He ordered me to call him my lion, so I did. I took his face in my hands and said, I am yours and you are mine.”

Sansa was disgusted by Shae’s words, but she didn’t know if it was because of the nature of the words or because she knew they were all lies. She didn’t believe anything Shae said a single second. She couldn’t imagine Tyrion mistreating someone in such a way, even a whore. Tyrion refused to bed her when he could. He barely ever touched her. The only time they slept in the same bed he only
held her to comfort her. What Shae said couldn’t be true. They were lies. Anger was rising in Sansa.

“Shae. Please don’t.” It was Tyrion who spoke now. He spoke very lowly, so Sansa barely heard
him, but she heard him all the same.

“I am a whore. Remember?” Sansa didn’t really know what it meant. For a moment, she had the
impression Tyrion knew Shae, but before she could think furthermore about it, Shae started to speak
again. “That was before he married Sansa. After that, all he wanted was her. But she wouldn’t let
him into her bed. So he promised to kill his father for her. They were planning to have the king and
the queen murdered afterwards so Tyrion could be Hand of the King again for Tommen. A year later
they would have Tommen killed as well before he got too old. Then Tyrion would have crowned
him and Sansa king and queen to achieve what her father, Lord Eddard Stark, failed to do.”

“THAT’S A LIE!” Sansa shouted before she realized it, louder than she ever did in her life. She
could maintain her armor of courtesies in all circumstances, but now it was too much. These were
horrible, filthy and stupid lies. Lies against her, against her father, and against Tyrion. She couldn’t
allow it. People started to yell as well in the court. They were yelling at her and at Tyrion, but Sansa
didn’t care about it. She was staring at Shae, but the woman who had been her friend refused to look
in her direction. All the same, she didn’t stop to look at her. Shae betrayed her.

It took some time for Ser Kevan to restore order in the room. When he did, he ordered Sansa to sit
down or else he would have to have her escorted out of the trial. Sansa only half-heard him, but she
complied all the same. She continued to fix Shae. Right now, she hated her former friend even more
than she ever hated Joffrey.

“Do you have anything else to say?” Ser Kevan’s question was directed toward Shae. He seemed
exasperated, but Sansa couldn’t decide from what.

“No.”

“Very well, the trial is adjourned for tomorrow. Bring back the prisoner to his cell.”

“My lady, we should go.” Sansa felt Brienne’ hand on her arm. “We must go before they decide to
arrest you. Come quickly.”

Sansa followed Brienne, her mind still half in another world. She noticed Mira followed them
closely. As they left the Great Hall, she heard her husband screaming. “So you think I am guilty,
Uncle? Don’t you? I saved you. I saved this city. And all your worthless lives. I should have let
Stannis kill you all.”

Sansa heard the crowd shouting.

Chapter End Notes

With a few changes, this chapter is mostly Tyrion's trial in the show, version "Sansa is
present". I tried to imagine what would have been Sansa's reaction if she had been there
the best I could.

Please review. I put a lot of work on this part of the story and I would like to know your
opinion for this chapter and the six following.
Next chapter: Jaime
Jaime III

Chapter Notes

Jaime is back with some family problems like always. "Ever since I've returned every Lannister I've seen has been a miserable pain in my ass."

See the end of the chapter for more notes

JAIME III

“You’d condemn your own nephew to death?”

“I’ve condemned no one. The trial is not over,” answered his uncle.

“This isn’t a trial. It’s a farce. Cersei has manipulated everything and you know it.”

“So you believe he’s guilty now?”

Jaime and his uncle were in Kevan’s study. He still refused to occupy the Tower of the Hand. At least Jaime didn’t have to climb hundreds of steps to talk with him. His uncle continued to speak.

“I know very well some of the testimonies are lies, or a part of them are lies. Do you really think I believe this whore when she says Tyrion was planning to seize the Iron Throne? Only a fool would believe it, or else Tyrion really changed a lot while he was acting Hand. Nevertheless, I don’t think everything that was said was untrue. Too much was said, I can’t just pretend I didn’t hear them. The accusation is overwhelming.”

“So you believe he’s guilty now?”

His uncle sighed and raised from his seat. He came on the other side of the desk to face Jaime with a pained expression. “I think it might not be impossible. I didn’t sentence him to death yet, and I don’t intend to do so. I will listen to his witnesses tomorrow and judge with that. However, if things tend to prove that he’s guilty, I cannot just clear him of his charges and do as if I heard nothing.”

Jaime didn’t care that his uncle felt sorry about that. He was ready to execute Tyrion. “So, you will execute my brother? You will kill a Lannister? Is that what you’re telling me?”

Kevan looked tired. “I don’t want to kill Tyrion. Even if he killed Tywin, he is still my brother’s son. I know Tywin wouldn’t want to have him killed.”

Jaime scoffed. “Really? Father always hated Tyrion. I’m sure he would have been more than happy to sentence him to die.”

“Be careful, Jaime. You’re talking about a man who just died, and about your father. Tywin seemed to be a hard man to you, but he is no harder than he’s had to be. Our own father was gentle and amiable, but so weak his bannermen mocked him in their cups. Some saw fit to defy him openly. Other lords borrowed our gold and never troubled to repay. At court they japed of toothless lions. Even his mistress stole from him. A woman scarcely one step above a whore, and she helped herself
to my mother’s jewels! It fell to your father to restore House Lannister to its proper place. Just as if it fell on him to rule this realm, when he was no more than twenty. He bore that heavy burden for twenty years, and all it earned him was a mad king’s envy. Instead of the honor he deserved, he was made to suffer slights beyond count, yet he gave the Seven Kingdoms peace, plenty, and justice. He was a just man. He was my brother. He was your father.”

Jaime saw tears in his uncle’s eyes, though they never fell. He felt guilty for talking this way about a man who was dead. “I’m sorry, Uncle. But I know one thing, Tyrion is innocent. If you sentence him to die, that’s no justice, that’s murder.”

Kevan took some time before he answered. “I hope he is innocent. I hope that he will have good witnesses to prove he is innocent tomorrow, but if the trial shows he is guilty of any of the two charges, I’ll have no choice but to declare him guilty. And the punishment for kinslaying or attempt of regicide is death. I really hope he is innocent and that he can prove it, but if he can’t…” Jaime believed that his uncle was sincere, but he wished Kevan could see the truth as he did. Cersei had succeeded in planting seeds of doubts in his mind. “I need you, Jaime. I need you to talk to Tyrion.”

“What do you mean?”

“I cannot go to talk with him. I am his judge. You are the only one who can speak with him.”

“What do you want me to tell him?”

Kevan took a great inspiration. “Tell him that if he doesn’t believe he can prove his innocence tomorrow, then he can confess the crime and ask for mercy. I’ll allow him to join the Night’s Watch.”

Jaime couldn’t believe what his uncle was saying. “Forgive me?”

“He will be exiled, but he will be alive. If he cannot prove his innocence, that’s the best I can do. He’s not obliged to confess both crimes, only one. He can even wait for the testimonies in his favour to be done before he confesses. If he only recognizes the attempt of regicide, the trial will end there and he won’t be branded as a kinslayer for the rest of his life. The affair will be over.”

“You are going to exile him for a crime he did not commit? You are no better than Cersei.”

“I don’t hate Tyrion, and I’m not blind like Cersei. I only want to make sure that he may keep his head on his shoulders whatever may happen. If you want your brother to live just like me, I suggest you go and tell him that.”

Jaime registered the information. It was true, he had no choice if he wanted Tyrion to live in the case he would be declared guilty. He had to convince his brother to do it if Sansa Stark couldn’t prove her husband’s innocence.

“There is another matter I need to speak with you, Jaime.” His uncle’s words brought him back to the reality. Kevan went again on the other side of his desk and opened the chest on it. He pulled out from it a thick piece of paper. “Tywin’s will. I and Genna opened it before I left the Rock. Of course, it’s not the original, it is in Casterly Rock. That’s only a copy.”

Jaime read the will. His father left great sums of gold to all his children, his brother and his sister, and lesser amounts to the other members of his family, but it was mostly the succession that received Jaime’s attention. Of course, his father named him his heir. Even dead, he was trying to get him out of the Kingsguard.

“Jaime,” his uncle began, “I know you never wanted to be your father’s heir, but you are his eldest
son and these are his last words, his last wishes. You could have a much better life than the one you have actually. You could marry. You could have children. You could be one of the most respected men in the Seven Kingdoms.”

Jaime dropped the will on the desk. “I’m sorry, Uncle. That’s not a life for me. I never wanted it. Anyway, people will never respect me. I am the Kingslayer, an Oathbreaker, a man without honor in everyone’s eyes. I am a kingsguard. The Lord Commander of the Kingsguard. I took vows, and I will respect them. Anyway, Father disavowed me.”

Kevan lowered his eyes. “I know. He told me in one of his letters. I guess I know why.”

“I refused to go back to Casterly Rock and to be his heir. My answer is still the same.”

Jaime’s uncle nodded sadly. “Very well.”

Jaime chose the moment to add something. “This means, that by all the laws of the Seven Kingdoms, Tyrion is the Lord of Casterly Rock.”

“That’s not so easy, Jaime. But if he is cleared of his charges, you are right. He is the Lord of Casterly Rock.”

“Are you going to recognize him? Or are you going to follow my father’s last wishes to never let him have the Rock?”

“I’m not Tywin, Jaime. I loved my brother, but that didn’t stop me from seeing his flaws. I know he despised Tyrion. I never agreed with Tyrion’s behaviour with whores, wine and gambling, but Tywin didn’t even hate him for that. He hated him because he was a dwarf and because Joanna died when he was born. That was stupid. My own mother died not long after your uncle Gerion’s birth, and no one in the family hated him for that. Tyrion proved he was worthy of being the Lord of Casterly Rock if I look outside what was said during the trial. He did a good job when he was Hand of the King and as Master of Coin afterwards. He made an alliance with the Martells possible. He fought bravely at the Battle of Blackwater. Tywin was cruel and unfair with him, even more than many people believe. Don’t think you’re the only one to know the truth about Tyrion’s first wife.”

Jaime looked unbelieving at his uncle. Did everyone know the truth? “How?”

“I was the advisor of your father for a very long time, remember. I know the details.”

They remained silent for a moment. Jaime remembered the horror of this day. The look of despair in his brother’s eyes when he saw him a few hours after the tragedy. Jaime had never anticipated something like that from his father. Finally, he decided to break the silence.

“If Tyrion is sentenced, you know that Cersei will have Casterly Rock.”

“Of course, I know, unless you decide at the last minute to be Tywin’s heir. If you don’t, let us hope Tyrion is absolved at the end of the trial. Now go. I won’t talk about it anymore.”

Kevan’s voice let place to no discussion. Jaime left. He walked to the tower cells to meet his brother. He hoped he would greet Kevan’s proposition in a better way than Jaime had, but the Lord Commander didn’t really believe in it. He would have better luck in hoping for his brother and his sister to love each other.

The guards allowed him to enter as soon as they saw him. His little brother was drinking. It was no surprise after what happened today and Tyrion’s fondness for wine. He took some time before he raised his eyes to Jaime.
“Jaime. You’re paying a visit to a soon-to-be-dead man.”

“The trial is not yet over. You still have people who will testify for you tomorrow. Nothing is lost yet.”

“Of course.” Tyrion didn’t believe what Jaime said. He didn’t like to see his little brother in this state. “You heard what she said. All her lies. And you heard what these people said after my speech.”

Jaime remembered only too well. After Tyrion shouted he should have let Stannis kill them, there wasn’t much left before someone was trying to kill him. He needed ten gold cloaks to bring him back to safety here, and he even ordered them to gag Tyrion to stop him from speaking more nonsense. That was a brilliant speech. People would talk about it for weeks.

“You fell in love with a whore?” Jaime really found Tyrion stupid on this. In his brother’s eyes, it wasn’t the first time it happened.

“Yes, I fell in love with a whore. And I was stupid enough to think that she had fallen in love with me too. I couldn’t. I couldn’t listen to her standing there telling her lies. I couldn’t do it.” Jaime sat next to his brother. Tyrion really was in a bad state. Jaime didn’t think he was drunk, there wasn’t enough wine here to get Tyrion drunk. Perhaps enough to get Jaime drunk, but not Tyrion. “Do you think Sansa will still want to defend me after what she heard today?”

That was something Jaime feared. Sansa Stark had organized Tyrion’s defense. Without her, many of Tyrion’s witnesses wouldn’t testify. Worse, some witnesses may fear that Tyrion was lost after today and refuse to testify tomorrow. Jaime hadn’t visited his sister-in-law after the trial was adjourned, so he had no idea. “No matter if she protects you or not, I will testify all the same, and I’ll make sure Ser Balon testifies as well. She can go to hell.” Jaime would never forgive the Stark girl if she abandoned Tyrion.

“Be careful, Jaime. You’re talking about my wife.” Jaime was startled by Tyrion’s words, but the look in his eyes surprised him even more. “Sansa is much more than I could ever hope for. She is young, clever, kind, beautiful, and she is coming from one of the oldest families of the Seven Kingdoms. She was beaten by Joffrey again and again. She was nearly raped during the riot my nephew started. She saw her own father beheaded in front of her own eyes, and then she was forced to look upon his head on a spike. She was held as a hostage here for more than a year and she was forced to marry someone from the family in war against her own. And despite all of this, I managed to get along with her quite well until our father decided to murder her mother and her brother. And after that the best thing our father had to suggest to me was to rape her. You told me often how Robert shamed Cersei for sixteen years, but this is nothing compared to what Sansa supported here within a single year. Cersei had you and Father to protect her. Sansa had no one. And despite all of this, she didn’t turn into a manipulative bitch and she didn’t try to have me killed as Cersei did with Robert. She remained loyal to her family, and she didn’t become a murderer. She is a true lady and she assumes the consequences of the choices she makes, unlike Cersei who always blames the others for her own mistakes. If she abandons me after what happened today, I won’t be the one to blame her considering everything our family did to her. Perhaps there will even be some justice in this.”

Jaime was unsettled by Tyrion’s speech and by the expression of his face. He was defending his wife when she could be about to let him die. Also, Jaime was quite displeased of the way Tyrion compared Ned Stark’s daughter to Cersei. Tyrion knew about their special relationship and he was saying that his wife, a Stark, was better than Jaime’s lover. However, Jaime had to admit Tyrion was right about many things he said. He highlighted Cersei’s flaws very well, but Jaime wasn’t very pleased to hear his sister and lover being called a manipulative bitch.

“Be careful you too, little brother. You’re talking about our sister.”
Tyrion smirked. “A sister who’s about to have me killed.”

Jaime couldn’t argue with that. It was time to talk about Kevan’s proposition. “Tyrion, Kevan sent me here. He wanted me to tell you something, in case you are found guilty.”

Jaime explained very carefully Kevan’s plan if Tyrion couldn’t prove his innocence. As he expected, his little brother didn’t react very well.

“So, I will spend the rest of my days freezing at the Wall for a crime I didn’t commit. What an alternative for death!”

“It’s still better than death. I know you’re innocent, Kevan wants to believe it too, but… If you are found guilty, it’s still better than ending in the hands of Ser Ilyn Payne.”

“Oh yes, and this way I am finally out of sight. The family’s shame is far away, never to be seen again.”

Jaime was exasperated. “Kevan isn’t doing this for this reason. He’s not our father.”

“Well, he acts like our father. That’s exactly what he would have done to get rid of me. He would have seized the opportunity. Perhaps he even killed himself for that.”

“If he did, then it was useless. Kevan already asked me again to be the Lord of Casterly Rock and I refused.”

Tyrion was looking at him with a strange expression. Jaime thought it was close to indifference. “Very well. Then it means that once I’ll be executed for these imaginary crimes, House Lannister will be ruled by Cersei Lannister, the Lady of Casterly Rock. You can tell Kevan that’s what is going to happen if he declares me guilty, because I won’t go to the Wall, no matter the outcome.”

Jaime couldn’t believe what his brother was saying. “Wait, you can’t be serious. You’re going to let yourself be killed like this?”

“Yes, I will,” said Tyrion on an indifferent tone. “You can tell Kevan that unless he clears me of all charges since I am innocent, then he will have to follow Cersei’s pleasure for the rest of life, starting with ordering Ser Ilyn to cut my head in front of his own eyes. That’s how he will start his tenure as Hand of the King. By sentencing his own nephew to die. You can tell him this.”

“His trying to save you, just like me.”

“To save me? By condemning me to spend the rest of my days to the Wall? Thank you. If that’s what family is, I don’t want any of it. I spent the last year as Hand of the King to make sure our family would survive this war despite Cersei’s foolishness and Joffrey’s cruelty. I did everything I could to bring our family where it is now. And as a reward, my head was nearly sliced in two on my sister’s command, I was moved to a dark cell, forced to marry a child, my brother-in-law and my mother-in-law were savagely slaughtered, and now I am about to be exiled or executed for crimes I didn’t commit. If that’s what family is, then I don’t care about the family. You heard what Varys said. I told Father and I believed it. I don’t care anymore what will happen to House Lannister in the future.”

Did Cersei really order Tyrion’s head to be cut in two? He thought his scar came from the Battle of Blackwater. Jaime didn’t know what to do with the words Tyrion just told him. It was as if he disavowed all his kin. “You know that when you were arrested, I rode to war with Father to save you. I would have been ready to abandon my white cloak at this moment. I left Cersei to save you.”
Tyrion looked back at him with softer eyes. “You’re my brother. I will never forget that. You were among the few to really consider me like family. But I am done with my loyalty to a family that never showed me any. My loyalty is to you now. And to my wife.”

“So, you place your wife before your own blood?” Jaime asked unbelieving, afraid of the answer that would come.

“I swore to protect her when I put that cloak on her shoulders, and she showed more loyalty to me than the average Lannister. You still have a vow to her mother. Protect her. If I really am your brother, then do it, and do what you must to get me out of here alive, or go back to our sister who is about to get what she always wanted: my head.”

Tyrion looked away after he was done, but Jaime had his eyes fixed on his brother. He had never talked to him this way. He remembered all the humiliations Tyrion had to endure during his whole life, from his birth to this afternoon at the trial. He had a debt toward Tyrion, and a Lannister always pays his debts. He rose. “Then I’ll do it. The first things, not the last one,” he specified. Tyrion looked back at him and smiled. Jaime returned it and left. He still didn’t know what he would make of Cersei, but he knew what he would make of Tyrion.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
Sansa IX

Chapter Notes

Warning: emotional chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

SANSA IX

Sansa was staring at the cup of wine before her. Was it her second or her third? Or her fourth? She didn’t know. She couldn’t remember. She took another sip. She didn’t know if it helped, but she did it all the same. If Tyrion did it, there was surely some use to it. Sadly, it didn’t help her to forget. She couldn’t forget what happened at the trial. It looked like a nightmare.

Shae. Her friend. She betrayed her. Sansa had wanted to kill her at the end of her testimony, but now she wasn’t even sure she had the strength to wish her death. After the anger came despair. Shae had been her only friend during the time she was Joffrey’s future bride. She was the one to always remind her to trust no one. She was the one who tended to her injuries after she was mistreated one way or another. And she betrayed her. Sansa had been betrayed by so many people she once trusted. Joffrey. The queen. Ser Dontos. Now Shae. When would it end? What did she do for this? Why was everyone turning against her?

However, what made Sansa even more despaired were Shae’s lies about Tyrion. I was his whore. He stole me. When Tyrion arrived at the camp, he sent one of his cutthroats into our tent. He broke the knight’s arm and brought me to Lord Tyrion. I did everything he wanted. Whatever he told me to do to him. Whatever he felt like doing to me. I kissed him where he wanted. I licked him where he wanted. I let him put himself where he wanted. I was his property. I would wait in his chambers for hours so he could use me when he was bored. He ordered me to call him my lion, so I did. I took his face in my hands and said, I am yours and you are mine. That was before he married Sansa. After that, all he wanted was her. But she wouldn’t let him into her bed.

These were all lies, Sansa knew it. Filthy lies, just like all the others the witnesses told after swearing by all the gods they would tell the truth. But these lies from Shae were even worse than the others. They were only made for laughing at Tyrion, to humiliate him. It wasn’t enough for the people to accuse him falsely of the worse crimes, they had to mock him. Her father’s memory had been shamed by the lies of House Lannister, but at least people didn’t laugh at him. For Tyrion that was even worse. It was as if Joffrey had her father humiliated because he had a bastard once in his life. No, that was even worse. Tyrion was humiliated because of lies, not even something that was true.

Sansa knew Shae lied on everything. She knew it. And so my watch begins. Tyrion was sincere when he told her this. He wouldn’t cheat on her. He was her husband, the man who protected her ever since he arrived at King’s Landing. What Shae said was horrible. She had made Tyrion a monster who forced poor women to satisfy all his desires. That wasn’t him. That was a lie. These were all lies. Tyrion was kind. He refused to share her bed when he saw she didn’t want to. He would never have behaved with a woman in such ways.

The door opened. Mira entered with the dinner. “My lady,” she said as she placed the multiple plates
on the table. Sansa felt the eyes of her friend on her. Would she betray her as well? After a moment, Mira stopped to move. Did she place all the plates on the table? Sansa didn’t know, and to be honest she didn’t care. She wasn’t hungry. “My lady, how many cups did you have?”

Sansa looked at the goblet before her. How many? She didn’t know. And she didn’t care either. She only knew all the wine she drank came from the single jug at the center of the table. “I don’t know. No more than the jug.” The jug was half-emptied.

“My lady, you shouldn’t drink so much. You may believe it could help, but it will not. You won’t feel good.” There was concern in Mira’s voice.

Sansa didn’t care if she felt better or worse, now or later. “Tyrion was able to empty an entire bottle without being drunk.” This memory of Tyrion made her sad. “If he can drink so much with his size, how much do you think I can drink?”

“My lady, you should stop.” Sansa didn’t look back at Mira. She had green eyes, not the same than Tyrion, but the color would be enough to bother her if she looked at her handmaiden.

“I don’t need your service anymore for today, Mira. Take your leave for the evening. Send Podrick to clean everything after I’m done.”

“My lady…”

“Go.”

After a moment, Sansa finally heard Mira leaving. Sansa didn’t eat. She only took a sip of wine from time to time, as she did for two hours now, or so she believed. She didn’t remember for how long she had been sitting there, thinking about Shae and about Tyrion, and drinking.

She knew Shae was lying. Everyone who had testified had lied. Shae had lied all along, about Tyrion’s and Sansa’s plans to kill Tywin, Cersei, Joffrey and Tommen, about the poisoning, about her removal from Sansa’s service, and about being Tyrion’s whore. Especially about this. And so my watch begins. Shae had lied, she knew it. Sansa was holding her necklace firmly in her left hand. She held it so strong that she heard the click. It had opened. She looked at it and saw the silver direwolf. Never forget what you are. She wouldn’t forget who she was. She would never forget who she was. And she would never forget Shae’s horrible lies. However, there were other words and images that went back without interruption in Sansa’s head. She tried to stop them from coming back, but they did all the same, no matter what she tried. They were nothing important, but they kept coming back and they troubled Sansa.

The time Tyrion came to reveal her they would have to marry. How Shae looked upset about Tyrion trying to have a word with Sansa in private. The words Tyrion said at this moment. Sometimes we think we want to hear something and it’s only afterwards when it’s too late that we realize we wished we’d heard it under entirely different circumstances. As they came back in Sansa’s mind, she began to wonder if they were really meant for her at this moment. She remembered little details of the moments when Shae and Tyrion had been in the same place than her. She thought she remembered looks they exchanged, smiles towards one another, from the morning following their wedding night to the last meal Shae served them, including the walk in the gardens. She also remembered how Shae was upset after they learned Sansa would marry Tyrion, and how she turned colder toward her later. She remembered Shae’s reaction when she told her about Tyrion’s arrest, and the way she left quickly after she told her they slept in the same bed. She remembered angry eyes she saw sometimes in the glass when Shae was brushing her hair, often at moments when Sansa had been talking about Tyrion. But more than anything, she remembered the way Tyrion talked to Shae at the trial. Shae. Please don’t. And Shae’s answer. I am a whore. Remember? Tyrion had called her by her name,
something he never did before. He always forgot her name. He had spoken in a low voice, as if he
was hurt by her words. As if he knew her. As if he loved her.

She lied. She lied. She lied. Everything she said was a lie. Sansa repeated it in her head, knowing it
was the truth. And yet, these few words between her husband and her friend came back again and
again. And other words Tyrion told her during the pause about Varys. Everything he said was true,
even if that wasn’t the entire truth. Among all the things Varys told before the court was the fact that
Tyrion had been keeping a whore for his personal service in the Tower of the Hand. Could it be
Shae? She was already in the Red Keep at this moment after all. She had entered Sansa’s service not
long after Tyrion arrived in King’s Landing. That was before she and Tyrion were married. Was it
possible? Was she the whore in question? No, she wasn’t, Sansa was sure of that. She was lying.
And yet, the thought persisted in Sansa’s mind. She couldn’t get it out of her head. And she hated it.
She didn’t know precisely why, but she hated it.

Podrick entered the room. When he arrived at the table, he asked the stupidest question she ever
heard. “My lady, you ate nothing?”

“No. Just take it away.”

“Yes, my lady.” The boy started to remove all the untouched food from the table. He had been
Tyrion’s squire as far as Sansa could remember and he mostly took care of his clothes and poured his
wine. When he was done with cleaning, he started to walk back to the door, but stopped after a few
steps. “My lady.” He sounded hesitant. Sansa didn’t lift her head, still fixing her cup. “I’m sorry for
today. I was there at the trial, hidden in a corner. That’s horrible what they said about you and Lord
Tyrion.”

The squire continued to walk toward the door. “Podrick!” There was something she had to know.
Podrick had always been honest with her. “What Shae said… was it true?” She didn’t know why she
had to know it, but she had.

After a long silence, the boy answered. “My lady, I know she lied about the plot to kill Lord Tywin.
I know you and Lord Tyrion have nothing to see with his death.”

Sansa should have been satisfied with this answer, but truthfully she wasn’t. Podrick answered the
question, so why did she feel she had to ask something else? Before she could hold back, the
question came out. “That’s not what I’m talking about. Was she his whore?”

Why did she bother so much with that? She knew it was a lie. And yet, she wanted an answer. But
why? Another silence, longer than the previous one, took place before Podrick could answer very
lowly. “Yes, my lady.”

Sansa continued to stare at her cup. She felt empty. The wine was red. Red and dark. It was almost
black. She asked another question from nowhere. Shae. Please don’t. “Did he love her?”

Sansa realized her voice was shaking when she spoke. Why was she asking this question? Why did
she fear the answer? This time the silence lingered longer than Sansa imagined it could. After a very
long time, she averted her eyes from the cup before her. Podrick was still there, standing next to the
door with the plates in his arm, looking at his feet. She should let him go, so she opened the mouth.

“Podrick.” Her mouth was dry. She couldn’t say anything more. So Podrick made a little affirmative
nod with his head, answering her question. And he left the room.

Sansa remained seated in her position, numb. She didn’t know how much time it took before she
could move again, and when she did her whole body was shivering. She took the cup of wine and
her hand trembled so much that she nearly spilled its content on the floor. She managed to bring the cup to her lips all the same and swallowed what was left of the wine with a lot of difficulties. She had trouble to gulp. Tears were rolling on her cheeks now. Why was she crying?

Sansa didn’t remember much what happened afterwards, but she felt bursting into sobs at one moment. All her saddest and most horrible memories came back to mind, beginning by the most recent to the oldest one. The humiliation of the trial. Tyrion’s arrest. Tyrion telling her they would be forced to consummate their marriage. Margaery announcing her the death of her brother and mother. Her wedding. Tyrion’s visit to tell her about their wedding. The news that Bran and Rickon were dead. The riot. Her beatings by kingsguards. The head of her father and all the people of Winterfell on spikes. The execution. Lady’s death. After that memories were mostly foolish dramas she experienced in Winterfell, like when she discovered for the first time Arya had hidden dung inside her mattress or when her little sister ruined a new gown she had worked on for weeks by starting a battle of food. If she had known back then how her life would become a living hell later, Sansa would have cherished these moments. She reached the memory of the moment the bard left when she was younger. He was a wandering singer who sang of knights and quests and ladies fair. He had left after staying half a year in Winterfell and Sansa had cried more than she ever did before, begging without success her father to keep him at home. Her last thought was about a song the singer performed one day. It was a very sad song, one she didn’t like. How could she remember the lyrics? And yet she did remember them, along with the melody.

Everywhere I turn I hurt someone

But there's nothing I can say to change the things I've done

Of all the things I hid from you I cannot hide the shame

And I pray someone something will come and take away the pain

There's no way out of this dark place

No hope, no future

I know I can't be free

But I can't see another way

And I can't face another day

Tell me where did I go wrong

Everyone I love, they're all gone

I'd do everything so differently

But I can't turn back the time

There's no shelter from the storm inside of me
There's no way out of this dark place

No hope, no future

I know I can't be free

But I can't see another way

And I can't face another day

The last thoughts she could remember were the words of the song. She also had the impression someone was helping her to stand up from the floor and led her to her bed at one moment.

When Sansa woke up the sun was already risen. She felt numb and her mouth was dry as if she hadn’t drunk anything for days. When she tried to raise her head, she felt a headache so strong she thought her head was about to explode. Then she felt something coming in her mouth and covered it with her hands. Without thinking, she jumped from her bed and went to her chamber pot. And she spewed. She vomited more than she had done in her entire life up to now. She felt so bad.

She felt a hand on her shoulder. Startled, she turned her head very quickly and felt another wave of pain through her head. When she finally looked up, she saw green eyes observing her. For a moment, she instinctively thought about Tyrion, but she realized very quickly those green eyes didn’t belong to him.

“Mira. What are you doing here?” Sansa asked.

“I’m sorry, my lady. Podrick told me you weren’t in a good state, so I came back in the middle of the night. You were lying on the floor, crying. I helped you to go to your bed. You were in a very bad shape. You were saying things that made nonsense. I stayed on the couch for the night in case you would need more help.”

Sansa didn’t remember she had fallen on the floor, though she remembered someone helped her to stand up when she was on the floor. How did this happen? The multiple thoughts in her mind sent new waves of pain through her head. She held her forehead with her hands while she gasped. Her mouth was so dry.

“The jug of wine was empty when I arrived,” Mira resumed. “You must have emptied it. I told you you wouldn’t feel good.” She didn’t say it as a reproach. She mostly seemed sorry. Now Sansa knew what it was to be drunk. How could Tyrion manage to be so often? The thought of her husband brought tears to her eyes.

“You have been drunk before, haven’t you Mira?” Sansa needed something to occupy her thoughts. If Mira knew the effects of drinking, then it was probably because she experienced it once.

“No, my lady.” Sansa heard a thin laugh escaping from Mira’s voice. “But I saw many of my friends drunk here in King’s Landing, back in Highgarden… and at Ironrath too. I know the effects from them.” Mira looked sad when she pronounced her home’s name. She lowered herself to Sansa’s level since she was still leaning on the pot and presented a cup. “It’s only water, my lady. It will help you.”

Sansa nearly ripped out the goblet from Mira’s hands. Her tongue was so dry it could have been used as a parchment. She drank deeply. She didn’t remember water to be so delicious. With two gulps the cup was empty, so Mira brought her another one. It felt good.
“My lady, if you want I can get you some breakfast. Nothing too consisting, that wouldn’t be good in your state. You’ll be able to eat more in the midday when you’ll feel better.”

Sansa nodded in agreement and Mira left her room. After a moment, Sansa felt a little better and managed to get up and sit at the table. She drank more water from a bottle on the table. She didn’t remember there was one last night. She still felt pounding in her head, but her mouth was much less dry than before. Mira came back soon with fruits and some bread. She joined Sansa in her breakfast on her mistress demand. As they ate, Sansa realized what day they were. The trial would continue this afternoon.

“What time of the day is it?” she asked her friend.

“Don’t worry, my lady. The sun only came out two hours ago. There’s still more than enough time before the trial starts again.”

Yes, before the trial. However, Sansa wondered if it was of any use now. She didn’t know if they still had a chance to save Tyrion, and in fact Sansa wasn’t even sure she wanted to save him. And so my watch begins. Words are wind. Sansa now knew he had been sleeping with her handmaiden. That explained the long moments he spent out at night. How blind she had been. Did she really think her husband wouldn’t bed any other woman after their wedding, especially when he was one of the most renowned whoremonger of Westeros? Now she wasn’t only the disgraced daughter of a traitor. She was also the shamed wife of the Imp.

“I’m not sure it matters anymore now. Tyrion will be sentenced to death no matter what happens and no matter what I do.” Sansa felt sad at the idea that Tyrion would die, but she felt she had no more chance to save him.

“No, my lady. Everything isn’t lost. You still have witnesses. With their testimonies you can still prove his innocence.”

Sansa stared at Mira. “You heard what she said yesterday.”

Sansa saw a glow of comprehension in her friend’s eyes. “My lady, the things she said were lies.”

“Not all of them.” Sansa looked away.

“Even if some of the things she said are true, these things are no proof of Lord Tyrion’s guilt. You can still convince Ser Kevan of Lord Tyrion’s innocence, and if you convince him you’ll have his vote and the one of Lord Tyrell. That will be enough.”

“No, there’s no way to win now. You heard how the people laughed and insulted him. They believe the lies, and Ser Kevan will believe them as well. The only truth that matters is the one people want to believe.” Sansa sighed loudly. “You should leave Mira. Once Tyrion is dead, they will force me to marry someone else, or worse they will execute me for participating in Lord Tywin’s murder. I won’t be able to protect you anymore. You were right. You should have left for Ironrath a long time ago.”

There was a heavy silence that followed her words. “I cannot go back to Ironrath, my lady.” Mira broke the silence with a quavering voice. Sansa looked at her and she realized Mira was staring at the floor. “Do you remember when Sera came to talk to me yesterday? She told me the Whitehills attacked Ironrath and burned it to the ground. There is no news of my family. As far as I know, I am the last Forrester alive.”

Mira looked back at Sansa, and for the first time Sansa perceived tears about to break out in the eyes of her friend. Mira had always been so strong, Sansa admired her for that, but now she looked about
to lose it. Just like Sansa, she had lost all her kin. They were both alone now.

“I’m sorry, Mira.” Sansa felt she should say something to comfort the Forrester girl, but nothing came to her mind. What could she do? *How can you help me? I don’t know, but I can try.* Now she understood how Tyrion felt after her family’s slaughter. He wanted to help her, but didn’t know how.

“Let me be honest with you, my lady.” Mira’s voice turned hard suddenly and she fixed Sansa with her eyes. Sansa could still see water in them, but there was again determination in them and her voice. “I don’t care what this woman said at the trial. I don’t care about how many women Lord Tyrion fucked, where, when or how he did it in his whole life. If he is executed, then this is over for me as you told it yourself. You can stay here and drink again, that’s your right, but I won’t remain idle. If I must die, then I prefer to die with some honor, defending a man who tried to help me.”

Mira rose and left the room when she was done with her tirade. Sansa remained benumbed for some time when she was gone. Despite the headaches it gave her, thoughts were crossing her mind in great numbers and quickly. After a moment, she realized Mira was right. Sansa had decided to live for her family. She couldn’t abandon right now. It was true, they still had hope. They could probably convince Ser Kevan of Tyrion’s innocence. She wasn’t doomed yet, but if she did nothing, she was, just like Tyrion and Mira. Why was she bothered so much by Shae’s testimony, only because her allegations about being Tyrion’s whore were true? Tyrion had helped her so much, and was forced to marry her, could she really blame him to seek the company of another woman? Could she blame him especially when he loved this woman? She could destroy her testimony. If someone was to blame, it was Shae, who testified and lied about a man who loved her. Ideas were flooding Sansa’s mind about ways to get Tyrion’s acquittal.

When Mira surprisingly came back an hour later, Sansa already had a good idea of what she might do. She wanted to tell it to Mira immediately, but her handmaiden spoke before her. “I’m sorry about the way I talked to you, my lady. Only, if you don’t want to act, I will.”

Sansa nearly felt exasperation. Mira was apologizing when she should be the one doing so. She went to her friend and took her hands in her own. “No, Mira, you were right. I cannot abandon Tyrion. I will fight.” Mira smiled a little. “I’m really sorry for your family, Mira. I wish I could say more, but… I understand what you feel.”

Mira approved with a nod. “You once told me that if my family disappeared, the survival of the Forresters would be on my shoulders. I must make sure now that their name lives on. And I can only make it sure if I live.”

They remained in their position for a moment, looking at each other, understanding what the other was feeling. Finally, Sansa broke the hold of their hands. “Mira, I need you to bring me Brienne, Ser Jaime, Bronn, and Podrick. Find them all and fetch them here. I also want you to be there. We need to adapt Tyrion’s defense.”

“Yes, my lady.” Mira left right away to fulfill the order. While she was away, Sansa continued to think about ways to enhance Tyrion’s defense. Her headaches turned less painful as time went by and her throat was no longer dry now. She drank enough water to ensure that.

Half an hour later, they were all there. The one-handed man, the lady knight, the squire who looked at his feet, the sellsword with the name of a bay, the Northern girl from the Reach and the traitor’s daughter. They discussed together for two hours, sharing information, plans, ideas, and arguments. Finally, they went separate ways. Ser Jaime left to do his duty as Lord Commander of the Kingsguard. Ser Bronn went to a brothel. Podrick went to look after Sansa’s husband. Mira left to meet a knight after she was done preparing Sansa for the day. As for Brienne, she accompanied
Sansa. At the end of this two hours discussion, Sansa had two more witnesses than yesterday. Now, she would try to get a third one.

Chapter End Notes

Some people probably realized it, the song is not from me. I don't claim to match Phil Collins talent for composition. For those who want to hear the song: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-J1ADlO_ijA

Please review

Next chapter: the third witness
Margaery III

Chapter Notes

A short chapter compared to the previous ones, but the upcoming updates are going to be much longer than this. You'll see Margaery being quite surprised by Sansa.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

MARGAERY III

Margaery’s cousins and friends were sewing in the gardens of the Red Keep with her. They were about the midday meal time. The sun was high in the sky and hit them, but not in a hard way. Temperature was dropping and the weather was quite clement for now, so Margaery positioned herself to have the sun caressing her skin. If only she could be as happy as the weather seemed to suggest. Her wedding wouldn’t take place before a week. It should have been celebrated more than a month ago. So much preparations, and they would have to start some all over again. In fact, they already began to reconsider services, singers, songs, decorations and other entertainments. Couldn’t they be done with it so she may finally be queen? She had already waited long enough.

A conversation between Megga and Elinor brought her attention. Megga was talking. “Did you hear what this woman said yesterday about the Imp? Everything she went through? To be honest I was pitying her, despite who she was. No one deserves to be treated like this.”

“I agree with you,” added Elinor. “What a horrible man he is. I’m not surprised to be honest, though. You heard all the rumors about him. The one I pity the most is Sansa. Who knows what he made her do? Everyone says their marriage was un consummated, but I wonder what he may have coerced her to do with the pervert tastes he must have.”

“Poor Sansa. And to think she was supposed to marry King Joffrey. She really had no chance. How she must regret him now. Perhaps that’s why she wanted to kill the queen and Joffrey, because they ruined her marriage and set her aside.”

Margaery had to roll her eyes at Megga’s stupidity. If there was one thing Margaery was sure about, it was that Sansa had been much happier and well with Lord Tyrion than with Joffrey, even with the slaughter of the Twins.

“Megga, Elinor.” She called after her two friends and they looked up from their needlework to her. “We are here to relax. Please keep this kind of discussion for other times.”

Both girls apologized and went back to their needlework in silence. Margaery also went back to her work without a word. She didn’t discuss with anybody. She was alone with her thoughts. She was thinking about the wedding, of course, but also about the trial. It had let a bitter taste in her throat. She couldn’t believe how people like Elinor, Megga and even her father could be so stupid. Anyone with some brain could see easily the accusations were stupid and entirely wrought. Alone the accusation of this whore was proof enough of that. She knew who this woman was. She had seen her accompanying Sansa on a few occasions and spying on her while Margaery was speaking with her friend. She surely was Cersei’s spy since the beginning. Who could believe seriously that Tyrion
and Sansa planned to seize the Iron Throne by killing half the Lannister family? It was more than obvious that at least half the testimonies were distorting the reality. How could her father thank the queen for her supposed courageous testimony? Margaery agreed more and more each day with her grandmother. Her father really was an imbecile. That was a chance there were women in Highgarden. If the men of her family wielded the real power, House Tyrell would have crumbled long ago.

Margaery extracted the thread with so much force in her rage that the tissue of her work ripped. Her rose was entirely ruined now. She took a new piece of fabric and started all over again. Margaery was angry against Cersei. She had nearly cancelled her wedding with Joffrey, and now she was spreading horrible lies about Sansa. Margaery knew that Sansa couldn’t have anything to do with Lord Tywin’s death. She was incapable of killing someone, as was Margaery. Margaery’s tactic was always to put people on her side. If that was impossible, she would find ways for them to cause no problem, but not by killing them. There was always another way than killing to deal with a problem.

Sansa was her friend, and Cersei was forcing people to tell stupid lies about her and her husband. To be honest, Margaery didn’t believe in Lord Tyrion’s guilt. The testimonies were so obviously faked, and the dwarf didn’t strike as an assassin. If only her father had some more brain and could realize it. Furthermore, Cersei was destroying all the work Margaery had done with Sansa. She had expected that Sansa would one day rule the North or the Westerlands, perhaps both, and she could have used their friendship to have a powerful ally. However, now that Tywin Lannister was dead, at the moment when Margaery could have gotten what she wanted, the Queen Regent decided to ruin everything and to accuse her brother of parricide in the stupidest way someone could imagine. Margaery wouldn’t be surprised that Cersei was accusing Sansa’s husband only to get Casterly Rock. If Tyrion Lannister died, the Westerlands were hers after all.

Sera entered the square where Margaery was spending time with her entourage. “My lady, please excuse me, but Lady Sansa would like to speak to you.”

That was something Margaery wasn’t expecting. Normally she was the one seeking Sansa. Margaery realized that her friends and cousins were leaving the square by the entrance on her right. Sera had come from the other entrance, the one in front of Margaery. The other girls didn’t want to be seen with Sansa after what happened yesterday. However, Margaery wasn’t going to repel her friend. Anyway, she couldn’t just send her away when she had no excuse. That wasn’t fitting for a future queen.

“Very well, Sera. Let her in.”

Sera left by where she came from and Sansa came in a moment later. She was wearing her purple gown with flowers. Margaery rose to greet her.

“Lady Sansa.”

“Margaery. Please forgive me, but I needed to talk with you about an urgent matter.”

They were alone in the square, but Margaery took no precaution. “Very well, but I fear I don’t have much time to give you, Lady Sansa. The midday meal will be served very soon and I promised my friends to take it with them.”

Sansa stared at her. “So you call me Lady Sansa now. I thought we were friends.”

Margaery sighed. She spoke lowly, close to whispering. “I’m sorry, Sansa, but with everything that’s going on I must be very careful. I am still your friend, but I cannot display this friendship too openly after the events of yesterday.”
“I see.” Sansa was speaking lowly as well. “So that’s what you do when someone becomes undesirable. You still pretend you are his friend, but you act as if you weren’t. Is that what you said to Mira when you dismissed her?”

The mention of Mira brought painful memories to Margaery. Mira had been Margaery’s most trusted friend for years. However, with everything that had happened to her family recently, she had tried to make alliances with people that caused many problems to Margaery. She had tried to give chances to Mira, but her handmaiden only answered by going even farther. The crushing blow happened when she discovered Mira had a scene with a merchant called Lord Andros in public and cooperated with Cersei. It had been too much. With a broken heart, Margaery had dismissed her from her service. She couldn’t allow to be involved in any scandal before she was married to Joffrey. Mira hadn’t lied. When Margaery confronted her about it, Mira confessed everything. She even recognized that Sera helped her, but only because she forced her to. Mira had seemed sad when she revealed it. She regretted it, but it was too late. Margaery had no choice but to expel her from her inner circle. Mira’s last words still resonated in her head weeks later. You would have done the same for your family. Of course Margaery would have done the same, and that was what made her so angry about all of this. She couldn’t blame Mira for what she did. Her family meant so much for her. Margaery still remembered the glow of joy in Mira’s eyes when she talked about her parents, her brothers and her sister. When she learned about the destruction of Ironrath yesterday, she barely managed to hold tears for her former handmaiden. She sent Sera to tell the news to Mira so she may know. However, Margaery still felt betrayed by her. Mira was now serving Sansa. To see her at Sansa’s side during the trial had caused some pain in her heart. Margaery wished she could erase everything and bring back the northern girl she had come to know and trust at Highgarden, but that was impossible. She told Sansa the truth.

“I had no choice. I wish I could have acted otherwise, but I cannot be involved in any scandal or affair before my wedding with Joffrey. Cersei will exploit every weakness she can find.”

Sansa answered in quite an angered voice. “So, what are you going to do? Hide until you become queen? Do you really believe that to be Joffrey’s queen will protect you? Cersei still has half the Kingsguard and many Lannister guards in her pocket. She will never let you hold any influence on Joffrey. You see what she’s doing with Tyrion now that Lord Tywin is dead, and you know it would have been even worse if Ser Kevan hadn’t come. If she can do this, what do you think will stop her from strangling you in your sleep at the first opportunity?” Margaery raised a surprised eyebrow at the mention of that. Cersei threatened her about this once. Sansa seemed to understand what she was thinking. “Tyrion overheard you in the Grand Sept before our wedding.”

Margaery looked down before she answered. She didn’t want to talk about it. “Why did you come to talk with me?”

“I need you to testify for Tyrion,” Sansa stated bluntly. Margaery couldn’t have been more surprised.

“Sansa, I can’t do it.”

“If you don’t, Tyrion may be executed. Ser Jaime already refused to be the Lord of Casterly Rock despite Lord Tywin’s will. If Tyrion dies, Cersei becomes the Lady of the Westerlands. She will have a whole kingdom and half the Red Keep against you.”

“Perhaps, but even if Lord Tyrion gets out of this alive, even if he becomes the head of House Lannister, he will leave with you for the West and Cersei will remain here. She will never forget that I participated in the ruining of her plans to execute your husband. And if her brother is executed all the same, it will be even worse if I testify for him. I may even make more enemies at the court. There are so many people who believe that he’s guilty.”
There was some truth in Sansa’s words, but Margaery couldn’t take that risk. However, Sansa talked again and her words took Margaery aback. “What if I tell you that Cersei won’t be able to do anything against you after the trial is over?”

Margaery raised her eyebrows, skeptical. “How can you promise me this?”

Sansa walked in her direction until not even a feet separated them. “I have a secret card.” Sansa explained her everything with a murmuring voice. No one else would hear it except Margaery. When she was done, Margaery looked at her friend, impressed and bewildered.

“That could work,” the Tyrell girl recognized. “Are you sure about that? It’s quite risky.”

“More risky than ending strangled in your bed one day?”

Sansa wasn’t wrong. An opportunity like this one wouldn’t present itself again before long. “What do you want me to say?”

“Only what we discussed about after my wedding. I want you to tell the court how Tyrion treated me well and refused to share my bed. Also tell them you don’t believe he’s guilty or that he had a whore.”

Margaery wasn’t quite convinced. “I don’t think it will help your husband very much, Sansa.”

“It will destroy Shae’s testimony. All the accusation only holds on the testimonies of Pycelle and Shae. If they fall, Cersei has no proof against Tyrion. I have strong testimonies against Pycelle, and a few against Shae, but your word will have much more value. You are the future queen. People will listen to you. If I can prove that Shae lied for a part of her testimony, I can also prove everything she said is untrue. And remember I have my secret card.”

Margaery was impressed by Sansa’s cleverness. She never saw her use her brain this way before. What happened to the crying girl she met months ago? Perhaps Lord Tyrion’s arrest finally shook her. Margaery smiled. “Very well, I’ll testify. Just make me a sign when it will be my turn to speak. I hope you know what you’re doing.”

“I know. Don’t worry.” Sansa didn’t sound as certain as she probably wanted to seem. “Thank you, Margaery. I won’t forget. And a Lannister always pays her debts.”

Right before Sansa left, Margaery noticed she was wearing a golden necklace. She glimpsed a lion on the medallion. Margaery was quite surprised by this. Perhaps her conversations with Sansa had given some results. The pitying wolf had turned into a lioness. Margaery had quite the impression she would hear Sansa roar before the end of the day.

Chapter End Notes

You know who’s the third witness now. The three next chapters are the rest of the trial. They really are huge and important chapters that I worked a lot on. I can't wait for you to read them.

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa (the trial resumes)
Sansa X

Chapter Notes

Because of the many comments and reviews of people telling me they couldn't wait for
the next chapter. Because the last chapter was quite short. Because I was excited myself
to publish this chapter.

I decided to update sooner than I planned.

Let the trial continue.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

SANSA X

Sansa was walking in the direction of the Great Hall with Brienne and Mira, just like the day before. However, this time, she wasn’t going to listen to lies about her and Tyrion. She was going to tell people the truth. She held tightly the scroll in her hands. After her visit to Margaery, she had gone back to her personal rooms for a quick meal and a last preparation before the trial. She also wrote down the names of all her witnesses for Tyrion’s defense. Ser Kevan had asked for a list when he visited her, so she had to give it to him before the trial continued. Sansa was nervous, but also determined. She wouldn’t abandon Tyrion, and all these people who came to testify against him would pay for their lies, especially Shae. Sansa knew the whole truth about her relationship with Tyrion. Bronn and Podrick told her everything about it this morning. That made her angry to see how Shae betrayed Tyrion after he treated her so well. She was also angry at Shae for her betrayal toward her. Shae would learn the cost to anger a wolf.

While she entered the Throne Room, Sansa felt eyes on her and heard whispers all around her as she passed. They didn’t know, but soon they would. Ser Kevan was sitting on the Iron Throne. Sansa climbed the dais and went to him.

“Ser Kevan.”

“Lady Sansa.” He spoke coldly. He probably thought right now that Tyrion was guilty, and Sansa as well. She would have to convince him of the opposite.

“This is the list of the defense’s witnesses.” She handed him the scroll. Ser Kevan took it and unrolled it.

“You have a lot of witnesses,” he commented after he took a look at the names. “There is an empty line at the end. Why?”

“I have a witness who may not be able to come. If he does, I’ll tell you when the time comes.”

Tyrion’s uncle eyed her suspiciously. Sansa remained unmoved by his stare. She couldn’t reveal the name of her last witness, not right now. Finally, after a moment, the Hand of the King rolled the parchment. “Very well, my lady. You may take your place.”
Ser Kevan pointed with his hand the dais towards his left. Sansa looked at the place. Why was he indicating the chairs where the Tyrell family was sitting? By looking more attentively, Sansa realized there were four chairs instead of the three yesterday. Lord Mace Tyrell was a judge, so they only needed three chairs for Margaery, Ser Loras and their grandmother. She looked back at her uncle-in-law. “What does it mean?”

“Considering what happened yesterday, I don’t think it would be appropriate for you to sit among the assistance. You’ll be safer here on the dais.”

Sansa considered the chair. If everyone took the same place than yesterday, she would be seated next to Margaery. That could be a good thing since the future queen would testify. It would give the impression the Tyrells were on her side, and she preferred to sit with Margaery instead of Cersei. However, if she was on the dais, it might give the first impression that she believed Tyrion was guilty. After what he endured yesterday, what would be his reaction if he saw her on the dais like the judges? Perhaps he would believe she betrayed him. She couldn’t take that risk.

“I thank you, Ser Kevan,” she began. “But I would rather be close to my husband.”

Ser Kevan looked at her with a strange expression. He seemed surprised by her words. “Very well, I’ll have your seat moved on the floor before the right row of benches. You’ll be close to a gold cloak this way.”

“You care a lot about my safety, ser. I thank you.”

“You are the wife of my nephew. This is natural.” He spoke without emotion, with indifference. Sansa understood the meaning. He wasn’t doing it out of kindness, but only because through her marriage with Tyrion she was a Lannister. Sansa went away. Two men were already lifting her chair and bringing it to the place Ser Kevan indicated. Her seat was now behind the box of the witnesses. At least she would be close to Tyrion. He needed to know she was with him. His brother told her this morning about the deal Ser Kevan proposed him to join the Night’s Watch. Tyrion had refused when Ser Jaime told him, but would he still be of the same mind today? Sansa had to make sure Tyrion wouldn’t confess. He was innocent.

Sansa remembered the words Ser Jaime brought back from his conversation with Tyrion. *He said his loyalty was to you now. That he didn’t care about House Lannister, just like Varys said. And that you showed more loyalty to him than the average Lannister ever showed him.* Sansa had been touched by Tyrion’s words. She didn’t love him, but she could consider him as an ally, even a friend. He helped her very much and had been kind with her. She couldn’t let him die. Sansa touched the necklace around her neck. Inside she was still a Stark, but outside she was a Lannister. Tyrion helped her, and a Lannister always pays her debts.

Kevan invited everyone to sit down. The same chaos than yesterday began. Sansa noticed Bronn and Podrick already at their places among the crowd. There was a young girl next to Bronn. Brienne was at her side, standing with a hand on the hilt of her sword. As for Mira, she was standing on the other side of Sansa.

“Don’t you want to sit, Mira?” Sansa asked her.

“I fear it’s too late, my lady.” Mira glanced towards the benches. She was right, they were all occupied now. “Anyway, I must be close to you in all circumstances. I’m your handmaiden after all.”

Sansa had to smile at this. Mira was perfect as a handmaiden. Sansa still had difficulties to believe Margaery removed her from her service. She was as loyal as Podrick. They made a good pair
After a few minutes, the massive doors of the Hall opened, and just like the last time Ser Jaime entered, followed by Tyrion and two gold cloaks who attached his shackles. When Tyrion entered the box of the accused, he noticed her presence. Sansa smiled a little in his direction to show he had her support. Tyrion looked at her strangely and averted his eyes from her. He looked ashamed. Perhaps he thought she blamed him for his relationship with Shae. To be true, she felt betrayed in some way when she learned it, but Bronn and Podrick explained to her this morning that Tyrion never had anything with Shae after their wedding. Sansa couldn’t blame Tyrion to spend time with a whore before they were married. After all, she knew very well he wasn’t the only one to do so, far from it, and he couldn’t know at this moment they would marry. In fact, Sansa even felt grateful that he stopped whatever there was between him and Shae, at least physically, after they were married. And so my watch begins. He kept his promise. It was difficult to find people like this since she arrived in King’s Landing.

Joffrey didn’t show up today. He was probably certain they would bring him Tyrion’s head before the end of the day. Sansa hoped he was wrong. The trial resumed as soon as Tyrion was restrained and the guards took their places. One of them was near Sansa. She didn’t know if she should be reassured or scared by his presence. The gold cloaks had turned against her father when he was Hand of the King. At least, it wasn’t Janos Slynt who was their commander anymore. Tyrion saw to that a long time ago.

Ser Kevan cleared his throat. “Tyrion of the House Lannister, you stand accused by the Queen Regent of the murder of your father, Tywin Lannister, the Lord of Casterly Rock and the Hand of the King. You are also accused of attempt of murder against the king. After listening to the accusations and the witnesses of the Crown, do you wish to change your pleading?”

There was a moment of silence. Tyrion looked at her, uncertainty plain on his face. Sansa made a negative sign with her head. No, don’t do it. He mustn’t plead guilty. Tyrion turned to his uncle and said the word Sansa wanted to hear. “No.”

“You didn’t kill your father?”

“No.”

“You made no attempt on the life of your king?”

“No attempt.”

Sansa believed she saw Ser Kevan sigh in silence. She was quite sure he tightened his lips. “Very well. We will listen to the witnesses of the defense then. The defense may call its first witness.”

Sansa exchanged a look with Ser Jaime at the other side of the room. The Lord Commander of the Kingsguard walked with a determined pace to the box, his steps echoing through the room. Some people whispered in surprise. Sansa had decided they would start with a witness that would show Tyrion’s defense was serious. This way, the judges would consider everything her witnesses would say from the beginning. Then would come the less important and most questionable people until they reached those that would prove without a doubt that Tyrion was innocent.

“Ser Jaime Lannister,” declared the main judge. “What do you have to say?” Ser Kevan spoke without emotion again. He really sounded like his brother in these moments, though less severe.

“I have to say that my brother is innocent. Anyone who believes he is guilty isn’t wrong, he is stupid.” Ser Jaime’s words brought some mutterings among the crowd.
“That’s a frank declaration, Ser Jaime, but it doesn’t prove anything.”

Ser Jaime sighed and looked down before he rose his head again and declared something else that let people silent. “I’m going to tell you the truth. Tyrion hated our father. Our father hated him too. But my father also hated me. And he hated Cersei as well. And both of us hated him too. But we respected him, all of us. I, Cersei, Tyrion, we all respected him. He was our father. None of us would have ever thought about killing him.” Ser Jaime stopped a moment before he said what was really important. “Anyway, I have the proof that my brother is innocent. I have the proof that he didn’t kill our father.”

“What is this proof, Ser Jaime?” asked Lord Mace Tyrell. “The Grand Maester told us your father was poisoned with the tears of Lys and that Lord Tyrion stole it in his stores.”

“Pycke will tell you something one day and tell the contrary two days later. Do you know what he told me when he examined the body?” A silence welcomed Jaime’s question. He had answered to Lord Tyrell on a defying and exasperated tone. “No, of course you don’t. I’ll tell you. The morning my father was found dead I was heading to my personal quarters after my guard of night. I crossed the way of the Grand Maester who told me my father was dead, so I ran to his chambers and found him lying on his bed. He looked like he slept. There was no injury on his body, no smell, nothing. When the Grand Maester arrived a few minutes later and examined his body, he told us my father died of a heart failure during the night. There wasn’t a single smell coming from his body. He wasn’t poisoned. Tyrion was arrested by my sister because she assumed our father was murdered the moment she realized he was dead. Even Pycke at this moment told her our father died of natural causes.”

“Ser Jaime is right.” Oberyn Martell spoke. “The tears of Lys eat the bowels of its victims. If Lord Tywin really died of this, there should have been a horrible smell in the room.”

Sansa was glad Prince Oberyn highlighted this detail. Was he really against Tyrion? She started to have some doubts about it now. Perhaps his vote wasn’t decided before the trial began. Pycke’s testimony would be quite weakened by this testimony, and it was only the beginning.

“Thank you, Ser Jaime. You’re dismissed.” Ser Jaime left the box with a bow on Ser Kevan’s words and went back to his place where he stood guard. Sansa noticed that Cersei was looking at him with a poisonous look. “The defense may call its second witness.”

As soon as Ser Kevan spoke, someone at Sansa’s side left her place. Mira knew she was the second one to testify. She wouldn’t bring much evidence to exonerate Tyrion, but it was always useful to have people talking for you and coming from all social classes and all the Seven Kingdoms.

“State your name,” said Ser Kevan, looking at Mira intently.

“Mira Forrester. I am a handmaiden in service to Lady Sansa, Lord Tyrion’s wife.” Mira’s voice was neutral. She was quite talented to hide her emotions and stay calm.

“Wait a minute.” That was to be expected. It was Lord Mace Tyrell. “I recognize you. You were at the service of my daughter Margaery. What are you doing at the service of someone else?”

“My lords.” The call came from the dais. It was Margaery. “If you permit, I may explain it.”

Ser Kevan looked on his left to Margaery. After a moment, he conceded. “Very well, Lady Margaery. You may.”

“Mira was my handmaiden, it’s true, but a few weeks ago Sansa told me during a discussion that one
of her servants had left and that she was short a member in her household. Since I had more than enough people at my service, I offered her to have Mira as her handmaiden.”

Strangely, Prince Oberyn was the next one to speak. “I don’t recognize your name. I know the names of most of the noble families of the Reach, but I never heard about a House Forrester.”

“I wasn’t born in the Reach, Prince Oberyn,” Mira answered. Perhaps she should have waited, or perhaps she shouldn’t have given more details. “My father was the Lord of Ironrath. My family is sworn to House Glover of Deepwood Motte, who are sworn to the Wardens of the North.”

Mira’s declaration brought some new mumbles. Now they would see her as a traitor. Oberyn Martell was looking at her with some surprise. “You are a Northerner?”

“I am.”

Cersei chose this moment to intervene. “Her family fought for the traitor Robb Stark. Why should we listen to her?”

“Silence!” Ser Kevan’s voice resonated. “Your Grace, you are submitted to the same rules than the accused and everyone else here. You will only speak when asked to.” Sansa saw the anger in the queen’s eyes. She wasn’t used to being rebuked, Sansa could see it. “We are not here to discuss about allegiances. Lady Mira, what do you have to tell us?”

Mira waited a moment before she answered. She also turned her head to look at Tyrion for a moment. “I don’t believe Lord Tyrion is guilty. I can’t say I know him personally, but I met him a few times in the weeks preceding his arrest and he gave me the impression to be a good man. I know that he fought valiantly at the Battle of Blackwater, that he served loyally as Hand of the King and as Master of Coin. I can’t imagine someone so devoted to the Crown and to his family capable of murdering his own father.”

“How did you meet him?” That was Oberyn Martell who talked. “Why would Lord Tyrion spend time with a handmaiden?” There was a smile on Prince Oberyn’s lips. Was he implying there had been something between Mira and Tyrion, just like with Shae? If that was the case, Mira didn’t lose her composure and continued to speak with a neutral voice.

“My family is specialized in the harvesting and crafting of ironwood. Lord Tyrion was looking for a supplier in order to get enough of it to rebuild the royal fleet. Since I was the only person who could represent House Forrester in King’s Landing, he approached me to discuss of it. During our discussions, he always remained centered on his duties as Master of Coin. He even told me that it was on the orders of his father that he was looking for ironwood. As for me, someone so dedicated to his duties towards the Crown couldn’t have killed the Hand of the King, even less his own father.”

Mira was done talking and Sansa heard people arguing among them in the assistance. They weren’t sure if they could believe Mira’s testimony. The following witnesses would prove Mira was right. Ser Kevan allowed her to take back her place. When the next witness was called, it was the other person at Sansa’s side who went forward.

Brienne had told Sansa she could testify for Tyrion. She was one of the three new witnesses Sansa found this morning, along with Margaery. She said that after what she heard during the first day and what Sansa told her about her husband, she didn’t believe anymore he was guilty. Sansa hadn’t been sure if Brienne’s testimony would make anything good, but she finally decided to include her. She was still one more person to speak for Tyrion.

Brienne’s presence surprised many people. They weren’t used to women clad in armor and with a
sword at their belt, even if now Brienne was known for that through all the Red Keep. Her name caused even more surprise. People knew she was suspected of killing Renly Baratheon, and Lord Tyrell made a point to remind them of it.

“Weren’t you the one to kill Renly Baratheon?”

“I didn’t kill him.” Brienne answered shortly. Sansa had warned her to not extend about the events of Lord Renly’s death if she was asked about it. That was what she feared the most with Brienne’s testimony. Sansa noticed at the same time the angry gaze Ser Loras was shooting at Brienne.

“We’re not here about Renly Baratheon’s death, but about Tywin Lannister’s death and attempts of murder against our rightful king. You have no need to say anything about things that don’t concern the accusations, Lady Brienne. You may speak.” Kevan’s intervention relieved Sansa. Brienne wouldn’t have to speak about the shadow. She was so honourable that it almost made her stupid sometimes.

“Thank you, Ser Kevan.” Brienne started her testimony. “I don’t believe Lord Tyrion is guilty. I know his brother, Ser Jaime Lannister, and Ser Jaime knows his brother very well. If he believes that Lord Tyrion is innocent, then he is innocent.” That wasn’t quite convincing. It would be what would follow that would make her testimony a success or a disaster. “Furthermore, after Lord Renly died, I served Lady Catelyn Stark, Lady Sansa’s mother. I escorted Ser Jaime to King’s Landing on her orders, but people don’t know why Lady Stark really released Ser Jaime.”

Ser Kevan was the one to ask. “Why did she release him?”

The hard part came. Brienne talked very carefully, saying exactly what Sansa told her. “When he was acting Hand of the King, Lord Tyrion made a secret deal with Catelyn Stark. His brother, Ser Jaime, against her daughters, the Lady Sansa and the Lady Arya.” There were sounds of surprise once more. “The Starks were traitors to the Crown, but everyone knows that despite this, they only trusted people whose honor they were sure of. People they knew would be incapable of killing members of their own family. Lady Stark trusted Lord Tyrion. This means that in her eyes, Lord Tyrion was a man of honor who would never betray his family. He can’t have done this.”

It was the better Brienne could do. Even Mira’s testimony was more convincing, but perhaps it could have some weight in the balance when the other witnesses would have testified. Brienne came back to her place beside Sansa. She was obviously angry to have said that Sansa’s family were traitors, but Sansa ordered her to say it, or else her testimony wouldn’t be considered. The next witness was Ser Balon Swann who Sansa turned against Cersei not long after she was confined by Joffrey in her chambers. Taking a look at the queen, Sansa saw the anger in her eyes. She had to admit she felt proud in this moment to have deprived Cersei of a good witness. Ser Balon never hit Sansa, so she had nothing against him, though he joined the Kingsguard after Joffrey stopped to ask them to beat her.

Ser Balon started his testimony by praising Tyrion. “My Lord Hand, I had the honor to fight alongside Lord Tyrion during the Battle of Blackwater. He is a brave man for all his size. I saw him covered of blood, fighting for the city, fighting for his king. He stayed somewhere between life and death for days I learned later. It is true that he slapped his Grace once, after the riot. But he only slapped him once, he never kicked him or hit him in any other way or at any other time. It was a fit of wroth, no more. A summer storm. The mob near killed us all. His Grace didn’t keep any mark of this. As for the time he said the king was a halfwit, I was there. What my sworn brothers said is true, but they didn’t tell the whole story.” Ser Balon’s voice turned different. He now sounded ashamed of speaking of this, and Sansa knew he was. It had taken a lot from her to convince him to tell the truth about this scene. He had to speak, even only indirectly, against his sworn brothers and his king.
“What Lord Tyrion said yesterday about it was true. It was soon after the Battle of Oxcross. Robb Stark had defeated a great army of the Crown and the king brought the Lady Sansa before the court to answer for the treason of her brother. He was pointing a loaded crossbow at her, saying that killing her would send the young wolf a message. I feared he would do it for a moment, but finally his Grace lowered the weapon. He instructed Ser Meryn to send a message to Robb Stark another way, so Ser Meryn hit the Lady Sansa with his fists and the flat of his sword. He tore her clothes apart. She was half naked before the court and Ser Meryn was about to deliver another strike of his sword when Lord Tyrion intervened. He put a stop to this and reminded the king of the respect he owed to his betrothed and that he couldn’t do as he liked as the Mad King did. That was no threat. It was a warning and an advice from a Hand and an uncle to his king and nephew. I will not believe that Lord Tyrion attempted to kill his Grace or killed his father.”

“This man is telling lies about the king he swore to serve. I want him to be removed immediately from the Kingsguard!” Cersei shouted as soon as Ser Balon was done.

“Silence! If you want to say something, your Grace, you’ll have to ask for it, or else you will not be allowed at this trial any longer.” Ser Kevan had to intervene again before Cersei’s outburst. Tyrion’s outbursts were civilized and proper in comparison.

“I am the queen! You have no right to expel me!”

“You will not be expelled, your Grace. You will be accompanied back to your chambers with all the dignity your rank gives you the right to. The judges cannot allow the king’s justice to be interfered. If you wish to leave, just say a word.” Cersei didn’t say another word. “Ser Balon, if you don’t have anything else to say, you may leave.”

Sansa couldn’t believe she looked with wonderment to this woman once. She looked like a scolded child right now. Shae had better manners than this queen, and that said a lot. Ser Balon left the box. When the next witness advanced on Sansa’s sign, there were nearly shouts of surprise through all the Great Hall. Even Oberyn Martell looked surprised… and amused as well if Sansa judged by his smile. Ser Kevan had a doubtful expression. Lord Mace Tyrell was stammering. Cersei’s face was contorted by anger. Ser Jaime was agape and Sansa felt Brienne’s questioning gaze on her. Ser Loras was looking at his grandmother with a dumbfounded expression and the Queen of Thornes was fixing the new witness, her eyebrows frowned by surprise. As for Tyrion, he looked at Sansa in a way that showed he was impressed. Sansa smiled back at him, feeling pride rising in her chest. Mira, already aware of all this, bowed her head when Lady Margaery passed before her and Sansa saw a thin smile on the future queen’s lips directed toward her former handmaiden. She gave the same one to Sansa before she took place into the box. Her presence caused many reactions. Only her presence as a witness for the defense could switch the crowd’s opinion about Tyrion, and have more than enough impact to convince her father to vote for Tyrion even if Ser Kevan told him not to.

Margaery began her testimony. “I remember something that my brother Loras told me about the Battle of Blackwater a few days after it took place. He told me that during the battle he saw a small shape on the ground, wearing a red armor, covered with blood and mud, a huge red line on his face from the forehead to the chin. I learned later it was Lord Tyrion. My brother saw him injured in the middle of the battle. Lord Tyrion risked his life for the city and for our king this day. He saved the city. He saved our king. It’s true, Lord Tywin arrived with our forces to defeat Stannis, but before it was Lord Tyrion who held the city against the usurper. Without him, my brother and Lord Tywin would have arrived too late. Some people here owe their life to this man. He saved my king, my love, on this day, and I can’t believe that he would try to kill him.” Margaery seemed so sincere in her way to speak, allowing just the right sparks of emotion to make sure her words just had the right impact. “Also, I must reveal that one of the witnesses yesterday lied in front of the whole court, under the eyes of the Seven.”
“Someone lied? Who?” Margaery’s father really was stupid.

“I’m talking about the whore. Shae.” The word caused some rumbles in the crowd, like when it was pronounced yesterday, or so Sansa thought. She had been so shocked by Shae’s words back then that she barely noticed the other people’s reactions. “I saw her a few times when I spent time with Sansa and she always seemed to be spying on her, watching her in every circumstances. I spoke with Sansa after she was married to Lord Tyrion and she only had good words for her husband. He treated her with all the consideration a husband owes to his wife. She told herself that he treated her even better than she deserved to be. And she never refused him in her bed like Shae said. It was Lord Tyrion who decided to wait until his wife was ready to consummate the marriage. He is not the perverted man this woman described, quite the opposite. I don’t believe a word of what she said. She lied about his marriage with Sansa, and she swore by all the gods that everything she said was true. She lied about one thing, so I don’t see how we could believe anything she might have said before the court. Anyway, if Lord Tyrion had wanted to kill my beloved Joffrey, he would have done so during the Battle of Blackwater. I don’t believe a single second the accusations against him.”

Margaery went back to her seat on the dais when she was done speaking. Her speech had quite an effect on everyone. The tide was turning. The next witnesses would have to exploit the breach Margaery created. And Sansa would be the first to work on it. When Ser Kevan called for the following witness, Sansa rose and came to the box. She stood there, her face impassive, waiting for the judges to ask their questions.

After the Hand of the King asked what she had to say, Sansa began. First, she had a physical proof to present. “My lords, I would like first to give you something.” Mira advanced on the dais with the vial that contained the essence of nightshade Tyrion gave to Sansa a few weeks ago. She presented it to Ser Kevan. Sansa explained to the judges the content of the vial. “As you can see, it is almost full. I didn’t use it very much.”

The vial was examined by both the judges. When it came to Prince Oberyn, he looked very closely to it. “I would say approximately five drops were used. We would need ten drops to kill a single man. It couldn’t have been used to kill Lord Tywin.” Sansa internally sighed in relief. The two poisons the Grand Maester mentioned as being the possible cause of Lord Tywin’s death were now excluded. Sansa started her testimony after the judges were done looking at the substance. She made sure her voice was low, hesitant, sad, soft and delicate.

“I remember that the queen used to say how fool, silly and idiot I was. Today I have to admit she was right. I was an idiot to trust Shae, my handmaiden. I would never have trusted her if I had known who she was. I heard many people yesterday testifying against my husband and each time I wanted to cry. I can still remember how Ser Meryn Trant and Ser Boros Blount used to hit me with their iron fists. I remember the many bruises and cuts I could see all over my face each time I was looking at myself in a glass. I can still feel the pain that I felt when Ser Meryn hit me with his sword here in this very room. I still remember how I felt when he stripped me of my clothes in the presence of dozens of people.”

Sansa heard cries behind her in the assistance. She could see Lord Mace was surprised and shocked by her words, and how Ser Kevan and Prince Oberyn were looking closely at her, listening to every words she pronounced. She didn’t stop to talk. “I remember how I felt when I heard Shae relating all her lies yesterday. She lied about the fact I refused my husband. He was the one to refuse to consummate our marriage, just like Lady Margaery told you. Shae lied in front of all of us in the sight of the Seven. I have come to know Lord Tyrion these last months. I already knew him before our marriage, but I learned to know him even better afterwards. Even if Shae really is who she pretends to be, I know that my husband would never mistreat a woman, whoever she is. Anyone who knows him even a little is well aware this is impossible. And anyone who knows him knows
very well he would never make such a stupid plan to kill the whole royal family.” She looked directly into the eyes of Ser Kevan. She saw that he was moved by her words. “Shae’s testimony is perjury.”

Sansa heard people whispering in approval as she headed back to her seat. When she passed close to Tyrion, she heard him speak. “Thank you.” It was a whisper so low that only she could hear it. She gave him a timid smile as she sat down in her chair.

After Sansa came Bronn. Sansa had feared for a moment that Bronn may abandon Tyrion. Cersei had offered him a marriage with Lollys Stokeworth and gold if he refused to testify for Tyrion and to be his champion if Tyrion ever asked for a trial by combat. After yesterday’s testimonies, he nearly told her this morning that he would accept Cersei’s offer if she couldn’t guarantee Tyrion would be declared innocent. Sansa and Jaime argued for half an hour to convince him to stay by their side, and Sansa had to promise him a marriage prospect with a highborn lady and a lordship once Tyrion would be free. She wondered how Tyrion would react to this when she would tell him. However, Bronn was there and about to testify.

The sellsword knight began his testimony by rambling about his great deeds. “Ser Bronn of the Blackwater. Sellsword for many years. Fought and worked for many men, as long as they had money to pay me and that I had a chance to live at their service. I’ve been north of the Wall once. Defeated Ser Vardis Egen in a trial by combat and saved the life of Lord Tyrion Lannister this way. Fought at the Battle of the Green Fork. Appointed Commander of the City Watch by the Hand of the King after the baby’s killer was sent to the Wall. Fought at the Battle of Blackwater and put fire to half the ships of Stannis. Anointed knight by the king himself for this, on the order of Lord Tywin.”

“Is that all you have to say about yourself?” The prince of Dorne didn’t look impressed by Bronn’s personal praise.

“I’m good at killing and fucking and singing. I can sing the Dornishman’s wife pretty well if you want. I’m quite known in the brothels.”

The reactions of the people were a mix of indignation, discomfort and laughter. Prince Oberyn was smiling. Ser Kevan decided to put an end to this. “Ser Bronn, what do you have to say about the matter at hand?”

Bormon began by telling them what happened the day Sansa was beaten before the court by Ser Meryn. He described the scene when he and Tyrion entered the Great Hall at this moment, Ser Meryn holding his sword high in the air, about to deliver a great stroke with it while Sansa knelt on the floor, wailing with all her clothes torn apart. Bronn added some nasty details about the kingsguard. “He sheathed his sword as soon as the Lord Imp approached, probably afraid of what he may order. What kind of knight beats a helpless girl, Tyrion asked. Do you know what Ser Meryn answered? The kind who serves his king, Imp. I told him he should be careful to not soil his pretty white cloak with blood. After all, he never really had blood on it since he flew away from the battlements in the middle of the Battle of Blackwater. Anyway, when Tyrion warned his nephew that he could end the same way than the Mad King if he did as he liked, that’s when Ser Trant declared that no one could threaten the king in the presence of the kingsguards. The answer of the Imp was I’m not threatening the king, ser. I am educating my nephew. Bronn, the next time Ser Meryn speaks, kill him.” That brought reactions of surprise again among the assistance. “You should have seen the fear in his eyes then. That was a threat. See the difference? That’s what the dwarf said right after that. I guess the man understood the difference between an advice and a threat. I wished he had spoken again.”

There were some rumbles in the room. Prince Oberyn looked quite amused by Bronn’s tale while
Lord Mace seemed to be searching for his words. That didn’t stop Bronn to speak however.

“Another day, I had quite an interesting discussion with Ser Meryn, not long after the Battle of Blackwater. When I told him I was a knight, he said I was an up-jumped cutthroat, and nothing more. I answered. \textit{That’s exactly who I am. And you’re a grub in fancy armor who’s better at beating little girls than fighting men.}”

The last words brought some laughter this time. Sansa hadn’t been sure about what Bronn would say about Ser Meryn. After all, he was a kingsguard. It was a chance Joffrey wasn’t there. However, Sansa didn’t have a choice. Bronn had accepted to testify at the condition he could mock Ser Meryn like he wanted. Sansa needed his testimony to destroy Ser Meryn’s testimony, and for much more. Bronn was essential to destroy another testimony. No, in fact, he was essential to destroy a witness. Even better, two witnesses. Anyway, his mockery of the knight seemed to have turned quite well. He was about to destroy three witnesses in this case. After the laughs were over, he continued on another subject.

“To talk about something else, I’m sorry about that your Grace,” he made a deep mocking bow in Cersei’s direction, “but it appears that most of the things Shae said were false.” Bronn started to say that he knew Shae personally and she didn’t believe in any god, so an oath to tell the truth by all gods didn’t mean a shit for her. Then he recited all the lies in Shae’s testimony. Tyrion and Sansa never planned anything against the royal family or Lord Tywin, or else Bronn would have known since Tyrion told him nearly everything. He knew Tyrion for a long time and he knew he didn’t do it. “He hated his father, of course, but many hated him. And poison’s not his style. Or murder, for that matter. In fact, I never had so few people to kill while working for someone. The only times I killed for him were the trial by combat and the Battle of Blackwater.” He also told the whole story about how Shae came to be in Tyrion’s service. He recognized Shae was his whore and that he kept her in the Tower of the Hand, but he pointed out every details of her testimony that were untrue. How she came willingly in Tyrion’s tent when Bronn told her Lord Tywin’s son wanted her in his service, not long before the Battle of the Green Fork. How Bronn broke the arm of the knight when he refused to let Shae go by her freewill. How she was quite interested by everything of value in Tyrion’s tent and didn’t seem at all bothered to work for him. Bronn explained Tyrion treated her very well and that Shae enjoyed his company very much. He really told her \textit{I want you to fuck me like it’s my last night in this world}, but Shae looked more amused than sad when she talked about it. The nickname was Shae’s idea and she began to use it at the very beginning of their time together. “Anyway, she wasn’t bothered at all to be with him. She loved him.”

Consternation was obvious on everyone’s face in the room and by their breath, from the judges to the crowd, even to the guards. Only Sansa and the other people with her this morning remained impassive since they already knew about it. Ser Kevan broke the awkward silence that had followed Bronn’s declaration. “Wait a minute. This woman… was in love with Lord Tyrion?” He really seemed surprised by this.

“Yes, she was.” Bronn answered so casually. “After the Battle of Blackwater it became quite obvious. She wanted him to escape with her to Pentos, but he refused. That’s why she was so angry with him after he married the Lady Sansa. She wanted him to marry her instead. She told me one day \textit{I am his, and he is mine.”} Many people blew puffs of air when they heard it, a few even laughed. Sansa felt glee to see Shae being mocked as Tyrion was yesterday. No one would ever believe her testimony after that. When Sansa looked at Tyrion, he was sitting, looking away on the floor. Sansa knew now he loved Shae, so that was probably normal he looked so sad in this moment. Sansa felt sorry for him, but she was also angry in some way that Tyrion still cared for a woman who betrayed him so coldly.

Bonn specified as well that Tyrion stopped to see Shae after he was married with Sansa, and that Shae got even more angry because of that. Sansa never knew about the relationship between Tyrion
and Shae and Sansa never removed Shae from her service. Shae was the one to leave King’s Landing by her own will after Tyrion was arrested. Then came the last part of Bronn’s testimony when he spoke about the day they arrested the Grand Maester. Bronn was there and told every details about this day, including the fact they found the Grand Maester in his bed with a whore. Pycelle was present today, so he began to protest immediately. “This… these are filthy lies… from a cutthroat. I was wrongfully imprisoned…”

“That’s enough, Grand Maester.” Ser Kevan called Pycelle to order. “You were given time to speak yesterday. Continue, Ser Bronn.”

The sellsword knight went on, saying he brought himself the Grand Maester to the black cells on Tyrion’s orders and that Tyrion took nothing in the Grand Maester’s chambers while Bronn was present. He stole nothing in his stores and only stayed a few seconds after Bronn left with the old man. However, the best moment was when Bronn revealed the Grand Maester confessed he let Jon Arryn die and did nothing to save him. Pycelle tried again to speak, stuttering incomprehensible words. Ser Kevan ordered the gold cloaks to escort him back to his chambers since he couldn’t remain quiet and the Grand Maester left the room between two armed men under the shouts of the crowd. Even after Bronn was back to his place people continued to yell and Ser Kevan had to bring back the order again, even threatening to expel all the assistance from the court.

The next witness was a girl named Daisy. She was the one sitting next to Bronn when the trial started again today. She was the last witness Sansa managed to find this morning. When Bronn told her about Pycelle’s arrest, he revealed that he knew the girl who was present then since he visited Littlefinger’s brothels and that he could persuade her to testify if she was paid enough. That was why he left for a brothel after their meeting this morning, or so Sansa hoped. Perhaps he had used the opportunity to do other things while in the brothel. Sansa wasn’t sure if it was a good idea to bring a whore to testify for Tyrion. She had destroyed Shae so much up to now that people may not believe Daisy’s words, but she was the only one who saw what Tyrion did in the Grand Maester’s chambers after Bronn brought him in the black cells. Daisy’s testimony was quite short in comparison to the one Bronn gave and inspired a lot of pity. She seemed so fragile and afraid to speak. That was no surprise considering the last time she came into the Red Keep, Joffrey had her nearly beaten to death. She gave the same version than Bronn, confessing she was a whore working in one of Lord Baelish’s establishments and that she was with the Grand Maester in his bed the night Lord Tyrion arrested him. She confirmed all the things Bronn said, including about Jon Arryn, and revealed Tyrion stole nothing to the Grand Maester.

“The only thing I saw Lord Tyrion take was some sort of instrument I don’t know the name, but he only played with it a little before he put it back on a table. He took nothing. He stayed behind a few seconds after Ser Bronn and the Grand Maester were gone, but it was only to give me a silver stag and a golden dragon for my trouble. He took nothing in the chamber.”

No one dared to question her. Her voice was so weak and trembling, it was obvious she was afraid and hesitant to speak. All the judges seemed quite compassionate this time. Perhaps some of them even knew she was the whore Joffrey ordered to be beaten until her body was covered with blood.

When Daisy left, Cersei decided it was time for her to interrupt again. “She is whore. Why should we believe anything she said?” Ser Kevan silenced her with a single stare. Sansa could see Ser Kevan’s behavior changed in comparison to the beginning of the trial. He didn’t look at Tyrion or Sansa with hard or suspicious eyes like before. His glances only showed curiosity now. He was listening to Tyrion’s witnesses and considering everything they said.

Finally Podrick came. Like everyone, he said he didn’t believe Lord Tyrion was guilty. In fact, he swore on his personal life that his master was innocent of all the crimes he was accused of. He was a
kind and brave man, loyal to his family, and he never mistreated Shae. Podrick denied all Shae’s accusations and words, stating firmly that Tyrion never mistreated her and that she left King’s Landing by her own will after Tyrion’s arrest, not on Sansa’s orders. Then he spoke about the dinner when Tyrion threatened to hurt Cersei.

“The queen accused my lord to have shipped Princess Myrcella off to Dorne, and now to send the king to the battlefield to die. Lord Tyrion said the Kingsguard would protect him and that he had the best armor they could get for him. He said King Joffrey had to be out there fighting, that men would fight more fiercely if their king fought beside them. Then the queen said to Lord Tyrion she found his little whore. She said that every wound King Joffrey would suffer during the battle she would suffer it too. That if the king died, she would die from the most horrible death someone could imagine. Then she ordered Ser Mandon Moore to bring her in. But it wasn’t Shae. I think the name of the girl was Ros. Lord Tyrion had spent some time with her in the North and had given her a golden necklace, so the queen believed she still was in my lord’s service. She had bruises and cuts all over her body. On her arms, on her back, on her face. Blood was running from her lips. It was all black around an eye, someone had punched her right there. Lord Tyrion was angry at the queen because she ordered someone innocent to be beaten for no reason, that’s why he said he would hurt her for this. It wasn’t sincere. It was only anger that spoke in this moment.” Podrick continued on another subject. What he would say now would be vital for the outcome of the trial... and would plant seeds for the next testimony. So much depended on it.

“During the Battle of Blackwater, Lord Tyrion was on the battlements with King Joffrey, Ser Lancel Lannister, Sandor Clegane and some kingsguards. Ser Mandon Moore and Ser Meryn Trant were among them. When Stannis’s fleet attacked, he sent a ship full of wildfire against them. Then he gave the signal to Ser Bronn to loose a flaming arrow on the ship and it exploded. A large part of Stannis’s fleet was destroyed, but he chose to launch an attack on the city all the same. Lord Tyrion ordered Sandor Clegane to fight before the Mud Gate to prevent any Baratheon troops from coming nearby. Then he sent me to the King’s Gate to bring all men guarding it. He never made a single attempt to kill the king all this time. When I came back, Ser Meryn and the king were no longer here and all men were wondering why the king had left the battlements. So Lord Tyrion decided to lead the attack out of the gates. He led the men through a secret passage under the city and attacked the soldiers trying to break through the Mud Gate by behind. He defeated them and had the battering ram rolled and set on fire. The men were shouting HALFMAN! Then we were attacked by other Baratheon’s troops. It was during this engagement that Lord Tyrion was injured.” Podrick stopped for a moment. He looked hesitant to speak now. “What most of the people ignore is that Lord Tyrion wasn’t injured by enemies. It wasn’t one of Stannis’s men who gave him his scar. It was Ser Mandon’s sword.”

There were new shouts of surprise all over the room. Prince Oberyn looked intently at Podrick. He seemed quite intrigued by what Podrick just said. Lord Mace didn’t know what to say. Ser Kevan was first to come over the surprise. “Are you saying that Ser Mandon Moore is the one who injured Lord Tyrion?”

“Yes, my lord,” Podrick answered. “He tried to kill Lord Tyrion during the battle.” Again people puffed in surprise. “I don’t know why, but he suddenly slashed Lord Tyrion across the face with his sword. If Lord Tyrion hadn’t backed up in time, his head would have been cut in half.”

“Who’s this Ser Mandon Moore? I know no knight of the Kingsguard who bears that name.” It was Prince Oberyn who asked this question. Ser Kevan was the one to answer.

“Ser Mandon Moore died at the Battle of Blackwater.”

“Yes, my lord,” Podrick confirmed. “I killed him.”
Podrick’s confession brought a complete silence in the Great Hall. A fly could have been heard. After a moment, Ser Kevan broke it. “You say that you killed Ser Mandon Moore? You killed a kingsguard?”

“Yes, my lord. I had no choice. He was about to deliver a final stroke and to cut Lord Tyrion’s head. I am his squire. It was my duty to protect him. So I threw a spear through his head.”

There was a total silence once again. No one dared to speak. Finally, Cersei sneered. “He just confessed he killed a kingsguard. His head should be mounted on a spike, just like the one of the monster he’s serving.”

“SILENCE! The next time you speak, your Grace, I will have to ask you to leave the court.” Ser Kevan’s voice resonated even more powerful than it ever did before. Cersei turned silent again. “Podrick Payne, are you sure Ser Mandon Moore tried to kill Lord Tyrion?”

“Yes, my lord.” Ser Kevan examined Podrick for a very long time after he answered. Finally, the Hand of the King spoke again.

“If you have nothing else to say, you may retire.”

Podrick didn’t leave. He still had one thing to say. Something necessary to say, but also very dangerous. “My lord, before I leave, I just want to say one last thing. Ser Mandon Moore had no personal reasons to kill Lord Tyrion. If he tried to kill him, then it means he was following an order. And there are only two people in King’s Landing who can give an order to a kingsguard.”

Again, the room was silent like a crypt. Podrick left the box of the witnesses. His words weighed in the air. The atmosphere had gone very thick in a very short time. His words meant a lot. If Ser Mandon Moore received an order to kill Tyrion, only two people could have given the order: Joffrey or Cersei. Everyone understood that. After a long and awkward silence, Ser Kevan finally decided to adjourn the trial for an hour. Just like yesterday, the court was cleared and the judges left. And like yesterday, Sansa didn’t leave. She was eager to talk with Tyrion, but she waited for the Hall to be empty. She noticed Cersei was shooting angry glares in the direction of the Tyrells. Sansa was surprised the Queen Regent didn’t give her more attention. In the meantime, she turned to Mira.

“Go find him. Bring him in an hour.”

“Yes, my lady.” Mira left to carry out her duty. She knew what to do. Brienne and Mira were the only ones to know about this.

Everyone was gone, including Bronn and Daisy. The sellsword had escorted her out the Red Keep as soon as her testimony had been over and he was now escorting Mira to make sure nothing bad would happen to her. No one could know with Cersei and Sansa had Brienne to protect her right now, so she didn’t need Bronn’s presence. Sansa realized she was panting. It was the stress of the trial that had her in this state, she knew it. She rose from her seat and went to Tyrion, but before she could say a single word, they were interrupted.

“I must congratulate you, my lady. My lord.” Lord Varys came from behind Sansa’s back.

“Lord Varys.” Tyrion and Sansa said the words together. They looked at each other in surprise, and allowed a little laugh to escape from their mouths.

“As I once said, we’re perfect for each other.” Even in difficult times like these, Tyrion would always find a way to make a joke. Sansa wished she could do the same.

Lord Varys stepped in. “My apologies to interrupt you, but I think I can help.”
Lord Varys’s proposition took Sansa by surprise. It was the last thing she expected.

Chapter End Notes

This is the longest chapter of this story up to now. I hope it meets expectations.

Please review

Next chapter: Kevan (the trial continues)
Kevan II

Chapter Notes

The trial resumes after a pause. Sansa uses her secret card now.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

KEVAN II

Kevan sat heavily in his chair, the plates before him quite untouched. He didn’t have much appetite. Podrick’s words were looping in his head. There are only two people in King’s Landing who can give an order to a kingsguard. Kevan knew very well what it meant. If Podrick Payne said the truth and if Ser Mandon Moore didn’t act of his own initiative, then Joffrey or Cersei gave him the order to kill Tyrion. Kevan didn’t think Podrick lied. If he lied, he wouldn’t tell that he killed a kingsguard, something that put him in trouble right now. He remembered the kind and loyal boy he met in the Riverlands. The knight he was squiring for had stolen a ham from Tywin’s store. That was a stupid thing to do, but Tywin hanged the knight for this. He couldn’t tolerate such things. Podrick had the misfortune to have shared the ham with him. Kevan knew the boy had done nothing wrong and that the knight was the only responsible for all this. Luckily, he was a Payne and when Kevan found out about it and told Tywin, his brother decided to spare him. Kevan had known Ser Cedric Payne, who Podrick had squired for. It was obvious the boy was innocent, so Kevan counselled Tywin to send him to King’s Landing to squire for Tyrion. It was meant as a punishment, but in fact Kevan thought it might give a chance to a boy who never had one in his life up to now. Squiring for the acting Hand of the King wasn’t a bad thing after all.

Of course, if Podrick didn’t lie, then Ser Mandon Moore did try to kill Tyrion during the Battle of Blackwater. Kevan hoped Podrick was wrong and that Ser Mandon tried to kill him for some personal reason, but he knew it was unlikely. If Joffrey ordered Tyrion to be killed, then he had to be watched more closely than ever. And if Cersei was behind this… Perhaps Jaime was right and she had gone mad. Kevan had high doubts now about the accusations against Tyrion.

He wondered if everything could be a plot, lies orchestrated by Sansa Stark. No, that was impossible. Her witnesses were destroying testimonies that took place yesterday. She couldn’t have built something like that with nothing in a single night. Some of the things Tyrion’s witnesses told this afternoon were true, for sure. He knew Joffrey had the Lady Sansa beaten at the beginning of his reign, and between Tyrion’s outburst yesterday and the testimonies of his niece-in-law, the sellsword and Ser Balon Swann, Kevan thought the version of the defense was much closer to the truth than the one Ser Meryn and Ser Boros gave. Anyway, the two kingsguards gave no proof. Tywin didn’t seem to have been poisoned. Kevan already found Pycelle’s testimony yesterday unconvincing, but now he didn’t believe it at all. As for the whore, Kevan should have known since the beginning she was lying. Even Margaery Tyrell testified against her. They had no real proof against Tyrion. Kevan hadn’t taken his decision about the verdict, but if he had to make it now, he would clear Tyrion of all the charges against him.

He remembered how the whore described her bad treatments in Tyrion’s hands. Kevan had been quite surprised and horrified when he heard her words. It seemed so much unlike Tyrion, unless he
changed a lot since the last time Kevan saw him, but he saw no reason to believe it. He couldn’t imagine Tyrion mistreating a woman, even a whore. It was Tywin’s style to do it. He remembered how Tywin dealt with their father’s mistress after he died, forcing her to walk naked in the streets of Lannisport for two weeks, confessing to everyone she was a whore. However, the worst hadn’t been that. This woman had been deprived of all her power and influence, she had been shamed, but not mistreated. Another girl didn’t have the same chance.

That had been one of the rare times Kevan had really wanted to argue with his brother. When Tywin discovered Tyrion had married a commoner, he entered a great rage. He didn’t shout or curse or yell, but Kevan’s brother always had a way to show very calmly how dissatisfied and angry he was, and this time had been one of the worst. Kevan had understood Tywin forced Jaime to tell a lie to Tyrion. There was a great chance the girl was mostly interested in becoming a Lannister. She was lowborn. The memory of their father’s mistress was still bright in their minds after all these years, and Kevan could understand Tywin didn’t want to take a chance with this. Tywin was ruthless, but no more than he needed to be. Without him, House Lannister could have fallen. However, even if the girl was only interested in Lannister gold, he didn’t approve how she was raped by dozens of men, and even less how Tywin forced Tyrion to take her one last time. Was it really so necessary? Kevan had tried to reason back then that they needed Tyrion to never try to look for the girl again, and the girl to never try to look for Tyrion again, but he didn’t manage to convince himself Tywin did the right thing. Especially after he talked to the girl.

Tywin sent her away from Casterly Rock after the treatment he submitted her to. However, before she left, Tywin kept her in a cell for a short time, no more than two hours. While Tywin had a good discussion with Tyrion (probably he made sure Tyrion understood the lesson he just received), Kevan had gone to see the girl. She went to a corner of the cell as soon as Kevan entered. It took a lot before she looked back at him and Kevan got her to speak. She was very young. Kevan didn’t give her more than fourteen name days. She had blue eyes and dark hair. She was flimsy and frail, and afraid too. No wonder after so many men raped her. She didn’t talk a lot, but after a few words Kevan realized how wrong Tywin had been. His brother assumed the girl was only interested in Tyrion because she wanted to be rich, but Kevan quickly understood it wasn’t true. In fact, the girl didn’t seem to know where she was. There was a bag on her head while she was brought to Casterly Rock, and she didn’t even know that Tyrion was a Lannister. That was possible after all, many people of the smallfolk had no idea how their lords looked like since they remained in their castles most of the time. She was an orphan whose father died a year ago, and she loved Tyrion for real. When it dawned on Kevan’s mind, he realized what a huge mistake his brother had done. The girl was only a frightened child who happened to fall in love with the wrong man. Kevan had to admit he had been surprised that the girl fell in love with Tyrion, but after all Tyrion wasn’t an evil young man. He hadn’t started to visit brothels and to drink at this moment. He was even the most intelligent of Tywin’s children as Creylen often said. Tyrion could easily have become a septon or a maester, though Kevan appreciated he didn’t since Jaime was already a kingsguard. Tywin needed an heir. What would have happened if his two sons had gone celibate? All the same, the girl really loved Tyrion. She hadn’t married him for his wealth, his name or his title. Tywin had her raped uselessly. She didn’t deserve this. She had nothing to see with their father’s mistress. She was no different than Kevan’s wife, a gentle soul who loved needlework and flowers. The only difference was that this girl was lowborn. Kevan made sure a man loyal to him accompanied her to the docks of Lannisport after Tywin sent her away. He had her on a ship to Pentos. She wasn’t safe any longer in the Westerlands. It was better for her to start a new life far away, across the Narrow Sea. Kevan hoped she was still alive and alright.

This evening, Kevan had gone to Tywin to discuss about this. He still remembered the discussion they had.

“Tywin, we need to talk. About the girl.”
They were in his brother’s solar. Tywin didn’t leave his eyes from a letter he was writing. Kevan knew very well what it meant. His brother acted as if he didn’t care about what he said. “The matter is over. This marriage never took place, the girl is away, and Tyrion will never try to find her again. And with some hope, he will remember it the next time he wants to marry a whore.”

“She was no whore, Tywin, you know it very well. Jaime lied about this. You forced him to tell this story so Tyrion would believe the girl was a prostitute.”

“The only thing that interested her was our gold, and she received some of it. That makes her a whore. I’m not going to allow my children to wed this kind of women.”

“Tywin, I spoke with the girl before she left. She didn’t even know Tyrion was a Lannister. She barely realized he was highborn. She loved him for real. There was no use to have her raped like you did. I understand it may be dangerous to let Tyrion marry a lowborn woman, but Jaime’s lie would have been more than enough.”

“Anyway, this is over. It is done.” Tywin had firmly stamped the letter and started another. “This girl’s happiness is none of our concern, nor should it be Tyrion’s. He needed a lesson. He will marry a suitable wife when the time comes.”

“When? And how? You’ve tried to marry him several times up to now. Lysa Arryn, Elia Martell, a Hightower, a Royce, you failed each time. How do you think you will succeed in the future? If you want so much Tyrion to be married, then you should have let him with this girl. At least, their marriage would have been happy and they would have had children in time.”

Tywin had stopped to write to fix him with his cold stare. “Don’t ever mention that possibility again, Kevan. I will never let a commoner join House Lannister. Now go. I will not speak of it any further.”

Kevan knew there was nothing he could do. Tywin would never change his mind, but he had to tell him the truth all the same. “Tywin, I advised you for many years, so I have to warn you. A day will come when you’ll have to face the consequences of what you did today. And I know one thing. Joanna would never have approved what you did to this girl.”

Tywin hadn’t talked to him for two weeks afterwards. As for the consequences, they quickly appeared. Tyrion started to drink, to gamble, and to whore, and it only got worse with time. Kevan wondered how Tyrion would have turned without this accident. He was his nephew, and Kevan cared about him. He probably cared more about Tyrion than Tywin ever did. His brother always saw his second son as an embarrassment for House Lannister. Personally, Kevan never saw Tyrion as an embarrassment. And since he had more details about how Tyrion ruled the city while he was acting Hand, Kevan found he had proved to be quite worthy of his name. Kevan didn’t believe he killed Tywin or tried to kill Joffrey, but he had to listen to everyone until the end of the trial before he finally decided.

Kevan forced himself to eat something. He needed to be alert for the rest of the trial. After a few minutes, someone entered the room. It was Tyrion’s new wife, Sansa Stark. Sansa Lannister now, in fact.

“Ser Kevan.” The girl made a little bow.

“Lady Sansa. If you want to speak in Tyrion’s favor, I must warn you we can’t discuss about it. I am judge and I will take my decision once I heard all the witnesses.”

“I’m not here for this reason, ser.” Again, she didn’t show any sign of surprise, frustration or anger after Kevan talked. “I only want to add a witness.”
Kevan took the list of Tyrion’s witnesses the young lady gave him today from a pocket of his doublet. After Podrick Payne, there was only one witness left. “Only your mysterious witness is left.” Kevan wondered why she refused to tell him the name of this witness she wasn’t sure about.

“He will come to testify, but I have someone else to present before him.”

“Who?”

“Lord Varys.”

The name surprised Kevan. “Lord Varys already testified for the Crown.”

“And now he wants to testify for my husband.”

Kevan looked very carefully at Lady Sansa. He really couldn’t see any feeling on her face. There had been feelings in her voice when she testified, but now she was again undecipherable as a stone. Now she looked more like the Lady Forrester who testified at the beginning of the afternoon. “Very well. There is nothing that prohibits someone to testify for both sides, though it is quite unusual. I will let Lord Varys testify for your husband.”

“Thank you, ser.” She smiled a little this time and left.

Sometime later, the bells tolled and Kevan went back to the Iron Throne. When he looked at the Great Hall from his place, he noticed Tyrion was talking with his wife. He thought he saw them laugh. They were smiling for sure. The girl didn’t seem to hate him at all. Kevan was quite surprised that a Stark helped a Lannister she was forced to marry. That was unsettling. However, what was even more unsettling was the way they reminded him of two other people. Two people now dead. Sansa Stark reminded him of someone. Someone he wished she had lived longer. When everyone had taken his place, Kevan called for the next witness. Not to his surprise, Varys came in the box to talk a second time. The other people however were quite taken aback by his presence and plainly showed it. He wondered what the Spider would say this time.

Kevan understood very soon what was going on. Varys was confirming everything Tyrion’s witnesses said up to now. He confirmed the way in which Lady Sansa was beaten by Ser Meryn (something he forgot to mention yesterday). He confirmed Pycelle declared Lord Tywin was dead of a heart failure when he examined the body for the first time. He confirmed many things. Tyrion was the one to choose to not bed his wife. He never mistreated the whore Shae in any way, far from it. Shae really was angry at him for not leaving with her to Pentos and for marrying Sansa Stark. The discussions Varys related between Tyrion and Shae caused many laughs for the whore. Ser Boros and Ser Meryn repeatedly hit Sansa Stark after her father’s death. The whole story about Pycelle’s arrest was true. The details Podrick gave about the dinner were true as well and Ser Mandon really tried to kill Lord Tyrion. He also brought some declarations Cersei did ever since Tyrion had come to King’s Landing to act as Hand of the King.

“When Lord Tyrion arranged a marriage between the Princess Myrcella and Trystane Martell, the queen didn’t react quite well. Here are the words she said. Myrcella is my only daughter. Do you really think I’ll let you sell her like a common whore? I will not let you ship her off to Dorne as I was shipped off to Robert Baratheon. You won’t get away with this. You think the piece of paper Father gave you keeps you safe? Ned Stark had a piece of paper, too. Lord Tyrion tried to explain to the queen that the princess would be much safer in Dorne if King’s Landing fell, but the queen only yelled, broke a jug of wine on the floor and pushed her brother. When the princess left the capital, the queen said these words to Lord Tyrion. One day I pray you love someone. I pray you love her so much, when you close your eyes, you see her face. I want that for you. I want you to know what it’s like to love someone, to truly love someone, before I take her from you.”
There were some loudly reactions among the crowd, just like when they heard some words Tyrion said yesterday. However, Varys didn’t stop. “Right before the Battle of Blackwater, the queen confronted Lord Tyrion about his idea to have King Joffrey fight. She told him this. A Lannister always pays her debts. You stole my only daughter, you plot to have Joffrey killed. Pretty thing, your whore. Lovely body. The bruises will heal in time. This one you like. You like her very much. Could it be love? Don’t worry, she’ll be treated gently enough, unless Joffrey is hurt. And then every wound he suffers she’ll suffer, too. And if he dies, there isn’t a man alive who could devise a more painful death for your little cunt.”

“THESE ARE FILTHY LIES! GET THIS MAN OUT OF HERE IMMEDIATELY!”

Kevan barely managed to not jump from the throne in surprise when he heard Cersei’s outburst. He didn’t remember Lady Sansa’s outburst to be so loud, though she was farther from him than Cersei. “Your Grace, perhaps you should go back to your chambers. You should find back your composure,” Kevan said very calmly. They didn’t need the trial to turn into chaos. He stared at Cersei, waiting for her answer.

“Sorry, Uncle.” Kevan didn’t know if he should be relieved about this answer. The next time Cersei would react this way, he would have no choice but to send her out. “Only, Lord Varys’s lies unsettle me very much.”

“Is it the lies that unsettle you, sister, or the truths you want to keep hidden? I think I know some that many people would find quite interesting.” Tyrion’s words didn’t arrange things.

Kevan didn’t like this. He knew very well what kind of truths Tyrion was talking about. He gave a long look at Cersei to make her understand she should stay calm and sit. They had to put an end to this folly as quickly as possible. Cersei sat. Varys continued his recitation.

“When the queen went to her father’s room after his death, she immediately concluded that he was murdered, even if the Grand Maester and Ser Jaime assured her he died of natural causes. She said to her brother: You’re really an idiot! He was murdered! Can’t you see it? I know he was killed, and I know who did it. I will have no rest before he is dead. When Ser Jaime announced her she was no longer in charge of the trial on the king’s orders and that the trial was delayed, she said: You think a piece of paper will be enough to protect Tyrion? The trial will take place tomorrow. That’s all you won with it. You think you can act against me like this, you and our uncle? The trial will take place tomorrow, no matter what you do. When the queen realized she could finally do nothing against it, she ordered Ser Osmund Kettleblack to arrest Ser Jaime and to bring him to the black cells, which Ser Osmund refused to do.”

What really hurt was when he started to explain how Cersei manipulated all people who testified against Tyrion. The whore agreed to tell everything Cersei would like her to tell about Tyrion with promises of gold and a marriage with a knight. Varys also revealed Shae didn’t want to include Lady Sansa in her testimony, that she even refused to speak against her since Sansa did nothing wrong, but Cersei had threatened to have her hanged if she refused to do it. She told Grand Maester Pycelle to make sure he would find Tywin died of poisoning. Apparently the Grand Maester accepted with joy to testify against Tyrion and said he was sure Tyrion plundered his stores to get his hands on poison. When Cersei asked him if he had any proof of that, the Grand Maester said it didn’t matter and that the court would believe him without proof. Even worse was the way Cersei convinced the three Kettleblack brothers to testify. “The queen told each of them: Would it be enough if I promised you a night with me?”

There were murmurs of indignation and disgust in the crowd. Kevan took a short look at Cersei. She was gripping the arms of her chair so tightly that her hands were turning white. It was obvious she
had a very hard time to control herself. Kevan hoped Varys was done. “Lord Varys, if you have nothing else to say, you may retire.”

“I’m sorry, my Lord Hand, but I still have a few details to give concerning Ser Mandon Moore. I’m afraid I know from where he took his orders to kill Lord Tyrion.” A huge silence followed Varys’s statement. “During the Battle of Blackwater, Ser Lancel Lannister went to Maegor’s Holdfast, wounded by an arrow and reported Stannis’s army had landed on the ground. The queen ordered the king to be brought back to his chambers as soon as she heard he was with Lord Tyrion on the battlements. Ser Lancel tried to argue against it, saying the presence of the king was good for the morale of the troops, but the queen refused to hear anything. Ser Lancel went to see his Grace and told him the queen wanted him back to Maegor’s Holdfast. So the king left the battlements, causing the troops to lose any will to fight. In the meantime, Ser Lancel went back to the queen, telling her how soldiers lost all heart seeing the king leaving. When Ser Lancel asked to escort back the king to the battle, the queen told him: Why do I care what you want? Then she punched him right at the place where he was hit by an arrow.” Kevan looked at Cersei, horrified by what he just learned. Lancel never told him. In fact, his son didn’t speak a lot ever since the battle. He was always praying and saying he had sinned. “The absence of the king, ordered by the queen, forced Lord Tyrion to lead a sortie against Stannis’s men and led to Ser Mandon’s attempt against his life. However, the most important proof I have comes from a short conversation the queen had with Ser Mandon Moore two nights before the battle. This is what she told him. Make sure my wretched brother doesn’t come back alive from the battle.”

This time the reactions were unanimously against Cersei. Accusations and insults came from everywhere in the Hall. Kevan had a very hard time to bring back order. It probably took five minutes. In the meantime, he saw Cersei was fuming. She was about to explode, it was obvious. Varys had left. It seemed he had said everything he wanted to say. Only the latter would have been enough. The crowd was angry, and to be honest, Kevan was too. He would need a very good discussion with his niece once everything would be over. She had hurt his son and nearly caused the loss of King’s Landing with her foolish decisions during the Battle of Blackwater. Even worse, if what Varys said was true, she really tried to have Tyrion killed. Finally, calm came back. Kevan wanted to take his head in his hands, but he refrained himself. It wasn’t the time. He would sigh, react and rest in the evening when everything would be over. For now, there was still one last witness. After Varys, who could be worse?

“Lady Sansa.” Kevan made a great effort to not look tired. “You may call your last witness if he is here.”

“He is, ser,” the Lady Sansa answered.

Kevan heard footsteps on his left and looked at the origin of the sound. Nothing could have prepared him for this. Two people were walking toward the witness’s box. One of them was the northern handmaiden who testified earlier. Since she already testified, it had to be the person she was holding by the arm who would speak. And it was the presence of this young man that surprised Kevan the most. He had lost many pounds since the battle, his skin was so pale it was white as milk and his hair, so long before, had been cut. He hadn’t fully recovered from the wounds he had taken, but Kevan knew it was more his soul and his mind that were injured than his body. He had travelled with Kevan from Casterly Rock, and it didn’t help nor harm his recovery. When he arrived with the young lady at the box, she let him go.

“Good luck,” she told him.

“Thank you, Lady Mira,” the young man replied before he climbed the steps in the box and stood weakly before the judges, his eyes cast down.
“Lancel?” Kevan couldn’t stop himself.

“Father.” His son was speaking very faintly. “Lord Tyrell. Prince Oberyn.”

It took some time for Kevan to gain back his composure. What was his son doing here? Why did Lady Sansa hide to him she was planning for Lancel to testify? Kevan took a voice he made strong.

“Ser Lancel Lannister. You are Lord Tyrion’s cousin, aren’t you?”

“I am, Father.” His son still answered in the same faint voice.

“What do you have to say about the accusations against him?”

His son took some time before he answered. “I don’t know, Father. I don’t know if Lord Tyrion killed Lord Tywin. Only the Seven know for sure.” That was an evidence of Lancel’s new faith. “However, there is one thing I have to confess. No. I have several things to confess.”

Lancel began to explain the events of the time Joffrey had Meryn Trant beat Lady Sansa. He reported all the details of what happened on this day. That wasn’t something new. With Ser Meryn, Ser Boros, Ser Balon, Ser Bronn, Lord Varys and Lady Sansa, he was the seventh witness since the beginning of the trial to talk about it. His words confirmed mostly everything that was said up to now, but he added more details. For example, he highlighted all the threats Joffrey made to the young lady and, even more, he criticized not only Ser Meryn’s actions, but also Joffrey’s. However, Lancel was mostly criticizing himself.

“I lied before dozens of people. I said Robb Stark used sorcery to slaughter Stafford Lannister’s men with an army of wolves. I even said the Northerners ate the dead after the battle was over. These were only lies the king ordered me to say to legitimate his actions.”

People grumbled in the crowd. Up to now, no witness talked against Joffrey, at least not directly. But now Kevan’s son was saying the king ordered him to lie in order to justify the bad treatments he inflicted upon his betrothed. What was Lancel doing? What he just said was very dangerous. Some people would call it treason, even if it was true. Lancel even said he hadn’t been worthy of his knighthood. He allowed an innocent girl to be beaten only for the pleasure and the satisfaction of his king. He should have gone in the way, just like Tyrion did. He said his cousin acted more like a knight than everyone else on this day.

Lancel also told the whole story about the events during the Battle of Blackwater. Everything Varys said was confirmed. Lancel even said Tyrion made a great speech to convince the men to fight for their city and not for their king. That’s what gave the men the will to fight again. Tyrion saved the city. Lancel blamed himself again for obeying the queen’s orders. He shouldn’t have said anything to the king. He was in part responsible for the near defeat King’s Landing suffered. However, the central part of his testimony came when he spoke about Ser Mandon Moore.

“How do you know that? You said the queen spoke with Ser Mandon in her chambers a night. She told him to protect the king at all cost and to make sure Lord Tyrion would die during the battle.”

Kevan couldn’t believe what he just heard. Two people said Cersei ordered Tyrion’s death during Blackwater. Kevan again had to silence the assistance. During this time, Cersei obviously managed with great effort to stay calm, but it was quite evident for anyone who knew the queen even a little that she was boiling inside. When peace came back, Oberyn asked a question before Kevan could even sit back into the throne.

“How do you know that? You said the queen talked to Ser Mandon in her chambers during the night? What were you doing in her chambers at this hour?”
The question froze Kevan for a moment. Oberyn Martell made a point. What was Lancel doing there? How could he know about the discussion between Mandon Moore and Cersei? Kevan fixed his son, waiting for an answer. It took a lot of time for Lancel to answer, so much time that Cersei intervened.

“He doesn’t know what he’s talking about, it’s obvious. We should bring him back to his rooms. He is sick.”

Kevan said nothing. No one said anything. Finally, Lancel spoke. “I was spending my nights with the queen.”

There was no sound in the Hall. Kevan finally got out of his trance. “What did you say?”

“I was spending my nights with the queen. I shared her bed from the moment King Robert died until the Battle of Blackwater.”

Again, a complete silence lingered in the court. Cersei broke it, sneering. “This is ridiculous. The poor boy doesn’t know what he’s saying. Ser Meryn, escort my cousin back to his rooms. He needs a good rest.”

The words forced Kevan to react. “Ser Meryn! Stay at your place.” The kingsguard stopped his movement. Kevan stared at Cersei, searching for an explanation. His son shared her bed? Cersei talked in the end and her answer didn’t satisfy Kevan.

“These are lies.”

“Guards! Bring the queen back to her chambers.” Kevan talked in a very firm voice. His men from the Westerlands came at Cersei’s side. After a look at them and another at Kevan, she rose from her chair and left the Hall. Kevan followed her until she was gone, then he looked at his son. “Lancel, can you repeat what you just said?”

Kevan hoped he heard incorrectly the first time or that his son would say he didn’t tell the truth, but deep inside he knew it was the truth. Lancel always said ever since the battle that he had sinned. Now Kevan understood what he was talking about. Lancel’s answer was worse than he could imagine.

“I slept with the queen for months after King Robert died. I was the one to kill him. The queen came to me not long after an accident. She had been hit by the king and there was a big bruise on her cheek. She told me it wasn’t the first time the king hit her. I swore that I was ready to do everything to protect her, so she ordered me to get the king drunk during his hunt. I gave him strongwine to slow his reflexes. I am responsible of his death. After he died, the queen arranged for me to be knighted and I became her lover, spending my nights with her until I was wounded at the Battle of Blackwater. I regret what I have done, Father. I regret all my sins. Really, I do.”

The huge silence followed for some time after his son was done, then a shout came from someone in the crowd. *Kingslayer!* Then other insults followed. *Cousinfucker! Man without honor! Vermin! Traitor!*

Kevan ordered quickly his men to escort Lancel out under the shouts. He couldn’t believe what he just heard. His son. His own son. Kevan shot a glance at Tyrion, trying to ask him silently if it was true. Tyrion confirmed with a positive nod. There was nothing else to say for today. Kevan stood up.

“The trial is adjourned. We will listen to the concluding testimonies tomorrow. Clear the court.”

He wasn’t sure if anyone heard him and to be honest he didn’t want to care about it. But since the
gold cloaks were removing Tyrion’s shackles as Kevan left, he guessed at least some people heard him. He heard people shouting and yelling for a very long time as he went away from the Great Hall. He entered his rooms and ordered his men to bring him his son. When Lancel arrived, he never dared to look in his father’s eyes. He repeated everything he said before the court. Kevan still couldn’t believe what he just learned, no matter how many times he was told. Lancel told him he wasn’t worthy to be his son any longer. He only wanted to serve the Faith as a penance for all his sins. Kevan finally ordered his men to bring back Lancel to his chambers and to stand guard before his doors to prevent anyone from hurting him. When Lancel asked if he could visit the sept to pray, Kevan allowed it but ordered his men to be always four in the company of his son.

After Lancel left, Kevan was alone. He still didn’t inhabit the Hand’s quarters. His rooms were comfortable, but not spacious as the ones in the Tower of the Hand. What was he about to do now? Lancel confessed before more than a hundred people that he plotted to kill the king. He also confessed that he shared the queen’s bed. Kevan would never be able to hide all this. What would Tywin do in such circumstances? He would do everything necessary for family, even if that meant sacrificing a family member to ensure House Lannister would survive. But Lancel was Kevan’s son. He couldn’t sentence him to die. Kevan already lost two sons in the war. How would Dorna react when she would learn what their eldest son did? How would she react if Kevan ordered Lancel to be executed? No, he couldn’t do it. He couldn’t kill his son. Perhaps he could send him to the Wall, or even have him join some religious order. Lancel would probably be happier with the second solution.

All this brought a pang in Kevan’s heart. Tywin had made plans so that Lancel may become the new Lord of Darry after the Battle of Blackwater. The Lord of Darry, Lyman Darry, had died during the war and had no heir. Tywin even arranged a marriage between Lancel and Amerei Frey. Kevan remembered Dorna’s happiness when he told her about this. She wanted grandchildren so much. But now, everything was over. Lancel would never take possession of Darry and would never marry his betrothed after this. He didn’t want anyway. Dorna’s heart would be broken. She and Kevan already lost two sons. They just lost their third. But Kevan had no choice. All he could do was to exile Lancel to prevent his death, whether he exiled him to the Wall or to some remote place where he would live as a monk for the rest of his life.

Kevan decided to leave his rooms. He would speak about all this to Lancel and arrange everything once the trial would be over tomorrow. He walked in the direction of Cersei’s chambers. It didn’t matter now that the trial wasn’t over. He had to speak to the woman who destroyed his son. He had to speak to the woman who shamed House Lannister today. He had to do what Tywin should have done a long time ago. If only he had known the truth.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Cersei (concluding testimonies and end of the trial)
Cersei III

Chapter Notes

Another chapter from the mother of madness POV.

And, finally some will say, this is the end of the trial.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CERSEI III

Cersei had come back to her chambers with all the dignity a queen should have. She wasn’t about to show her true feelings while her stupid cousin made his “confessions”. What confessions these were. How could her uncle believe something like that? His stupid son had even less brain than Jaime. She should have made sure he would never speak about it. Her stupid cousin had ruined everything, and her brother’s whore as well. So many people testified against her. She should have come with better lies. She should have sounded more convincing. As for Pycelle, this creeping old man… She should have made sure he would tell something that would make sense. No, instead he allowed a viper to question the results of his examination.

Cersei would kill them all, from the whore to Margaery. The little doe-eye whore was the one behind all of this, she was sure. She manipulated Joffrey so he wouldn’t be present during the trial. Joffrey would have made sure justice would be given. She made a pact with Tyron and all his men against Cersei. Jaime was so foolish that he didn’t realize this, and her uncle was no better. She had to speak to him. The Tyrells plotted to kill her father, and right now they were managing to get Tyrion free. They were enemies. They were stealing her son, taking him away from her. How could Kevan not see this? How could her father have not seen this?

Margaery had arranged all of this, she knew it. She was manipulating Sansa, the little dove. The Stark girl was too stupid and simple to organize the defense of Cersei’s valonqar. The Tyrell whore had Tyrion’s men testify. She convinced a kingsguard to testify for him, turning him against Cersei, probably by seducing him. One of her handmaids spoke as well. She brought a whore she probably met in a brothel. Cersei wouldn’t be surprised that Margaery was frequenting this type of place. Even the ugly woman who assassinated Renly Baratheon, Margaery’s first husband, came to testify. Margaery organized all this. Cersei would break her lovely little neck with her own hands.

Her door opened. Kevan came inside, wearing the brooch of the Hand of the King on his doublet. Cersei jumped from her chair.

“Uncle! You must listen to me. Don’t believe…”

“I think I listened long enough to what you and your witnesses had to say yesterday. Anyway, you can’t talk to me about the trial. It’s your turn to listen to me.” Cersei stood in confusion before Kevan’s words. “Lancel is my son, Cersei. Your own cousin. You should have looked after him, guided him, found him a likely girl of good family. Instead you… you fucked him! You brought him into your bed! How could you do this?”
Cersei saw that her uncle was angry. He had to understand. “I know. I know. I was alone, weak. Please, Uncle, you must understand.” If only he knew the truth about his son. Lancel wanted her more than she ever wanted him. He probably still wanted her. But for Cersei, he was only someone to replace Jaime while he was away.

“Understand? You want me to understand why you disgraced yourself and my son? You want me to understand why you killed your husband, your king? Why did you engage Lancel into this?”

“I had to do it. Robert was listening to Ned Stark. He wanted to overthrow us. I had to do this for family.”

Her uncle didn’t react to her words immediately, but Cersei couldn’t have predicted what he said afterwards, soberly. “Yes, I’m sure Robert was listening to Ned Stark. I guess he read a book where it was written that all the Baratheon children had blue eyes and black hair. All except yours. I guess Ned Stark realized that Jaime was more than a brother to you.” Cersei was agape before her uncle’s words. How could he know? “I’m not an idiot. I saw you and Jaime grow, and I wasn’t away all the time like Tywin.”

“Did Father know?” It was useless to hide the truth now.

“No. When we received Stannis’s letter at Harrenhal, he ordered it to be burnt immediately and to never speak about it again. That’s a luck your father never wanted to consider this eventuality. It would have destroyed him. You and Jaime were his first children, the ones he was the most proud of. I don’t want to imagine what would have happened to him if he had discovered the truth about you. That’s why I never told him.” Cersei looked away. “Can you tell me why? You were married with the king. This is what you always wanted. Why couldn’t you have children with him? Was it so difficult?”

Cersei’s anger rose. “You don’t know what I had to support in Robert’s hands. He was a drunkard, an idiot who shamed me all the time. I was in a living hell.”

“So you decided to have children with your own brother instead? Do you realize there would never have been a war if Joffrey had been Robert’s child? My sons, Willem and Martyn, wouldn’t be dead. We wouldn’t have to fight for Joffrey’s claim.”

Cersei tossed away the idea of any child she might have had with Robert. She had one, and he died. “All this is Ned Stark’s fault.”

“Ned Stark would never have questioned Joffrey’s claim if he had been Robert’s son. The excuse that he tried to seize the Iron Throne is the better excuse you could find, but we would never have needed this if you had children with Robert. You shamed House Lannister with everything you did.”

“Shamed? Tyrion is the one who shamed us all. He killed my father. He tried to kill my son. He beat him. He brought whores in the Tower of the Hand…”

“And you brought your cousin, your brother, a kingsguard and his two brothers into your own bed. You tried to have your own brother killed. You allowed Joffrey to kill Ned Stark and to publicly beat his betrothed. Your son started riots and shot on people asking for bread with a crossbow. Tyrion saved you at the Battle of Blackwater. Without him, you and your two sons would be dead. He kept the city together while he was Hand of the King and managed to get Jaime free. And he did the right thing when he sent Myrcella to Dorne. He sent her as far as it was possible from the bad influence you have on your children.”

Cersei couldn’t believe what she just heard. The bad influence she had on her children? “How can
you say such a thing? I protected my children. I raised them. I made them strong. Everything I did was for them, for family.”

“Aye, and from what I saw of Joffrey, you are as unfit a mother as you are a ruler.” If Cersei had a cup of wine in her hands, she would have thrown the content at the face of her uncle. “You filled his head with the same wrong ideas you have yourself about power. You pampered him so much that he became as vicious as the Mad King himself. You are unable to control him. I will not let have any more bad influence on him or Tommen. You’re leaving.”

The last sentence left Cersei bewildered. “Leaving? What do you mean?”

Her uncle looked at her with a very serious face, but strangely he also looked sad. “I’m sending you away. You will leave King’s Landing as soon as possible to never come back.”

Cersei stood frozen for a moment as she realized what her uncle just said. “You can’t do this. I am Queen Regent. My place is here with my sons. I will not let you do that.”

“Yes, you will. With what happened today none of your men wants to help you. And don’t try to speak to Joffrey, he won’t see you. He refuses to see you since Tywin died.”

Cersei understood what was going on. “It’s Margaery, isn’t it? She’s planting her claws in Joffrey. She’s manipulating him, can’t you see that? She’s the one behind all of this. She organized all these lies that were told today. She plotted with Tyrion to have Father killed. The Tyrells are dangerous, they must be neutralized.”

Kevan looked at her with a stupefied expression. “The Tyrells now? You see Tyrion’s and Margaery’s hands everywhere now it seems. Lady Margaery is capable of controlling Joffrey, something you have been unable to do up to now. She will be able to make him a much better king than you ever managed to. And I highly doubt there is a plot between Tyrion and the Tyrells. All I saw today was a litany of witnesses who showed that everything you presented against your brother is a lie, at best a distorted truth. This trial was a complete stupidity from the beginning and you caused many problems to House Lannister through it. I will not let you cause any other problems. You’re leaving.”

“I won’t let you do that. I will not let you ship me off again to another husband.”

“You won’t be shipped to any husband. With everything the people learned about you today, the Tyrells will never want you as their future lady. You will be sent at another place that will be decided once the trial will be over. You will give your final testimony tomorrow and that will be one of the last times you’ll be seen in court.”

Kevan turned on his heels and nimbly walked to the door. Before Cersei could say anything, her uncle threw right before he left. “As for your thoughts that Margaery is behind Tyrion’s defense, you are wrong. You should be more careful with the new Lady Lannister.”

Her uncle left, leaving her alone. She would be sent away from her children. Myrcella was far away in Dorne, among snakes who hated her family, and now she would be taken away from her sons. She couldn’t allow it. Very quickly, Cersei devised another plan. Perhaps Joffrey didn’t want to see her, but nothing stopped her from leaving her rooms. She could see other people. Cersei went outside and saw two guards waiting for her. They were her uncle’s men, but they were only there to follow her, not to keep her inside her rooms. Less than two hours later, Cersei came back to her chambers, satisfied of what she did. Tyrion would be sentenced to death tomorrow. After his death, she would be able to take back the power and she would end the alliance with the Tyrells once and for all. And she would put an end to Kevan’s presence as well. No one would take her children away from her.
She would protect them with everything necessary.

Before she fell asleep, she drank, savoring her upcoming victory on her enemies. As she slipped into her bed tonight, she thought about what Kevan told her as he left. You should be more careful with the new Lady Lannister. The new Lady Lannister? There was no new Lady Lannister. Of course, Sansa was officially a Lannister, for the time being, since she married Tyrion, but the child had nothing of a lioness, and nothing of a wolf either. She was only an inoffensive little dove. She nearly cried before the court when she told everyone about the bad treatments she had to endure. The girl really was an imbecile. She almost looked to love Tyrion. Only an idiot could fall in love with such a malformed creature. Margaery probably told Sansa everything to say, perhaps she even was the one who convinced Sansa to be in love with the dwarf. It made Cersei sick to imagine a girl loving such a horrible creature. She dismissed the idea of being careful with Sansa Stark. Once Tyrion would be dead, she would organize her another marriage with another man who would do everything Cersei told him. Perhaps she should have given her to Lord Baelish as the brothelkeeper offered when Ned Stark was arrested, but he was only a minor lord at this moment. He wasn’t fit for a daughter of the Warden of the North.

As she drifted into sleep, Cersei found herself in a forest. She was walking in dark woods, early in the morning, with her friend, Melara, following her.

“We shouldn’t be out here alone,” the little girl told her.

“Why not?” Cersei asked. Nothing stopped them from being here.

“If your father…”

“He’ll never know we’re gone.” Cersei cut her friend.

“But if he finds out…”

Cersei turned around to face her friend. Melara Hetherspoon was the daughter of one of her father’s bannermen. She had been Cersei’s best friend during her childhood. She was quite pretty and slender, had black hair, brown eyes and freckles. Her house wasn’t important or powerful, but she had been Cersei’s friend all the same, sent to Casterly Rock to spend time with her. Cersei tried to reassure her. “You don’t need to be afraid of my father.”

Cersei let a malicious smile cross her face. Melara understood what she meant and looked at the ground. Cersei kept her left hand in Melara’s right one and drove her through the trail. The path was grim and threatening. Cersei understood why people feared to come here, but she didn’t fear anything. She was the daughter of Tywin Lannister, a lioness of Casterly Rock, and the future queen. Cersei and Melara had heard serving girls talk about the crone who lived in these woods. They said she could curse a man or make him fall in love, summon demons and foretell the future. That was for the latter that Cersei came. She wanted to know her future. She wouldn’t be afraid.

They arrived at the maegi’s tent. It was dark, with a tall peaked roof. It was made of wood, mostly branches. A fire was burning inside and they could see the light from the outside.

“Are you sure?” Melara asked.

“Yes,” Cersei stated firmly.

“We shouldn’t go in.”

“Of course we should,” Cersei countered.
She walked forward, pulling her friend by the hand. They entered the tent, Melara still hesitant on Cersei’s heels. Cersei looked around her. The place was a mess. Many boxes and cages with animals were hung to something she wasn’t sure if she could call it a wall or a ceiling. There was a nasty smell in the air and insects were buzzing all around. Cersei looked carefully all around until she finally found what she was looking for. A woman was sitting in what looked like a chair, her head laid on her right shoulder, obviously asleep, wearing ragged clothes. Cersei approached, confident. Behind her, Melara bumped into a cage containing something that looked like a rat. The noises she and the repulsive animal did woke up the woman.

“Get out. Get out!” The supposed sorceress shouted at them as soon as she was awaken.

Melara came from behind and grabbed Cersei’s arm. “Let’s go.”

“No.” Cersei refused to leave. She wouldn’t be afraid of some witch.

“Listen to your friend,” the woman told her. She was hideous, her hair unwashed and messy, but she had nothing to see with the scary descriptions other people gave of her. Cersei wasn’t impressed.

“They said that you were terrifying with cat’s teeth and three eyes. You’re not terrifying. You’re boring.”

“You don’t know what I am.” The maegi spoke with a smooth voice. She tried to make it frightening. That wouldn’t work, not on Cersei. Not on a lioness, as young as she could be.

“I know you’re a witch and you can see the future. Tell me mine.”

“Everyone wants to know their future until they know their future.”

Cersei wasn’t going to be dismissed so easily. She was a lord’s daughter, a lady. “This is my father’s land. My land. Tell me my future or I’ll have your two boring eyes gouged out of your head.”

The boring woman started to smile as Cersei threatened her, and then chuckled when she was done speaking. Cersei didn’t like to be mocked like this. The Lannisters weren’t mocked this way. The sorceress seized a knife on the table at her right. “Your blood. Give me a taste.”

The woman handed the knife to Cersei, the grip in Cersei’s direction. Was it some kind of trick? A taste of her blood? Cersei had doubts for a moment. However, the blade was pointed in the crone’s direction, so it wasn’t an attempt of assassination. Cersei needed to know her future. The king and his son, Prince Rhaegar, had come to Lannisport for a tourney her father organized in their honor. Cersei was ten and the prince was seventeen, new to knighthood. Two of Cersei’s uncles fell before his lance. At nights, the Last of the Dragons played of his silver harp. His songs were all beautiful and sad. He had been wounded. Cersei would mend his wounds. She needed to know her future.

Cersei slowly took the dagger and did a little cut on the thumb of her left hand. She let a little whimper escape from her mouth as she cut it. The maegi then grabbed Cersei by the wrist and sucked Cersei’s thumb. To feel her saliva on one of her fingers was disgusting. She let go Cersei.

“Three questions you get. You won’t like the answers.” Cersei didn’t like the way the woman was speaking. A little voice inside her head told her to go away. But she didn’t. Instead she asked her first question.

“I’ve been promised to the prince. When will we marry?”

“You will never wed the prince. You will wed the king.” The answer surprised Cersei, but it pleased her as well. She would marry Rhaegar Targaryen when he would already be king. She wouldn’t
have to wait for long. But she had to be sure she would be queen.

“But I will be queen?”

“Oh, yes.” Cersei liked it. All her hopes and dreams would come true. “You’ll be queen. For a time. Then comes another, younger, more beautiful, to cast you down and take all you hold dear.”

The crone’s answer didn’t make any sense. Surely she was lying. “Will the king and I have children?” Uncertainty began to gain her mind.

“No. The king will have twenty children and you will have three.”

“That doesn’t make sense.” This old woman was raving. How could Rhaegar and Cersei have children and not have children together at the same time?

“Gold will be their crowns.” Cersei found back her dreams. All her children would be kings and queens. “Gold their shrouds.”

Cersei couldn’t move after the last three words. Her children would die. Her thumb was throbbing where she cut it and her blood was falling on the floor. The crone burst into laughter. It was a maleficent laugh, a terrible one who would make everyone shake, and it made Cersei shake.

“Come on, we have to go.” Melara was pleading for Cersei to leave, but Cersei didn’t move. She had no future. Another queen would overthrow her and any child she would have would die. She barely heard her friend. “We have to go! Cersei!” Cersei wouldn’t allow that to happen. She would make sure it wouldn’t happen.

“You’re lying!” Cersei left on these words, but the words of the meagi followed her outside the tent. The sorceress had one last thing to tell her.

“And when your tears have drowned you, the valonqar shall wrap his hands about your pale white throat and choke the life from you.”

As they ran away from the tent and the sniggering, the dream changed. Cersei was now kneeling on the floor, holding the corpse without life of Tommen. His green eyes were wide open and fixing the ceiling, but they saw nothing. Next to him were lying two other bodies. When she looked at them, she recognized Myrcella and Joffrey, both with blood on their face. Darkness came upon her. She raised her head and saw him, standing before her, a dagger covered of blood in his hand. Her valonqar. Her little brother. Tyrion. His shadow was covering Cersei. It was a very large shadow for a very small man, and it plunged Cersei into darkness. She saw two other figures behind him that she couldn’t recognize. They were in the shadows. She felt hands around her throat. And life choked from her.

Cersei awoke, panting and sweating. She couldn’t remember Melara’s face, even if she just saw her in her dreams. Her friends had drowned in a well not long after the visit to the crone. *The valonqar shall wrap his hands about your pale white throat and choke the life from you.* Cersei had asked her septa later what the word meant. “Little brother,” she answered. Tyrion would kill her someday, and before that he would kill all her children. Cersei wouldn’t allow that to happen. She would burn King’s Landing and all the Seven Kingdoms to the ground before she let her little brother take everything she held dear from her. *You’ll be queen. For a time. Then comes another, younger, more beautiful, to cast you down and take all you hold dear.* Margaery wouldn’t take her son away from her. The little doe-eye whore would die. Cersei would make sure Maggy’s prophecy wouldn’t come true. Anyway, Margaery wasn’t more beautiful than Cersei. The prophecy made no sense, and Cersei would prove it. No queen would cast her down. She was Cersei Lannister, the Queen Regent,
a lady of the Westerlands, a lady of Casterly Rock, a lioness, the daughter of Tywin Lannister. In centuries, they would only talk of Tywin Lannister as the father of Cersei Lannister, the Great Queen. Her time had come the day her father died, and today would be the beginning of her true reign. Anyone who would dare to question her authority after this day would die, and would only appear in history books among the long list of Cersei’s enemies she defeated.

Cersei spent the morning preparing her concluding testimony. She would show everyone she was the Queen Regent and the true power in King’s Landing and in all Westeros. She drained a cup of Arbor gold before she went to the Great Hall. Cersei arrived from behind the dais. She was the queen. She wouldn’t walk with the common highborn who were gathering on the benches.

“Look. The whore.” She heard someone in the crowd saying these words. She did as if she didn’t hear. She didn’t have to care about the filthy lies these unimportant people were spreading. At the end of the day, no one would ever dare to speak against her again.

Cersei noticed the little dove talking with the doe-eye whore. There was also the ugly woman and the Forrester girl with them, along with the sellsword and the squire. The two men would regret to have rejected her offers. A Lannister always pays her debts. Cersei fixed Margaery’s back with her eyes. She was the enemy. She would pay for trying to turn Joffrey against her mother. However, Cersei noticed that Sansa was the one to talk the most. In fact, everyone seemed to be listening to her. What could she be saying that was so interesting for all of them? Her brother’s sellsword bowed deeply before Sansa and left to the benches. The squire did the same thing, with a more modest bow, not long after. Cersei saw from the corner of her eye that Kevan had come and sit in the Iron Throne. He could sit in the chair for now. Very soon, Cersei would be the one to sit in it. He could enjoy it for the little time he still could.

After some time, Kevan brought order to the court. The doors opened and let Tyrion enter with Jaime and two guards. Her twin didn’t look a single moment at her. Was he angry after her? Of course he was. He was stupid enough to believe Lancel, just like their uncle. That was Jaime’s problem. Cersei didn’t need him. If he chose Tyrion instead of her, then she had nothing else to do with him. Tyrion’s shackles were attached to the box where he stood. Soon, Cersei wouldn’t need cells or shackles to make sure Tyrion wasn’t a threat. Without a head, the valonqar wouldn’t be able to do anything.

Kevan cleared his throat. “Tyrion Lannister. You stand accused of the murder of your father, Tywin Lannister, the Lord of Casterly Rock and the Hand of the King. You are also accused of attempt of murder against the king. You heard all the witnesses these last days. You have the opportunity to change your pleading one last time before the concluding testimonies. Do you want to change it?”

“I cannot change the truth, Uncle.” The little monster spoke on a mocking tone. Mock and joke as you like. We’ll see if you still laugh when your head rolls off your shoulders.

“Mock and joke as you like. We’ll see if you still laugh when your head rolls off your shoulders.”

“The concluding testimonies will take place today, then the judges will give their verdict. The Crown will begin.” Kevan turned toward Cersei. His face showed nothing of his thoughts. Cersei left her chair and walked to the tribune. On her way, she heard many insults shouted lowly at her. She didn’t listen to them. She walked her head straight and high. She was a lioness, and a lioness didn’t concern herself with the opinion of the sheep. Her speech was only a formality, but she gave a good one all the same. She wouldn’t cry this time. She would show she was strong.

“My father is dead. He served as Hand of the King under Aerys the Second for twenty years. He served my husband, our beloved King Robert, loyally for sixteen years as Warden of the West. When our king died and the Northerners tried to seize the Iron Throne, he assumed the functions of Hand of the King for the second time. He saved the city. He defeated the usurpers Stannis Baratheon
and Robb Stark. He brought back peace and prosperity to the Realm. And for that, he was murdered. Cowardly murdered by his own son.” Cersei turned her head toward Tyrion to show her disdain for him and emphasize her words. She shot him a poisonous look, but Tyrion reacted by looking indifferently at her. It was the same behaviour he had when they received the news of Robb Stark’s death and he threatened Joffrey. She should have ordered him arrested right at this moment. She turned to face the judges again and continued.

“Tywin Lannister, the Old Lion, the Hand of the King, the Lord of Casterly Rock and the Warden of the West, was assassinated in the most treacherous way there is by an ill-made, spiteful little creature full of envy, lust and low cunning, who wanted to take his place as Hand of the King and Lord of the Westerlands. Our father never wanted him to inherit Casterly Rock because he knew how dangerous and unworthy he was. I wish my father had done something to neutralize him before, but he didn’t because he was his son. That was his huge and final mistake. I warned him to not trust Tyrion and to send him away, and sadly he only chose to not trust him. I wish he had listened to me. He tried to kill our king. He planned regicide. He committed kinslaying. He planned to do it again and again, until there was only him left. He planned to destroy his own house, his own family, to be king of the ashes. He’d kill us all if he could. He began by his own father, the man who sired him, and he won’t stop until he is the only one left. I’m here asking for justice for my dead father since he cannot ask it by himself because of this vile dwarf. I’m here as a queen to prevent the ruin of the Realm. I’m here as a daughter who loved her father and wants to see him rest in peace. I’m here as a mother who wants her children to be kept safe from the schemes and plots of their wretched uncle. I’m here as a sister who asks for her brother to be punished accordingly to his crimes against the Realm and against his family. I’m here asking for justice. I’m here to ask you to not allow this man to pursue his sinister plans. Nothing more.”

Cersei left the box and went back to her place. She didn’t hear anything in the room. Her speech would be more than enough. Kevan started to speak as soon as she gained back her seat.

“Thank you for your testimony, your Grace. Now…”

Her uncle suddenly stopped to speak. Cersei had been staring at Tyrion, a great smile upon her face to let him know she had won. Tyrion only displayed a smug smile in her direction. She didn’t believe he would show the same expression when his head would leave his neck. However, Cersei realized that someone was walking on the dais. She turned her head to her left and saw Margaery leave her seat and step down the dais. She walked toward Tyrion and stopped at his right, facing the judges with the same lovely and stupid smile she displayed in all circumstances.

“Margaery?” Lord Mace didn’t seem to expect that. Of course, he didn’t. He never expected anything.

“Please excuse me, Father. My lords. But I support the accused.”

Margaery’s words brought some whispers in the crowd. She was standing there, next to the little monster, her insufferable smile on her face. That confirmed everything Cersei already knew. Margaery had been behind all of this from the beginning. Cersei had focused too much on Tyrion after her father’s death. She should have neutralized Margaery as well. She wouldn’t do the same mistake again. She would have the Tyrell whore strangled in her sleep.

“Very well, do as you please, Lady Margaery.” Kevan decided to let it pass. That was all too good. Once Tyrion would be declared guilty, Margaery would accompany him in his downfall. “The defense may give its final speech.”

Cersei looked at Margaery and Tyrion with all the anger she had. They wouldn’t escape her wrath. Cersei waited for Margaery to step forward in order to speak for Tyrion. That would be no surprise
since she was the one who organized his defense. However, she didn’t move. When Cersei finally decided Margaery may not speak, she realized someone else was in the box. It was Sansa Stark.

Cersei was quite surprised by this. She thought Margaery would testify last, hoping she would cause Cersei’s downfall when in fact it was her own downfall she was preparing. Instead, the little dove came to speak. Cersei wondered what it would give. Would Sansa end up crying and asking for mercy for her beloved husband? Would she confess everything and ask to be spared? Would she remind again everyone how she was mistreated? As if that mattered. She was the daughter of a traitor and the wife of a monster. What she endured during a year was nothing compared to what Cersei supported for sixteen years with Robert. The little dove should be thankful that Cersei didn’t have her head removed from her little body and allowed her to remain betrothed to her handsome son. She should thank Cersei for freeing her from her lecherous dwarf husband and to marry her to a more comely man.

“I remember when I first met the queen at Winterfell. I had never left the surroundings of Winterfell before. I was only thirteen back then. When I saw her for the first time, I couldn’t believe that I had the chance to meet the queen. In my eyes, she was a perfect queen, like the ones in the stories I loved so much to read back then. I told myself, at this moment: I want to be like her, later. I admired her. She looked so much without reproach. I already told you that later, when I was in King’s Landing, she often told me how a stupid and silly little girl I was. And she was right. I was an idiot to take such a woman as a model.” The last sentence took Cersei aback. What did Sansa just say? “What witnesses, what proofs did she bring at this trial? A lying whore? Only her words about my husband trying to seize the Iron Throne for himself by killing all his family prove that her testimony is a tissue of lies. Everyone who knows Lord Tyrion well enough would know that he would never have put in motion such a ridiculous plan. The Grand Maester? He didn’t seem quite sure which poison was used, nor to know what effects had a poison, and we know that he first stated Lord Tywin died of a heart failure. We also know that he lied about my husband plundering his stores. What would you expect from an old Grand Maester who sleeps with whores? All the other evidence from the other witnesses are no proof at all, only words said in very specific circumstances. Anyway, these witnesses include two kingsguards better at beating children than to fight in battle. One of them, Ser Meryn, flew away from the battlements in the middle of the Battle of Blackwater. The third kingsguard is a former sellsword, and he and his two brothers seem to have testified only for spending time in the queen’s bed. Only Lord Varys’s testimony could be trustworthy, and he didn’t bring any proof of Lord Tywin’s murder. As far as we know, Lord Tywin died of natural causes in his bed. As for the queen, I’m wondering if we can really consider her testimony after everything we learned about her yesterday.”

Cersei couldn’t believe what she just heard, and the crowd seemed to be quite surprised as well. Sansa was talking against her, directly. She was staring directly into Cersei’s eyes, not flinching a single time. That wasn’t the little dove Cersei saw during the last two years. She defied Cersei, and the next part of her testimony was even more daring.

“I remember some conversations I had with queen. When I flowered, she told me to never love anyone but my children. I was betrothed to King Joffrey at this moment, so I asked her if I shouldn’t love Joffrey. She answered me: You can try. She told me to not love the king.” Cries of surprise followed. How could she remember such details? “Later, during the Battle of Blackwater, the queen spent her time drinking wine. She quickly got drunk. At one moment, she told me that if the city fell, she might have enough time to yield to Stannis in person. She told me she might have hoped for a private audience if it hadn’t been Stannis Baratheon, but that since it was him, she would have a better chance to seduce his horse. I remember the exact words she used. Tears aren’t a woman’s only weapon. The best one’s between our legs.” New cries of surprise and indignation. How could she remember and say such things Cersei told her privately? She was a stupid child. “She also told me about her husband: I was sold to some stranger like a horse to be ridden whenever he desired.”
“STOP THAT!” Cersei jumped from her seat as she shouted at the girl. “HOW DARE YOU TO SAY SUCH THINGS?”

Sansa couldn’t say these things Cersei told her. She was an innocent little dove. However, it wasn’t the submitted eyes she was familiar with that looked back at her now. Sansa didn’t show any surprise or reaction to Cersei’s outburst. She didn’t flinch and looked back at Cersei with indifference and determination. She never looked at Cersei this way. She replied defiantly.

“Why? Does it bother you for the people to know who you truly are? Do you want me to reveal even more? About you and a certain person who was always present during your childbirths for example?”

Cersei was agape before Sansa’s words. She was threatening her, the queen. What happened to the frightened little girl she saw in Tyrion’s rooms a month ago? Cersei was on the dais, but right now she had the impression Sansa was the one taller than her. How was it possible? She was standing there, so proud. She looked so strong. That was so hard for Cersei to accept that she fell back into her chair without even realizing it. Sansa continued to talk.

“While the queen was drinking and calling back her son from the battlements because of her irrational beliefs that her brother wanted to kill the king, Lord Tyrion was leading. He set ablaze most of Stannis’s fleet with wildfire. He organized and led the defenses on the walls as the usurper’s troops landed on the ground. After our king left the battlements, he mustered the men and led the foray outside the gates, and destroyed the battering ram that was about to break through the Mud Gate. He fought bravely this day and was severely injured. He nearly died. Tywin Lannister saved the city, it’s true, by arriving in time to put Stannis’s forces in disarray. But without Lord Tyrion, King’s Landing would have fallen before Lord Tywin and the Tyrells arrived. Many people here would be dead, and Stannis would be sitting on the Iron Throne instead of Ser Kevan right now. The heads of our king and our queen would be rotting on the city’s gates. Before that, Lord Tyrion fought bravely at the Battle of the Green Fork against the rebels. He brought three thousand men to his father’s army, and these men nearly defeated an entire army by themselves. After that, he went to King’s Landing on Lord Tywin’s orders to serve as Hand of the King in his stead. He ruled the city better than anyone else could have done in these difficult circumstances. He did everything humanly possible to reduce the starvation the people were suffering of. He prepared the city’s defenses. He removed from their position corrupted men who slaughtered babies and innocent children. He made an alliance with House Martell. He made a secret pact with my mother, Catelyn Stark, which resulted in the release of Ser Jaime Lannister. He sent Lord Baelish to negotiate with the Tyrells, which made possible their alliance with the Crown. After the battle, he continued to serve the Crown as Master of Coin on the small council, managing the finances of the realm very well considering the war. He served loyally House Lannister and the Crown. He saved King’s Landing. He saved King Joffrey. He saved the queen, and as a reward, a kingsguard tried to kill him on the orders of his own sister. And while Lord Tyrion was trying to rule the city and to defend it, the queen was drinking, plotting against him, ordering people to have him killed, giving lordship to sons of butchers who killed innocent people, spilling blood on the steps of the Great Sept of Baelor, and beating whores.”

Cersei was rarely paralyzed by words, but this time she was. She never expected that. Not from Sansa. The little dove continued to talk. “This trial is about kinslaying, it’s true. This is about an attempt of murder from someone on a member of his family, but not about the murder of Tywin Lannister by his son. You heard the witnesses. The Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, our future queen, the Master of Whisperers, the son of the Hand of the King, they all brought irrefutable proofs of my husband’s innocence, on all the crimes he’s accused of. The queen has no solid proof to present against this. But she tried to have her brother killed, the first time during the Battle of Blackwater while he was protecting her son, and the second time now, by using the death of her father to obtain her brother’s head for imaginary crimes. You want a kinslayer? She’s there.”
Sansa had spoken in the direction of the judges all this time, but she pointed Cersei by turning her head toward her at the end of her speech. “You have the choice between being accomplices of a murderer, or justice by freeing an innocent man.”

Sansa said the last words to the judges again and left the box. Cersei couldn’t believe what she just heard. The little dove couldn’t have come up with such a speech on her own. And yet… You should be more careful with the new Lady Lannister. Was her uncle right finally? Did she underestimate Sansa? Could she be dangerous? A silly little girl who loved songs, knights, tales, and poetry? No, that was impossible. Cersei would have realized it before. She looked at Margaery who looked back at her with the smile she always had. She was the real one behind this. She probably forced Sansa to repeat these words again and again last night until they were natural like the courtesies the little dove always used.

However, Sansa didn’t go back to her seat near the box of the witness. Instead, she went to Tyrion and stood on his left side, just like Margaery stood on his right side. There was a huge silence in the Great Hall in answer to Sansa’s speech. Even her uncle Kevan looked unable to speak. Before anyone could say something, the ugly woman who accompanied Jaime back to King’s Landing went to Sansa’s left, standing in the same position. But what surprised Cersei the most was when Jaime took the same position at the right of Margaery. Her twin brother was standing with Margaery and Tyrion. Before she could recover from this shock, a kingsguard arrived from the far side of the Hall and stood behind Tyrion. It was Ser Balon Swann, the traitor who turned against her. Even Tyrion was standing in his box now. Cersei noticed his little frame was casting a shadow on the floor. It looked larger than those the others projected. They were six in total, standing tall before the judges, facing them.

Cersei didn’t know what was going on. She had the impression someone threw a spell on the room. A seventh person, Tyrion’s squire, joined the six others, standing next to Ser Balon in an awkward position. Finally, Kevan managed to speak, but Cersei still had the impression there was a spell in the room and that Tyrion would be cleared of the charges. That couldn’t happen. She couldn’t let that happen. All her efforts couldn’t be reduced to nothing.

“We listened to all the witnesses of the Crown and the defense. The accused may be granted the right to say a few last words.”

There was a silence for some time. Everyone seemed to be waiting for someone to speak. Finally, Tyrion did. “I have nothing to say, but this. I didn’t kill my father. I didn’t try to kill Joffrey. The only reason I’m here is because my sister wants me dead ever since the day I was born.”

After another moment of silence, Cersei’s uncle spoke again. “Very well, the judges will retire to deliberate before they give their verdict.”

“I don’t need to discuss. My verdict is already decided.” The Red Viper raised his voice before Kevan could rise from the Iron Throne. Kevan glanced at Oberyn Martell, then looked at the Fat Flower, probably with a questioning look. Mace Tyrell seemed to make a sign in the direction before him.

“Alright,” her uncle said. “We’ll proceed this way. Each judge will give his verdict to each charge in turn. Lord Mace of House Tyrell will begin, followed by Prince Oberyn of House Martell to end with Ser Kevan of House Lannister.”

It was to Mace Tyrell to speak first. Cersei looked intently at him. The Fat Flower looked back at her. Cersei had to be strong. She couldn’t afford to look weak. She gave a look at Lord Tyrell that let place to no questioning. The Lord of Highgarden rose from his seat and gave his verdict.
“For murder of Tywin Lannister, guilty. For attempt of murder against the king, guilty.”

The reactions didn’t wait. There were shouts of stupor all over the Great Hall. Cersei saw the confusion among the Tyrells, the surprise and incomprehension on Margaery’s face as she looked at her father. Lord Tyrell sat. All the people standing at Tyrion’s side were looking at each other, plainly unaware of what was going on. Tyrion himself looked lost. Cersei exulted. She had gone to see Lord Mace in the Maidenvault last evening and explained him that his daughter was being manipulated by Tyrion and that everything that was said on this day were filthy lies like the ones Stannis Baratheon was spreading. She even promised him she would give them Sansa to marry a member of their family, even offering her to marry his son Loras if they thought it could cause too much problems for them to marry him to Cersei, but only if Tyrion was declared guilty since they needed him to be dead for Sansa to marry again. She had also gone to Prince Oberyn, promising him the head of Ser Gregor Clegane against a verdict of culpability for Tyrion. Both had accepted. It was the end for Tyrion. Even if Kevan voted for him, the Red Viper would never overlook a chance to have a Lannister killed. On Tyrion’s death, she and Oberyn agreed at least.

Kevan looked surprised as well. He looked in Cersei’s direction. Cersei smiled to him. You lost, Uncle. You always were a good advisor for my father, but I am his daughter. You should have remembered that before you defied me. Kevan’s anger was obvious, but Cersei didn’t care. He would leave the capital very soon after the trial. And if he didn’t… Cersei would force him to leave, one way or another.

“Silence! Order!” It took some time, but Kevan managed to bring back the calm in the Hall. In the meantime, Prince Oberyn Martell looked at Cersei with a wide smile on his lips. Cersei returned it. Soon, that would be the end for the monster who killed her mother. Maggy’s prophecy would never come true. What future do you see now, witch? The head of the valonqar off his shoulders? The end of this so-called younger queen who would cast me down? Cersei had turned the prophecy into a lie.

Finally, when the order was back, a tense silence lingered on the Great Hall. It was Prince Oberyn’s turn to give his verdict. Cersei couldn’t wait for this. She had wanted this for so long, and finally her monstrous brother would get what he deserved. Mace Tyrell sat again, but Prince Oberyn didn’t rise as he began to speak.

“Before I give my decision, there is something I would like to say. You see, I met the accused, many years ago.”

What was he talking about? They should get rid of this now. Well, after all, Tyrion would be sentenced very soon, so if the Red Viper wanted to take some time to tell a story, Cersei thought she might be able to support it.

“I think I would have remembered that.” Tyrion looked skeptical the way he spoke. Cersei was as well. When could Oberyn Martell have met Tyrion?

The answer of the Red Viper came immediately. “Unlikely. You had just been born. Our father brought me and my sister Elia with him on a visit to Casterly Rock. My first time away from Dorne. I didn’t like anything about the Rock. Not the food, not the weather, not the accents. Nothing. But the biggest disappointment, it was him.”

Cersei wondered what he was talking about and why. She thought she remembered the Martells visited Casterly Rock a long time ago. She didn’t remember well, though, she was very young. Was her mother still alive? If Oberyn said Tyrion was born, then it had to be not long after the monster killed her. But why in the Seven Hells was he talking about this? What was so important for the Dornishman to speak about a visit to Casterly Rock? He continued his tale nonetheless and everyone was listening in complete silence.
“The whole way from Dorne, all anyone talked about was the monster that had been born to Tywin Lannister. A head twice the size of his body, a tail between his legs, claws, one red eye, the privates of both a girl and a boy.”

“That would have made things so much easier.” Tyrion’s comments brought some nervous laughs in the rooms. Cersei didn’t remember these rumors about him, but she wasn’t surprised there had been some. He had been such an ugly and horrible baby, a true monster.

“When we met his sister, she promised she would show him to us. Every day we would ask. Every day she would say: Soon. Then she and her brother took us to the nursery and… she unveiled the freak.” The Prince of Dorne made a movement with his hand and arm to emphasize it. He had made a move with his head, pointing Jaime to make people understand he was with them. “The head was a bit large. The arms and legs were a bit small, but no claw. No red eye. No tail between the legs. Just a tiny pink cock. We didn’t try to hide our disappointment, Elia and I. That’s just a baby. And she said: He killed my mother. And she pinched his little cock so hard, I thought she might pull it off. Until her brother made her stop.” Another head’s move indicated Jaime. “It doesn’t matter, she told us. Everyone says he will die soon. I hope they are right. He should not have lived this long.”

Cersei thought she remembered it now. It was difficult for her to remember it considering the numerous times she pinched Tyrion when he was still a baby. She didn’t care about it. Every pinch he received he deserved, and even more. That was nothing compared to her mother’s death and what she endured while she brought the little monster into the world. He should have died right when he was born. Her mother was the one who should live. But as always, Jaime had stepped in to protect their so poor little brother. Well now, he wouldn’t be able to save him. Strangely, Cersei had a bad feeling. Why had Oberyn told this story? His voice had turned quite sad, she even believed she perceived pity in it. A Martell couldn’t pity a Lannister, especially not Tyrion. She looked at the prince and saw him staring at her. Not with a knowing smile this time, but with hard and disdainful eyes and face. And when he spoke in her direction, there was disgust in his voice.

“I can see nothing changed in thirty years.” With an evil smirk, he rose from his seat, not leaving his eyes from Cersei, until he turned to Tyrion and gave the verdict. “For both accusations, not guilty.”

Cersei’s jaw fell. How could he do that? They had an agreement. How did he dare? Oberyn Martell took his time to sit again. When he did, Kevan got out of the Iron Throne and pronounced the words Cersei feared the most. “For the murder of Tywin Lannister, not guilty. For attempt of murder against the king, not guilty. The gods have made their will known. Tyrion Lannister, you are free.”

That couldn’t be. No, that couldn’t be. Cersei had organized everything. Tyrion was guilty. He killed her mother. He killed her father. He sent her daughter away from her. He tried to kill her son. He would kill her children and kill her at the end. Gold will be their crowns. Gold their shrouds. And when your tears have drowned you, the valonqar shall wrap his hands about your pale white throat and choke the life from you. Maggy’s voice resonated. No, she wouldn’t let that happen. There was still one thing she could do. Cersei passed her right hand on her two breasts. That was the signal. Jaime, her love, was already unlocking the monster’s shackles. He had taken the keys from the gold cloaks in his hurry to free his little brother and was trying the best he could to free him with a single hand. Cersei noticed Margaery was pulling Sansa in an embrace. A kingsguard walked toward the box, coming from beside the dais. At the last moment, he drew a dagger.

“Ser Jaime, behind you.” Ser Balon Swann shouted too late. The kingsguard tossed Jaime away with his left hand. Between the surprise effect and the lack of his right hand, Jaime had no chance. Nothing stood between Tyrion and the kingsguard. The dagger slashed through the air. Tyrion
backed away, but not enough. Blood spurted out from his chest. A moment later, another dagger flew through the air and took the kingsguard right in the head. He fell on the floor. All the better. No one would be able to question him now, and he fulfilled his mission.

“Tyron! Tyron!” There was consternation in the Hall for a short moment, but the cries broke it. Cersei was surprised to hear Sansa cry for this monster. She was leaning over him, her hands on his chest. It was over. The Imp was dead. Cersei won. “He’s bleeding!”

“Fetch a maester!” Kevan shouted. “Not this one. Another.” The last words came out when Pycelle started to advance. Jaime was staring in shock at the body of his beloved little brother. Balon Swann’s attitude was no better. It was approximately the same thing for Maegaery, the woman clad in armor and the squire. Kevan advanced toward the box, but he didn’t look at Tyrion’s dead shape. The body of the kingsguard was still laying on the floor, his head facing the floor. Kevan turned it to see his face. There was a dagger in his throat.

“Jaime.” Her uncle called for her brother. Her only true brother. Cersei looked with wonderment and satisfaction at what just happened. The little monster was dead. Sansa could cry all she wanted, she couldn’t bring him back to life. She was a widow. She would appreciate it, just like Cersei appreciated it when Robert died, until Cersei found her a new husband.

“It’s Ser Osmund Kettleblack!” Jaime seemed to have gotten out of his numbed state and was looking down at the kingsguard. He and Kevan looked at each other for a moment, then they both turned their head to look at Cersei. At this moment, Cersei realized many eyes were looking at her. Kevan’s voice resonated in the Hall.

“Guards! Escort the queen to her chambers. Don’t let her leave them under any circumstance.”

Guards in Lannister cloaks approached and took Cersei by the arms, dragging her away. How did they dare? “I am your queen! Release me!” Cersei struggled to get free of their grips as she yelled. “Ser Meryn! Ser Boros! Protect your queen!”

The two kingsguards approached side by side, drawing their swords. “Gold cloaks, guards, Ser Balon, with me!” This time Jaime’s voice thundered. Within a few seconds he was standing in the way of his two sworn brothers, his sword in his left hand. Ser Balon Swann joined him, his sword out as well. The ugly woman was there as well. Cersei recognized her sword as the one her father gave to Jaime when he came back. It was made of Valyrian steel. What was she doing with it? Two guards were holding Cersei as she struggled without success to get free. Gold cloaks and other Lannister men were surrounding Ser Boros and Ser Meryn. The two men froze.

“I am the queen! You cannot do this! I just saved our king! He was a monster! He killed my father! I saved the family! I saved House Lannister! I saved Joffrey!” Cersei looked all around, searching for help, but she found none. Everyone abandoned her. Ser Osmund was dead and his brothers weren’t present. Ser Meryn and Ser Boros were too craven to die for their rightful queen, her uncle and her beloved Jaime were turning on her. Despite all her calls and yelling, no one tried to help her as she was dragged to her rooms and thrown in them without ceremony.

Cersei laid on the floor the guards left her on. Maggy’s words came back to her again. You’ll be queen. For a time. Then comes another, younger, more beautiful, to cast you down and take all you hold dear. Another jug of wine shattered on the door.
Before some people start to hate me, remember Cersei is an unreliable POV character. Wait for the next chapter.

Please review

Next chapter: Tysha makes an appearance

By the way, I started a new fanfic recently. For those who love Star Wars, especially the video game "Star Wars: The Old Republic", I invite you to read "Life as a spy". https://www.fanfiction.net/s/11932305/1/Life-as-a-spy
TYRION IX

I loved a maid as fair as summer
with sunlight in her hair.

I loved a maid as red as autumn
with sunset in her hair.

I loved a maid as white as winter
with moonglow in her hair.

The song came out from the darkness surrounding Tyrion. He didn’t know where he was. He had the impression to drift on clouds. His mind and body were numbed. Despite the darkness around him, he felt well. That was so different from how he usually felt. He had never been so much in peace. And now the voice was filling his ears, sweet, soft, slow, low, loving. It was a voice he heard long ago, but it had come back to him very often for fifteen years. It remembered him one of the few times he was really happy.

The song continued, as sweet as if it was the first time he heard it, always from the same voice. Tyrion kept his eyes shut. He didn’t need them with the darkness. He only needed his ears to hear the song. He felt he could stay here for hours, days, weeks, even months and years, listening to this song. The voice was clearer now. Tyrion had the impression it was closing on him, but he didn’t care. He remained there, listening to the sweet voice that drew near to him. Suddenly, it stopped. The voice didn’t sing anymore. It talked.

“I love you, Tyrion. I love your lips. I love your voice, and the words you say to me, and how you treat me gentle. I love your face.”

Tyrion opened his eyes. There was a torch right before him, but it didn’t blind him. Next to the torch was a face. The fire only allowed him to see her face, nothing more, but she was beautiful. Even more beautiful than in Tyrion’s memories. Her hair, her eyes, her neck, her cheeks, all her face showed a greater beauty than he ever saw in her before. Her skin also looked darker, but perhaps only because of the darkness. She also looked older.

“Tysha.” A single word escaped from his mouth. His voice choked. She was there, right in front of her, after all these years. Even if that wasn’t real, it was enough to have tears coming to his eyes.
“Tyrion. It’s been a long time.” Her voice was sweet, even bewitching. The flames of the fire were dancing on her face, making her far more beautiful than Tyrion could have ever imagined. “You remember. I loved you. I was yours, and you were mine.”

The words brought back Tyrion to the hard reality. “You were a whore. Everything you told me, everything we shared, all of it was a lie.”

“Was it a lie? Was I the liar?”

Tysha looked at him, a sad expression on her face. She looked like she felt sorry for him. Her face started to recede, disappearing slowly. As only a thin point of fire was left far away, Tyrion heard her voice one last time.

“We’ll meet again.”

Then there was nothing. Tyrion was in the darkness again. He closed his eyes again, letting his numb state carry him out of the world once again. He wanted to stay there forever. He didn’t want to go back to the reality full of treachery where everyone looked like they wanted to kill him, where he was hated. Here, there was no one to hate him. What reason could he have to go back to the real world?

Tyrion heard something else. Another song, but this one didn’t seem to come from the darkness. It came from somewhere else, though Tyrion ignored where. The voice was different, but sweet like honey and beautiful all the same. He had a vague impression to know this voice, but he couldn’t remember where he heard it before. He opened his eyes once again, searching for its origin. He looked around him, seeing nothing first. After a moment, he noticed a light far away. It was faint, but it was there. It wasn’t the light of a fire. This light was too white to come from it. The song came from the light. He couldn’t understand the words, but he felt attracted to them. The light was there, far away, and it didn’t move. He would have to walk toward it in order to reach it. It wouldn’t come to him.

Tyrion wasn’t sure if he wanted to go back to the light. He liked it here, in the darkness. Tysha had come to visit him. Perhaps she would come again. He didn’t want to go back to the sufferings, the horrors and the pain. He knew that if he walked to the light, he would have to play the game again. He was tired of playing, even though he had to admit he enjoyed to play. But the joy it brought was nothing compared to the sacrifices it meant. How much did he sacrifice to play the game of thrones? Too much. I lost too much. Tysha. Shae. Who else? Was all of it worth the pleasure of playing? Why go back to a world full of bad people?

But another part of Tyrion’s mind told him he had to go back. I do belong to this world. These bad people are what I’m good at. Outtalking them, outthinking them. It’s what I am. And I like it. I like it more than anything I’ve ever done. He couldn’t stay alone in the darkness. His place wasn’t there. And there were people he cared about, and perhaps who cared about him in the light. Tyrion had been alone most of his life, but he never wanted to be alone. He didn’t want to be alone. On the other side was his big brother, Jaime. His smiling and loyal squire, Pod. His sellsword and friend, Bronn. Even if he was more a sellsword than a friend, he was still a friend. There were also many other people that Tyrion liked on the other side. His uncle Gerion. Perhaps he wasn’t dead. There was also Gerion’s daughter, Joy Hill. Tyrion liked the girl. She had such an appropriate name. She brought joy everywhere she was accepted. Tyrion was walking in the direction of the light now and he was getting closer and closer, the light taking more and more place and filling the darkness as he approached. He regretted to leave the darkness, but he had to. He didn’t belong to the darkness. He belonged to the light. There was someone in the light he wanted to see again. The voice came clear as he approached the light. Tyrion recognized the lyrics of the song. It was a hymn.
Gentle Mother, font of mercy,
Save our sons from war, we pray,
Stay the swords and stay the arrows,
Let them know a better day.

Gentle Mother, strength of women,
Help our daughters through this fray,
Soothe the wrath and tame the fury,
Teach us all a kinder way.

Tyrion didn’t believe in gods. If there were gods, and if they were just and good, why would they make a world so full of injustice and monsters? Once he believed in gods, back when he wanted to become High Septon. But after he met Tysha, he forgot about this. Despite this, the hymn sounded beautiful as he heard it clearly. He came into the full light.

Tyrion was lying on something smooth. He believed it was a mattress. He heard the voice singing very distinctively. He remained still, listening to it for a moment, his eyes closed. There was something on his chest, he didn’t know what. After a moment, he decided to open his eyes to look on his right, where the voice seemed to come from. She was kneeling, her hands joined as she sang just next to him, her head leaning, her eyes closed. Her auburn hair were falling all over her shoulders. Tyrion thought he preferred her hair like this instead of some complicated hairdressing she had her handmaidens do for her in special occasions. He looked at her lips moving as she continued to sing the Mother’s Hymn. She had a beautiful voice. Tyrion knew Sansa could sing very well, but he never heard her sing before, and he never asked her to sing for him. He never really felt as if he could ask anything from her. He knew he could have, and Sansa would have obliged, but he didn’t want her to do something against her will only because he asked her to. He continued to watch her singing. She looked in peace, something she had never looked like ever since Tyrion saw her in King’s Landing. Perhaps it was the reason why she prayed so much. That was the only way for her to find some calm in this city. However, as much as he liked to stay here looking at her, Tyrion thought he should say something. He didn’t even feel well about looking at her without her authorization.

“You have a lovely voice, my lady. I regret I didn’t hear it before.”

Sansa opened her eyes and lifted her eyes to look at him. Tyrion believed he saw relief, even a smile on her face. “Tyrion. Are you alright? How do you feel?” Sansa raised from her kneeling position and sat on the bedside.

“I guess I’m alive. Unless the Maiden decided to welcome me in her paradise, but I don’t think she would.” Tyrion tried to smile. Sansa chuckled a little at the jape.

“Don’t worry, you’re alive. I’m not the Maiden. But you’re lucky to be alive.”
Tyrion looked around. He was in the chamber he and Sansa shared. He wondered how he ended up here, lying in Sansa’s bed. After all, it was her bed considering Tyrion never shared it with her… except one time. His mind was confused. He tried to sit.

“No, don’t do this!” Sansa’s warning proved to be clever. Tyrion felt a sudden pain in his belly as soon as he moved and landed heavily on his back. “You mustn’t move. You were gravely injured. You need to rest.” His wife spoke to him on an imperious tone, but Tyrion strangely perceived worry in her voice as well. She took something on a table near the bed and approached it from Tyrion’s face. It was some sort of cup.

“It’s Milk of the poppy. It will ease the pain.” When Sansa told Tyrion what was in the cup, he ducked. “Don’t you trust me?”

Tyrion looked at Sansa. He could only see worry in her eyes. He also had the impression she was hurt. Tyrion remembered now that Sansa defended him for his trial. She wouldn’t make so much effort to save his life only to kill him afterwards. Tyrion nodded positively and accepted to drink. He could trust his wife. He drifted into sleep once more, the last thing he saw being auburn hair and blue eyes.

Tyrion didn’t know for how long he slept, but when he woke up he had a great surprise. It was dawn. When he opened his eyes he was staring at the ceiling, but he felt something in his left hand and a pressure against his left arm. When he turned his head, he saw Sansa, lying next to him, still asleep, her face facing him. Her left hand was holding his own and her forehead was pressed against his arm. Tyrion thought he was probably dreaming. He closed and opened his eyes a few times, expecting all of it to disappear. After a few failed attempts, he decided this was real. Sansa was really lying next to him. Well, he couldn’t blame her. That was her bed after all. It was he who shouldn’t be there.

Tyrion remembered what happened the last time he woke up. He was exactly at the same place and in the same position. He had felt a strong pain in his belly when he tried to sit. He knew better than to repeat the experience. Instead, he lifted his head to see what caused the pain he endured. He realized he was naked. Well, not entirely since he still wore breeches, but nothing covered his chest, except several layers of bandages. He remembered then.

The last two days of his trial had nearly been an amusement for Tyrion. He saw several people tearing into pieces the testimonies of the witnesses Cersei had brought against him, from Ser Balon Swann to Daisy the whore. Tyrion was really impressed by Sansa. She managed to find enough people not only to prove his innocence, but also to destroy Cersei. The testimonies of Podrick and Varys, but most of all Lancel, entirely annihilated Cersei’s image and power. Sansa revealed to the entire world what a manipulative and paranoid bitch his sister was, that she tried to kill her brother, which was kinslaying as much as killing his own father, and that she slept with her cousin. Even better, Lancel confessed his part in Robert Baratheon’s death, and that could get Cersei accused of regicide. Tyrion jubilated as he looked how Cersei was even more destroyed by each new word the witnesses pronounced in the Great Hall. He never thought such a day would arrive. Tyrion had been amazed by Sansa’s work.

He knew Sansa wasn’t stupid. Many people in King’s Landing saw her like this, a stupid little girl, the daughter of a traitor, who always did what was ordered from her. Tyrion knew it was far from being the truth. Of course, Sansa always did what she was asked to, but she did it in order to survive. She was no different from Varys or Tyrion in some way. She had understood very quickly she would have to hide behind courtesies and to act as a perfect little girl in order to survive in the capital. Many other people wouldn’t have been wise enough to understand that. That was probably why Cersei never saw Sansa as a threat. It had been her last mistake. Sansa used the new situation and
revealed who she really was, a young woman full of resources and capable to play the game just like everyone, and to play it better than many people. And she revealed it at the best time ever. Even Tyrion hadn’t expected this. She took everyone by surprise. Her concluding speech was perfect. Tyrion still had some hard time to accept that Sansa had spoken so highly of him. He never thought she would do something like this someday. And yet she did.

However, everything Sansa did could have turned to nothing after Mace Tyrell gave his verdict. Tyrion still didn’t understand why the Fat Flower decided to declare him guilty. The Lord of Highgarden was expected to make the same choice than Kevan, but instead he chose to claim Tyrion was guilty despite all evidences of the opposite. Tyrion thought he remembered an exchange of look between Lord Mace and Cersei. What could her sister have said to persuade him to vote against Tyrion? By luck, Oberyn Martell unexpectedly chose to spare Tyrion. Except for Sansa praising him, a Martell coming to the defense of a Lannister was the last thing Tyrion expected. Sadly, a kingsguard tried to kill him as Jaime was freeing him. Tyrion couldn’t remember which kingsguard, but he expected that Cersei was behind this. She desperately wanted him dead. He remembered the dagger slashing through the air and a sudden pain in his belly, and then nothing else until he woke up with Sansa singing next to him. Tyrion remembered he backed up right before the attack came. Perhaps that saved his life, just like during the Battle of Blackwater. Cersei had tried to kill him twice, and twice he survived. He hoped he wouldn’t have to survive a third attempt.

The door opened and Tyrion saw a young woman with black hair bringing a tray of food on the table. Tyrion’s mind was a bit fuzzy, so he didn’t recognize her immediately, but he was quite surprised when he realized she was a Northerner.

“Lady Mira. What are you doing here?” Mira Forrester turned to face him at his question and smiled.

“Lord Tyrion. It is a pleasure to see you’re better.”

“Thank you, but you didn’t answer my question.” Tyrion noticed Sansa was stirring and awakening next to him.

“I am Lady Sansa’s handmaiden now, my lord. Did you forget?”

Memory came back to Tyrion. His mind was still misty. “Ah yes, I remember. Forgive me, my lady.”

The northern girl made a sign that showed she accepted the apology and walked on the other side of the bed. Sansa was getting out of it. Lady Mira helped Sansa to prepare for the day under Tyrion’s eyes. That was quite disturbing for him since he never saw it before. He was always gone when Sansa’s handmaidens began to dress her for the day. Tyrion looked away most of the time. He didn’t think Sansa would like him to spy on her, especially while she was dressing. When Mira Forrester was done with Sansa’s preparation, she left with a bow and the usual “my lady” and “my lord” for Sansa and Tyrion.

After she was gone, Sansa took some of the plates on the tray and brought it on the bed. She sat by Tyrion’s side.

“I could have come to the table, my lady. You didn’t have to move the breakfast for me, even if I appreciate it,” Tyrion observed.

“The last time you tried to stand you ended up laying again on the bed within a second.”

Sansa wasn’t wrong. Tyrion’s mind was really clouded. It was probably the Milk of the poppy. He didn’t like it. His brain was the only weapon he had. If it was restrained, he couldn’t defend himself. But for now, his mind wouldn’t be so useful. Sansa was no threat. At least not for him. They ate in
silence, and then Tyrion read afterwards. There wasn’t much else he could do. Sansa went to another part of the room and read a book as well. Tyrion told her she wasn’t obliged to stay, but Sansa refused to leave. She said she was alright here.

About the end of the morning, Maester Frenken, who Tyrion knew well, came to check his injury. Tyrion told his wife she could leave while the maester examined him, but to his surprise she refused again. The maester cut Tyrion’s bandages on his belly and revealed a huge opening on his chest, above his navel. The injury had been closed with stitches and Tyrion noticed traces of what was probably medicinal plants. Tyrion was never quite interested by medicine, but he read so much in his whole life that he knew a few things about healing. He could see the injury was cicatrizing, but not entirely. The maester confirmed what he thought as he examined Tyrion’s injury.

“There is no infection. Your life is no longer in danger, my lord, but I would suggest you do not move for today. Tomorrow you should be able to move, but carefully. No jerks. There will be no permanent damage left.”

“Except a huge scar. It seems I needed another one. Does every kingsguard want to leave his mark on me?” Tyrion asked.

The maester didn’t answer, but Tyrion thought he heard an inaudible chuckle from Sansa’s direction. The maester covered the injury with healing herbs and new bandages, then left. Before that, he asked Tyrion if he wanted some Milk of the poppy, but Tyrion refused. He felt his thoughts became clearer. The effects of the liquid were disappearing.

“How do you feel?” Sansa asked him when the maester was gone. She was again at his side, sitting on a chair.

“I feel quite well I would say, for someone who just came quite close to die. Even better for a twice scarred imp.” Sansa smiled. Tyrion liked to see her smile. “I guess I owe you some thanks. You just saved me from my demonic mad sister.”

“I am your wife, so it was my duty. And you once saved me from Joffrey, perhaps twice. A Lannister always pays her debts.”

Sansa was a Lannister in name because of their marriage, but the words sounded quite unnatural when they were about her. Tyrion knew Sansa would never be a Lannister, no matter what happened. She would never identify herself to the family who slaughtered hers. It was at this moment that Tyrion’s eyes were attracted by something around Sansa’s neck. Tyrion recognized it. It was the necklace he gave to her for her last name day. He thought she would never look at it.

“I opened it,” Sansa said suddenly. It seemed she noticed where Tyrion’s gaze had wandered. Tyrion looked back at Sansa’s face. She was smiling and her eyes only showed thanking. “Thank you. I like it.”

Tyrion smiled sadly. “I had it made for you before… everything that happened. I guess I still hoped at this moment you could go back to your family one day.” If Tyrion had hoped that, it had been a foolish hope. He should have known as soon as he married Sansa that his father would make sure all her family would die, or else the Lannisters could never use Sansa’s claim on the North.

A heavy silence followed Tyrion’s words. Neither him neither Sansa dared to speak. Finally, Tyrion broke the silence. He had something else to tell to Sansa.

“I have to give you some apologies as well.”
Sansa lifted her head, a doubtful expression on her face. “Apologies? What do you mean? You owe me no apologies. I know you have nothing to see with my family’s death. I was the one to be wrong for being angry at you after that.”

Tyrion would have been happy to hear these words in other circumstances, but sadly Sansa missed the point. “No, Sansa, you had every right to be at least resentful at me. I don’t blame you, far from it. But I wasn’t speaking about your family. I was talking about… well, you heard what Shae said. You know the truth now.”

Tyrion averted his eyes. “If someone should apologize, it’s Shae.” Sansa spoke very hard. Tyrion looked at her again and could see anger in her eyes. She was fixing him intensively. “From what Bronn and Podrick told me, you met her at the Green Fork, you brought her to King’s Landing against your father’s orders, you both fell in love with the other, she was angry at you when you were forced to marry me, and you sent her away when Cersei discovered who she was. You never mistreated her, never forced her to do anything against her will, you even saved her from the queen, and to thank you she came back to tell lies about you and me in order to have you executed. Furthermore, from what I know, you never spent time with her after our wedding, and I cannot blame you for all the women you’ve been with before. Forgive me if I see no reason for you to apologize, except if Bronn and Podrick lied to me.”

Tyrion was a bit stunned by Sansa’s words. That wasn’t the reaction he expected from her when she would learn he had a lover. A lover who happened to be her handmaiden. Sansa wasn’t angry at him. She was angry at Shae. She asked him a question. “Why? Why did you stop to bed Shae after we were married?”

Sansa’s face turned uncertain as she asked her question. Was she really curious about why Tyrion stopped to see Shae after the wedding? Tyrion owed her an answer after everything she did for him despite the discovery of his relationship with Shae.

“Well, first, I already limited my contacts with Shae after the Battle of Blackwater to prevent my father or Cersei to find about her. By the way, Cersei discovered her because we had an argument in this room and another of your handmaidens heard us.”

“That’s not the only reason,” Sansa countered. “You could have met in secret. Why didn’t you?”

She was fixing him, waiting for his answer. Tyrion sighed. “We were forced into this marriage, but it is a marriage all the same, as unusual a type of marriage it can be. I said the words. I took an oath. And as you said, you are the disgraced daughter of the traitor Ned Stark. I didn’t want you to be the cheated wife of the Demon Monkey with that.”

Another silence followed that Sansa broke after a moment. “Well, we’re married by force, our families are in war, and we end up being faithful to each other and saving each other. As you said, we’re perfect for each other.”

Both couldn’t suppress laughs. The situation looked so hilarious. Their marriage was a farce. They had every reason to hate each other. Well, Sansa at least had every reason to hate him, but it looked like she didn’t. They were looking after each other despite all their differences and the feud between the Starks and the Lannisters. That brought Tyrion to ask Sansa a question.

“Why did you do all this to have me spared? You took greats risks. If Oberyn hadn’t decided at the last minute to declare me not guilty, I don’t want to imagine the trouble you’d be in right now. And I don’t think you want so much to keep me as your husband.”

Sansa took some time to answer. “You have been kind with me ever since I arrived. There are not
many people I can say the same about. I didn’t want you to die.” Tyrion looked very closely to Sansa and examined her facial expression to see if she was wearing her armor of courtesies again, but she wasn’t. If she was, she would say it was simply her duty as his wife. Instead he only saw concern on her face. She was being sincere. “Anyway, if you die, I would have to marry someone else. That’s not a prospect I really enjoy.”

Tyrion didn’t blame Sansa for that. If he died, his family would keep her. She was the key to the North. They would marry her to another member of House Lannister. Some of his cousins were good men and younger than him, more handsome too, but they were still Lannisters. Tyrion didn’t think one of them would allow Sansa to remain a virgin during the wedding night.

Tyrion chose this moment to say something quite stupid. “We’re stuck together now, it seems. The Stark turned Lannister and the twice scarred Imp. We’re definitely perfect for each other.”

Sansa burst into small laughs after a moment she took to react. Tyrion too, and that brought some pain to his chest. Sansa then informed him of everything that happened ever since the trial. Apparently, the trial only ended yesterday. Tyrion hadn’t slept on drugs for a very long time finally. Ser Osmund Kettleblack was dead, killed by a dagger Bronn threw into his throat as soon as he tried to kill Tyrion. Tyrion felt he would have to double his wages, but Sansa told him he already owed Bronn a marriage and a lordship. This information brought him headaches. Cersei was now again confined into her personal chambers, guarded by Kevan’s men. Sansa had no idea what would happen to her, or to Lancel. Tyrion and Sansa continued to talk as the day progressed, only interrupted by Mira or Pod bringing their meals. Both couldn’t tell them what was happening with Cersei, rumours about her going from exile to trial. Sansa had read some of his books while he was in cell, so they talked about them for a very long time. Tyrion told a lot of things to Sansa about dragons since she read the *Unnatural History* of Septon Barth. She didn’t leave Tyrion’s side a single moment. That was probably one of the best days Tyrion had since years.

When they went to bed finally (well, in fact, Sansa was the one to go to bed since Tyrion was already in), Sansa laid her forehead against Tyrion’s arm in the same position he found her this morning. Before they fell asleep, Sansa told him: “I’m glad you’re alive.”

Tyrion could only answer one thing. “I’m glad to be alive too.”

Sansa chuckled, then remained silent. For a rare time, Tyrion slept well. Next morning, Sansa helped Tyrion to sit in the bed, and then to get on his feet very slowly. She even helped him to put on his clothes. Tyrion felt like a baby, but he couldn’t make any quick movement. It was Podrick who brought them their breakfast this time, along with a request.

“My lord,” said the squire, “your uncle would like to see you as quickly as possible.”

“Alright. I’ll go as soon as the breakfast will be over.” Podrick left after Tyrion answered. He then turned to his wife. “What are you gonna do today?”

“I’ll visit Margaery”, Sansa answered. “I would like to see her again. And I’ll go with Mira. She would like to spend some time with her friends from Highgarden.”

“Good. It will do you some good after an entire day with your husband.” Tyrion noticed Sansa reddened. “Give her my thanks. After all, her testimony helped a lot to clear me. I still wonder how you convinced her to speak at the trial, and even worse to speak for me.”

“I told her it was an opportunity to destroy Cersei forever and to get rid of her. You should thank Varys as well. He’s the one who suggested me to see your cousin Lancel.”
When they were done eating, Tyrion quietly left the room. Bronn and five Lannister guards were before the door. Two of them and Bronn accompanied Tyrion to his uncle’s solar, the three others staying behind. Apparently they were here to protect Tyrion and Sansa. Tyrion could trust his uncle now, so he didn’t worry. On their way, Bronn reminded him of the promise Sansa made to him. Tyrion told him he would pay his debt as soon as he could. For now, he had to speak with his uncle.

His uncle’s solar was on the first floor of the Red Keep. It seemed Kevan Lannister hadn’t moved in the Tower of the Hand yet. Tyrion knew his uncle had a great respect for his late brother. He had been the advisor of the Lord of Casterly Rock for a very long time, probably ever since the moment Tyrion’s father became lord, but Tywin Lannister rarely needed advice. Kevan mostly agreed with everything his brother thought and said. Ser Kevan Lannister seldom had a thought that Lord Tywin had not had first.

When Tyrion entered in Kevan’s solar, his uncle was writing. He lifted his eyes after a moment, and stopped to write, rising from his seat to meet his nephew. “Tyrion. I’m glad to see you’re better. I feared the worst for a time.” His uncle extended a hand to shake Tyrion’s. That was quite different from his brother. Tywin Lannister would remain seated and continue to work, as if he didn’t care about your presence. Tyrion took the hand his uncle offered him. “How are you? I hope the injury is healing well.”

“Yes, for now, but I must avoid quick movements. Glad to see you again uncle, and not as a judge.”

“Please, sit. We have several matters to discuss.”

Tyrion went to the chair before his uncle’s desk and slowly sit on it. He felt a pain on his chest as he sat. Kevan took place on the other side. He cleared his throat before he talked.

“Tyrion, first I must tell you that I and Genna read Tywin’s will at Casterly Rock when we learned about his death. He left important sums of gold to all his family, including me, Genna, you, Jaime and Cersei, and left many smaller amounts to almost all his cousins. However, the part that was the most important concerned his heir. Tywin’s last wishes were that Jaime becomes the Lord of Casterly Rock when he died.” Tyrion wasn’t surprised to hear it. Jaime had always been the heir his father wanted, no matter Jaime didn’t want it and no matter what Jaime did. He was his golden son. He could lose a hand, kill his king, fuck his own sister, Tyrion’s brother always was the golden son. “However, Jaime refused. Anyway, he is a kingsguard. He cannot inherit lands or titles. By all the laws of the Seven Kingdoms, you are our new lord.”

Tyrion was quite surprised by Kevan’s last statement. He stood bewildered for a moment. Of course he knew that since Jaime was a kingsguard, he was his father’s lawful heir, but his father always refused to acknowledge him as heir to Casterly Rock.

_I would let myself be consumed by maggots before mocking the family name and making you heir to Casterly Rock. You killed your mother to come into the world. You are an ill-made, spiteful little creature full of envy, lust, and low cunning. Men’s laws give you the right to bear my name and display my colors since I cannot prove that you are not mine. And to teach me humility, the gods have condemned me to watch you waddle about wearing that proud lion that was my father’s sigil and his father’s before him. But neither gods nor men will ever compel me to let you turn Casterly Rock into your whorehouse._

His father’s words resonated in his head. But now, he was dead. Jaime refused Casterly Rock, and Tyrion was next in line. It was true. By all laws, he was the new Lord of House Lannister. That seemed so easy. Tyrion had difficulties to believe it was really happening.

“Father left nothing else in his will? Anything like : _Tyrion Lannister is never to be the Lord of_
“Nothing of this sort,” his uncle answered more than seriously. He sighed. “I know Tywin never wanted you as his heir, but Tywin also knew that you were the most intelligent and clever of all his children. He never told me, but I know he believed it, and I know it is true. You proved it at the Green Fork, and that’s why he sent you to King’s Landing. You did an excellent job here as Hand and Master of Coin. Tywin is dead and we need a new lord. Perhaps Tywin would disagree, but I cannot force Jaime to become the lord, and we must think about House Lannister. You are the most well-suited to be the Lord of Casterly Rock.”

Tyrion was quite surprised by his uncle’s words. He could only answer awkwardly. “Well, I don’t have much choice anyway. Thank you, Uncle.”

“You don’t have to thank me. I’m only doing what is right and necessary. You’ll have to leave for Casterly Rock very soon. You’ll have to attend the royal wedding first however. It will take place in five days, but you must leave not long after to make sure your bannermen pledge themselves to you. There will also be a ceremony tomorrow. Joffrey will acknowledge you as Lord of Casterly Rock and confirm you in all yours lands and titles before all noblemen and noblewomen present in King’s Landing. We must make sure everyone knows that you’re alive and the new Lord of the Westerlands after the attempt of murder at the end of the trial. I already sent ravens to all the lords of the Westerlands to let them know you were alive. We must also show the Crown supports you.”

“Good. Within a few days I went from kinslayer to Lord of Casterly Rock. The change will be appreciated. Do you really think Joffrey will recognize me without complaints?”

“I’ll make sure he does. Also, in the meantime, I would like you to resume your functions as Master of Coin. Lord Gyles Rosby didn’t prove to be fit for this position and his health is declining. We have a few problems I would need you to solve before you leave. Cersei took some… questionable decisions during the short time she ruled.”

“What a surprise.” Tyrion wondered what foolishness Cersei did again. “What did they do? Did they order a golden statue fifteen-metres high of Joffrey? Or did they decide to double again the cost of the royal wedding?”

“You’ll have to look into the cost of the wedding. I fear it got higher with the delay. What preoccupies me the most is the capacity of the Crown to pay back its debts. Cersei stopped the payments to the Iron Bank and the Faith in order to have enough money to rebuild the royal fleet. I ordered the payments to start again, but we may have problems all the same. And we don’t have enough money to rebuild the fleet.”

Tyrion saw his sister make many mistakes, but now she had reached new heights. The words were as famous as: A Lannister always pays his debts. You couldn’t avoid to pay back the Iron Bank, or else they would make sure your enemies would defeat you by funding them. As for the Faith, it was a very bad idea to have problems with it. The Crown already had some problems with it after Ned Stark’s execution on the steps of the Great Sept of Baelor and the assassination of the High Septon during the riots. It wasn’t a good time to antagonize it. Tyrion remembered The History of the Decline and Fall of the Valyrian Freehold by Lord Eddard Gibbon. He wasn’t eager to live this theory.

“If I understand well, I must find money for the royal wedding and try to repair the damage my sister caused while she had me put into a cell.” That wasn’t a prospect that excited Tyrion.

“As long as you are here in King’s Landing,” completed his uncle.
“Very well. What about Cersei? I’m not paranoid like her, but it seems unlikely to me that Ser Osmund Kettleblack only tried to kill me for pleasure. He was a sellsword, and sellswords kill people when they are paid to do it. He received orders from someone.”

“I already questioned his two brothers, Osfryd and Osney. They claimed their innocence and said they knew nothing of all this, but I think it’s quite clear Cersei was behind this. Anyway, she tried to have you killed by Ser Mandon Moore before. I’m afraid she can no longer remain in King’s Landing, especially after Lancel’s revelations. I will send her away, out of King’s Landing, and she will never come back again.”

“Very well. Where do you plan to send her?”

“It depends on you. I was planning to send her to Casterly Rock, but you’re the lord now, so the decision is yours.”

Tyrion thought about it. He didn’t want Cersei near him any longer. She would only try to have him killed again. In fact, he wanted her as far from him as it was possible. “Uncle, I’m sorry, but I don’t want Cersei in Casterly Rock, nor in any place close to it. In fact, as long as I live, I will never allow her to set foot in the Westerlands. Send her where you want, but not on my lands.”

Kevan took a little instant to answer. Tyrion wondered if he would disagree. “Very well. This is your choice. I will probably send her to some bannerman castle in the Crownlands as a prolonged guest, along with a consequent guard to ensure her protection.”

Tyrion knew very well what it meant. The guard would be there more to make sure she wouldn’t leave her exile place than to really protect her. “I can’t agree more, Uncle. What about Lancel?”

Kevan’s face turned sour. “He confessed before more than a hundred people that he plotted to kill his king. I can still prevent Cersei from standing trial, but Lancel confessed his crime. I decided to send him to Quiet Isle, a community of brothers. I already talked to him about that, and he seems to approve the idea.”

Kevan remained silent for a moment afterwards. Tyrion never liked Lancel very much, but Kevan, even though he never was very close to Tyrion, always showed him respect. And he just recognized him as his liege lord. “I’m sorry, Uncle.” That was all Tyrion could say.

His uncle took some time before he cleared his throat again. “Tyrion, there is something else I must talk with you. I would have liked to not speak about it right now, but with the ceremony tomorrow I have no choice. I know you didn’t consummate your marriage yet.”

Tyrion has to sigh. Not again. “Uncle, I don’t want to discuss about it. Father tried to convince me to consummate the marriage before he died, and he failed. If you want to know, our arguments were mostly about this.”

“Tyrion.” His uncle looked at him directly in the eyes. “You are the Lord of Casterly Rock, now. The future of House Lannister rests on your shoulders. That also means you need an heir. You need a son to succeed you when you are dead. We’re not talking about getting the North anymore. We are talking about the very survival of our house.”

Tyrion had to admit Kevan was right. If he produced no heir, the name of the Lannisters could fade. On the other hand, he couldn’t just tell Sansa they needed to make a child so House Lannister wouldn’t disappear. And he wouldn’t force himself upon her. He swore to protect her.

“I’m sorry, Uncle. But I will not force Sansa to consummate our marriage as long as she doesn’t
want.” Tyrion looked at his uncle with the most serious expression he could have. He wanted to make clear nothing his uncle would say would convince him to change his view on the matter.

“You don’t have to force her. You are married. You both have a duty toward each other as husband and wife. Anyway, from what I’ve seen, I don’t have the impression she would be so reluctant to consummate now. She cried and yelled at you out of despair when Ser Osmund tried to kill you and when you looked dead. She remained at your side all the time the maesters were treating you. When I went to your chambers to see how you were last evening she was praying at your side, and from what I know, she did it almost all the time we weren’t sure you would survive.”

Tyrion was agape at his uncle’s words. He didn’t know about Sansa’s reaction while he was close to death. Though, when he thought about it, he remembered hearing someone crying as he passed out after Ser Osmund’s attack. He also thought he remembered the back of his head bumping into something hard. He probably blacked out because his head hit the wooden bars of the box he was held in. Tyrion cleared his thoughts, coming back to reality.

“We were both forced to marry each other. I will not mistreat her. I think our family already caused her enough misery like that. It was already hard enough for her to marry me.”

“Then in this case you only have to marry someone else.”


“I’m not talking about having a second wife. I’m talking about choosing another one.” Kevan was very serious as he spoke, it was obvious. “If you say you don’t want of this marriage, we can get an annulment. The High Septon is on our side. You brought him yourself where he is. There is nothing preventing this since you didn’t consummate the marriage. You could be free to marry someone else afterwards.”

“Who would want to marry me? I don’t think Father never tried to arrange me a marriage, and from what I’ve seen he failed.” Tyrion was quite skeptical about being able to marry again if his marriage with Sansa was annulled.

“He tried half a dozen times, and you’re right, he failed,” recognized Kevan. “But the situation is different now. You are the Lord of Casterly Rock, one of the greatest lords of the Seven Kingdoms. Only among your bannermen there would be many who would be ready to give you one of their daughters. You could also look for important lords of the Reach or the Vale to strengthen our alliance with them. You can even look in the Riverlands, the Stormlands, or even Dorne or the North as far as I’m concerned, but you would have the choice. Only to have someone of their family as Lady of Casterly Rock, many lords would be ready to consider an offer to marry someone of their own family to you now.”

Tyrion thought about that. He always wanted to marry someone he loved and who loved him. Perhaps he had a chance to choose his wife. However, he highly doubted the women who would want to marry him would want out of love. He was still the Imp, the Halfman, the Demon Monkey. They would marry him for the title of Lady of the Westerlands, nothing more. Sansa, on the other side… Sansa wasn’t in love with him, but they had managed to find some balance before her brother and her mother died. They had managed to get along quite well, and from what Tyrion saw in the last days, she didn’t seem to be bothered so much by their marriage any longer. Furthermore, if Tyrion annulled their marriage, Sansa remained the key to the North. His uncle would marry her to someone else, probably one of Tyrion’s cousins. Tyrion put the cloak on her shoulders during the ceremony. He said the vows. He said them under constraint, but they were vows nonetheless. He couldn’t allow someone else to take her into his bed only in order to get the North. Furthermore, he
didn’t want to shame her. If he obtained an annulment, what would people say about her? The disgraced wife of the Imp? And she would be forced to marry a Lannister all the same afterwards. Tyrion didn’t think this Lannister would treat her the way he did. Sansa wouldn’t be given any choice on her wedding night this time. No, Tyrion couldn’t do it. He swore to protect her.

“No,” he voiced aloud. “I will not disown Sansa.”

“We are not talking about disowning anyone. We are talking about annulling a marriage. A marriage neither of you wanted,” Kevan pointed out.

“In the eyes of everyone, it will be a disowning. And I will not allow you to marry Sansa off to someone else for her claim on the North. She already suffered enough because of us.”

Tyrion noticed an internal sigh in his uncle. “What happened to the girl was horrible, I concede it. I myself was horrified when I learned about the Twins, but it is done. If the girl wants to get her home back one day, she needs a child, just like you. And you need another child to ensure your succession.”

“Sansa is fifteen, nothing is urgent. She’s not close to her change like Cersei. And I’m not old like Jon Arryn when he married Lysa Tully. We have many years before us. There is no need for us to have children right now. We will have them when Sansa will feel ready.”

“And if she never feels ready? You will die without heir.” His uncle advanced arguments Tyrion couldn’t defeat. He knew there would be problems if Sansa never wanted children with him, but he couldn’t bring himself to set her aside. Not when things began to improve between them again. Kevan continued to talk. “I understand you may care for the girl, but you need to think about family before anything else.”

Tyrion sniggered. At his uncle’s words. He really rarely had an idea his brother didn’t have before him.

“That amuses you?” Kevan asked. He looked incredulous. Tyrion had the impression to have been in a situation much like this one before, but with his father.

“Yes, that amuses me, because that’s approximately what Father told me one day. *The house that puts family first will always defeat the one that puts the whims and wishes of its sons and daughters first. A good man does everything in his power to better his family’s position regardless of his own selfish desires.*”

“Your father was right.” Kevan looked quite sincere when he answered.

“Tell me, Uncle. If your brother had ordered you to rape Dorna for the good of House Lannister, would you have done it?”

Tyrion was well rewarded for his question by the look on his uncle’s face. His uncle was entirely frozen and didn’t make a single movement. Not a single muscle of his body was moving. Kevan didn’t expect such a question, and probably didn’t know what to answer. Tyrion knew his uncle loved his aunt Dorna. She was a gentle woman, always kind, who loved her children, needlework and flowers. She prayed even more often than Sansa. Tyrion started again to speak before Kevan’s confused expression.

“That’s what my father ordered me the evening before he died. He told me I had one last night to deflower Sansa, or else he would force me to do it during Joffrey’s wedding night. And the best thing he found to tell me after we learned about Robb and Catelyn Stark’s deaths was to remind me I
had to put a child into Sansa, one way or another. I don’t think a man who married his own cousin and refused to marry again after she died was in position to tell me how to treat a wife he forced me to marry. Don’t tell me your brother married his wife for family. If he had married for family, he would have married another great lord’s daughter.”

It took a long time for Kevan to react to Tyrion’s tirade. He probably had a hard time to fully assimilate the question Tyrion asked him. Finally he spoke, very carefully. “I know that Tywin looked ruthless in your eyes, Tyrion, but he only was because he had to.”

“So you would have done it if he ordered you to rape your wife?”

Kevan didn’t answer, but Tyrion had a very good idea what was the answer, even though Kevan would never give it. Tyrion spoke again before the lack of answer.

“Then you understand me. Why did my father and my mother marry? Was it for family he did it?”

“The marriage between Tywin and Joanna had many advantages. It prevented any disagreement inside the family about how to act and reinforced the links between the members of House Lannister. Their marriage made our house more united than ever,” Kevan explained.

“Was it really the only reason?”

“No, not even the main,” finally conceded his uncle, lowering his eyes to look at the floor. “Your father and your mother married because they loved each other. And Tywin refused to marry someone else after she died because he loved her.”

Tyrion already believed it was the case. His uncle Gerion once told him his father never was the same after his mother’s death. “So, I am forced to marry someone I don’t want for family when my father decided to marry and to not marry against the best interests of the family.”

“You don’t have to, Tyrion. You can choose now. You can find yourself the wife you want. You only have to get an annulment and…”

“I already told you I won’t. Sansa is my wife and I will not disavow her. The matter is closed. She will be at my side tomorrow when Joffrey will acknowledge me in my titles, and I want Joffrey to acknowledge her at the same time Lady of Casterly Rock and Lady of the Westerlands, as well as Lady of Winterfell since she is after we killed all her family.”

“Tyrion! We cannot do that! It’s already difficult to get Joffrey to acknowledge you, so to acknowledge Sansa Stark! And her family was in war against ours not long ago. We cannot give her such a public recognition.”

“You will. Joffrey will acknowledge Sansa in all her titles. If you don’t see that he does it by himself, then I will ask him to do it before hundreds of people, and you’ll have to deal with the aftermath as Hand of the King.”

Tyrion knew his uncle had no choice. He couldn’t allow Joffrey to refuse publicly a demand from the Lord of Casterly Rock right after he acknowledged him. That would send a very bad message to all the other houses. They would think there were tensions between the Westerlands and the Crown. Finally, Kevan yielded.

“Very well. You are my lord, so I must obey. I’ll make sure Joffrey does it. You won’t have to ask for this. It could even help in the future when we’ll try to seize the North. And it will remind Roose Bolton he is only Warden of the North for the time being. But you should make sure your wife is dressed like a lady of House Lannister. After all, she is a Lannister now, and our first lady.”
“Very well, I’ll explain it to her. Thank you, Uncle.” Tyrion slowly left his seat to not hurt himself.
He didn’t think Sansa would enjoy to wear Lannister colors, but it was a small price to pay for her to
become one of the greatest ladies of the Seven Kingdoms and to be recognized officially as the lady
of her home. Before he left the room, his uncle told him one last thing.

“Tyrion. Don’t forget who you are now. House Lannister depends of you. My father loved us and
was well intentioned, but he nearly brought our house to its ruin. Don’t make the same mistakes he
did.”

Tyrion stopped. He knew very well what Kevan was talking about. He wasn’t a fool. He wasn’t
trusting or ignorant like his grandfather.

“I’m not your father, Uncle.” As he started again to walk away, he added loudly. “But I am not my
father either.”

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Shae
In this chapter, discover the fate of Shae after the trial.

The stench was poking her nose. It wasn’t entirely dark for now, so she guessed they had to be sometime during the day. All the same, there wasn’t much light. The floor was made of hard stone and covered with straw, and in some places the straw was quite wet. She had a good suspicion why it was wet, and she didn’t think it was because of water. She received two meals each day, essentially made of moldy bread and water. The water didn’t seem quite clean. There were insects everywhere. She had a wooden bucket for her natural needs, but from the traces around it she didn’t think it was entirely waterproof. They hadn’t changed it ever since she was brought here. The bed was mostly a wooden bench with straw on it, the same straw that was on the floor. After more than two days here, her dress was already dirty and tattered in a few places.

Shae had lived in places much less welcoming than this one, but she had to admit it was harder than before after nearly two years in comfort. However, that wasn’t what bothered her the most. What bothered her the most were the crude jokes she had to suffer from her jailors. Shae had heard this kind of things behind her for most of her life and she had learned with time to steel herself against them. She accepted them, knowing it was part of her job. However, now they hurt. They hurt even more than when she had begun. Everyone saw her as a whore again. That was the thing that hurt the most.

He says you’re only a whore. You’re not fit to bear his children. He cannot be in love with a whore. Your friendship is over. He needs to observe his vows to his wife. Everything Bronn told her had come back again and again in her head for more than a month. Every day, every hour, every minute the words came back. Shae hadn’t wanted to believe it at first, but Bronn had assured her they were true. He enjoyed his time with you, but now this time is over. She had slapped him before she let him accompany her on the ship. There, she had her own cabin with food, wine, a featherbed and all necessary furniture. Shae hadn’t left the cabin for the whole journey until they made a stop at Gulltown. There she had gone out of the ship. It would stay here for two days, so she had all the time she wanted. She had gone to an inn and drank ale. She needed it. As she drank and got drunk, a man approached her and made her some advances. In her state, Shae played the game from the bar to the bedchamber. They only did it once and the man gave her some money when she left. She was reminded of who she was. She was a whore. She had gone back to the ship for the night, and had cried, just like she did for most of the journey from King’s Landing.

When she had finally fallen into sleep, Shae didn’t find any rest. She dreamed every time she fell asleep. Mostly, she dreamed of her lion. He was everywhere. Sometimes she would make a beautiful dream where he fucked her just like the way he did when they were together. It was beautiful. So beautiful. Her lion had allowed her to feel real pleasure with a man for the first time in many years. Then she would awake and realize it was all over. And she would cry. Other times, she would dream
of him saying she was only a whore, or insulting her. Then she would awake and cry again. Only this night, she made another dream, or a nightmare to be more precise. A dream of Tyrion and Sansa. These dreams were the worst ones. She couldn’t support them. She would dream of their wedding, of the time Tyrion announced it, about the times she surprised them to talk and even to laugh together, of the times Tyrion put his hand on hers. But that night had been horrible. For the first time, she had dreamed of both of them, together in the same bed, and she saw them together right before her. Both had an expression of extreme pleasure as they came together. Shae wanted to scream in despair, but she was mute in this nightmare. She had to watch until the very end. And they made it again, and again, and again, all before her eyes. Everything Tyrion once did to her, he was doing it to Sansa. And everything Shae once did to Tyrion, Sansa was doing it to him, and Shae had never seen him so happy. She had woken up screaming so much like a demon than the captain of the ship had come to see if everything was alright.

When the ship sailed for Pentos, Shae wasn’t on it. She was already on another ship for King’s Landing. Despair had turned into anger. She wanted her revenge. She had allowed herself to fall in love with Tyrion. She had given him everything she had, and he betrayed her, rejected her… for a child. Shae didn’t want to hate Sansa. She knew the girl had nothing to see with that. She was forced to marry Tyrion. She had had no choice. But Tyrion had a choice… and he made it. He was a pervert. He wanted her. This child! Ever since the beginning, he had wanted Sansa. All his words that he had no choice, that he still loved Shae, they were lies. All were lies. Shae would make him pay for that. She would make sure he would feel everything he made her feel.

When she had arrived in King’s Landing, Shae had gone immediately to the queen. She knew Cersei was dangerous, but they had the same objective at this moment: make Tyrion suffer. The queen had accepted Shae’s testimony against Tyrion, but at the condition she would add the plot Tyrion and Sansa prepared. Shae had been reluctant first. She only wanted to tell people what a horrible man Tyrion was, but she never wanted to bring false proofs that he poisoned Tywin Lannister, even less to say that Sansa participated in the plan. But she complied at the end, for a promise she would marry a knight and receive all the gold Tyrion promised her when she began to work for him. Anyway, Shae had the insurance that Sansa wouldn’t be hurt or endangered in any way. What Shae would say about her wouldn’t cause her any problem. That would cause problems to Tyrion, but Shae didn’t care. He would have what he deserved.

Shae had testified against Tyrion during the trial, saying everything she told to Cersei and everything Cersei told her to say. When Tyrion asked her to stop, she reminded him who she was. I am a whore. Remember? She made him suffer as much as he made her suffer. When Sansa shouted at the end of her testimony, Shae didn’t look at her. She wanted to tell her she would be safe soon enough, but she couldn’t, not in front of so much people. She didn’t want anything wrong to happen to Sansa, but at this moment she couldn’t reassure her. She wished she had been able to see Sansa before the trial to explain her everything, but of course Cersei wouldn’t allow her to do so. In fact, Cersei couldn’t allow Shae to do anything after she was confined to her rooms. Shae wasn’t even present during the whole trial. She only came for her testimony. She spent all her time in Qyburn’s chambers, deep inside the Red Keep, unable to leave them. This man was frightening, even for Shae who didn’t fear many things. He made strange experiments in what he called his laboratory, and the few times Shae talked to him, he was looking at her with an interesting look, but not in the way a man would be interested by a woman. He looked at her like he looked at the other strange creatures he had in his rooms.

Shae was brought out of Qyburn’s rooms the day she testified against Tyrion. After the trial, Cersei sent her to some room close to hers. It was small, but comfortable with enough food and a modest featherbed. However, the next day, some Lannister guards came to her room and brought her to this cell. It had been three days ago. Ever since she had stayed there, enduring the bad jokes of the men who guarded her. Shae hadn’t understood what was going on until Lord Varys came to see her in the
night. He was disguised as a gaoler, but Shae recognized him after a moment. He brought her some fresh food and water, and bad news.

Apparently, the second day of the trial was horrible. Most of Cersei’s witnesses saw their testimonies torn into pieces by Tyrion’s witnesses, and Shae was the one to suffer the most. Several people demonstrated her testimony was constituted of lies. Margaery Tyrell the future queen, Bronn, a whore named Daisy, Podrick, even Sansa proved Shae lied. The eunuch confessed he highlighted some of her lies himself. Shae couldn’t believe it. Bronn had always been kind with her, even when he accompanied her to the ship. As for Varys, she felt a little bit betrayed by someone who came from the same continent than her and always was pleasant to speak with. But what hurt her the most was that Sansa testified against her. Varys had left after he told her everything about the trial.

The following night, he came again to tell her Tyrion had been cleared of all his charges. Shae was angry Tyrion escaped, but her behavior changed all of a sudden when Varys told her someone tried to kill him. Instantly, Shae forgot everything that happened during the past months. She even forgot how Tyrion rejected her. Varys described the assassination attempt by Osmund Kettleblack. Shae regretted Bronn had killed this son of a whore. She would have liked to kill him herself. He tried to kill her lion. Shae realized quite quickly Cersei was behind this. She would rip out her eyes from her head as soon as she would see her again. Shae was relieved when Varys told her Tyrion would survive. The only consequence of all this would be another scar on his chest. She thought immediately how it would be to caress his new scar once she would see him again.

However, everything that followed crushed all her hopes. Varys told her everything about Sansa’s role during the trial. She convinced several people to testify for Tyrion and organized his whole defense. She gave an impressive concluding speech that let everyone bewildered in the court. Varys himself recognized she surprised him. She had Lancel Lannister confess his whole affair with the queen, humiliating and neutralizing Cersei in the process. It was revealed to everyone that Cersei tried to have Tyrion killed during the Battle of Blackwater. Varys also described Sansa’s reaction when Tyrion was attacked. He told Shae how Sansa remained at Tyrion’s side while the maesters took care of his injuries and how she stayed with him all the time he was unconscious, praying for him as far as Varys knew.

When Varys had left her two days ago, Shae’s mind had been in turmoil. What he said about Tyrion and Sansa made Shae sink into despair once again. All her hatred for her lion disappeared all of a sudden. She realized this night what she had done. She had spoken against the man she loved. She conspired with Cersei to have him killed. She didn’t realize it. Shae had only wanted to take her revenge on Tyrion for sending her away. She never really wanted him to die. She didn’t think about it. She loved him. What had she done? She should have been there to defend him, to protect him, to watch over him as he was accused of false crimes. Instead she testified against him. She helped his bitch sister. Why did she do that? He never loved you. You were always only a whore in his eyes. That’s what you’ll always be. Unless you do what is necessary to not be. The only way for that is to destroy the people who see you that way, beginning by those who lied to you when they said you were no whore. There’s no justice in this world, not unless we make it. Make your own justice. The words she heard at Gulltown came back to her mind. What had she done? She tried to have Tyrion killed when she should have done anything to save him. Instead, Sansa saved him. She did everything Shae should have done. She was standing by Tyrion’s side as he was close to death when Shae should have been by his side, just like she did after the Battle of Blackwater. A truth imposed itself to Shae’s mind.

She loves him. Shae couldn’t believe it. She couldn’t accept it. Sansa had fallen in love with Tyrion. That was impossible. And yet she did. All her behavior, all her actions Varys talked about were proof of that. She had fallen in love with Shae’s lion. Shae had cried all the night. The bad dreams had come again in her sleep. She saw Sansa and Tyrion together in the same bed again, just like this
night on the ship. She had cried and screamed so much. She had lost him. She had lost her lion. He was no longer hers. He belonged to Sansa now.

Varys had come again yesterday. As soon as he entered Shae asked him how Tyrion was. Varys assured her he was alright and out of danger. When Shae asked to see him, Varys told her it was impossible.

“You just testified against him. You told lies before the court after you swore by all the gods your testimony would be true and honest. You committed perjury and everyone knows it now. You are no longer safe here in King’s Landing. I must send you to Pentos as we agreed before.”

Shae didn’t want to go to Pentos. “I won’t. I’m not going to leave him alone. My place is here with Tyrion. He needs me.”

“I’m afraid he doesn’t,” answered Lord Varys. He looked regretful. “I’m sorry, my lady, but I told you it would never be your home. A foreign girl with no name cannot spend her life with the son of Tywin Lannister. Tyrion Lannister is now the Lord of Casterly Rock.”

“Then in this case he can do whatever he wants. He can protect me. I can live with him.”

“You just told lies about him and tried to have him killed. Even if he wanted to see you, he wouldn’t. He has a wife. A wife who just saved him and who stays at his side day and night since he’s been injured. He will never see you again, if only to not indispose her. And the Lady of Casterly Rock won’t ever let you be in our mutual friend’s company now that she knows about you. You betrayed her as well. I’m afraid you will never see Lord Tyrion again. You should have gone to Pentos and never come back.”

Shae was utterly destroyed by Varys’s words. She would never see her lion again. She could never apologize. He would end in Sansa’s arms. “He said I was a whore. He forced me to leave. He set me aside for Sansa. She’s only a child.” Anger pierced through her voice as she allowed her frustration to escape.

“Do you really think it was true? Do you really think he believed you were only a whore after everything that happened between you two? If he told you this, it was because the queen had discovered who you were. He didn’t think a single word of what he had Bronn tell you. But he wanted you to believe it so you would leave and never come back. He did it to save you.”

No. That couldn’t be true. “Why didn’t he tell me the truth? Nothing of this would have happened. I would never have come back for revenge.”

“It’s true. You would never have come back. Because you would have refused to leave. You would have stayed here to fight his sister. And you would have died. That’s why he lied. He wanted you to believe he didn’t love you anymore in order to save you, because he loved you. And he still loves you, I’m quite sure of that, but you’ll never be able to be at his side now.”

Shae burst into tears. “No. No. No.”

She repeated the word again and again. Varys left. She remained there, crying for who knows how much time. And here she was now, dirty and smelling after three days here, waiting for her departure. Shae had no more illusions now. She would leave King’s Landing very soon and would spend the rest of her life in Pentos. She wondered what she would do there. There was only one thing Shae knew to do, and she didn’t want to do it anymore. She wanted a normal life. She had always wanted a normal life. She had thought she found this normal life when she realized she loved Tyrion, but then he had to marry someone else and Shae had to watch her lion fall in love with his
bride. What would she make of her life now?

Shae heard the key turning in the lock of her door’s cell. She went to a corner and turned her back on the door. She didn’t want to see Varys and his sorry face. She wanted to be alone. The door creaked as it opened and closed behind the intruder. He didn’t speak immediately and Shae didn’t give him the time to speak with his soft voice.

“Leave me alone. Only come back to tell me when it’s time to leave,” Shae gloomily told him. She didn’t grant him a glance.

“It’s time for you to leave, but before I need answers.”

Shae knew this voice. It wasn’t Varys. She turned her head to face her friend. Sansa was standing there, clad in her purple gown. Her hair were braided and fell behind her back. She was clean, in excellent physical condition and health, all dressed and washed. She was everything Shae wasn’t right now.

“Sansa! I’m glad to see you…”

“You will not speak unless I allow you. I want answers, and the truth this time. No lies.”

Sansa cut Shae as she spoke. Her eyes were hard and merciless. She wasn’t looking at Shae as she used to when Shae was at her service. She was staring at her with anger, not flinching a single moment. Shae hadn’t only lost the man she loved. She had lost Sansa, her friend.

“Why?” There was no need for Shae to ask Sansa to specify her question. She was well aware what her ancient mistress wanted to know. The Lorathi woman started her explanations.

“I never wanted to testify against you, I swear,” began Shae. “The queen threatened to kill me if I didn’t. I had no choice.”

“Was it your choice to come back to King’s Landing after you left?” Shae couldn’t answer to this.

“Then it was your choice. What were you expecting of Cersei? And I know you were promised a marriage with a knight and gold to testify, so don’t tell me you only did it out of fear. You betrayed me. And you betrayed Tyrion as well.”

“He sent me away!” Shae yelled.

“For your own safety. Bronn and Podrick told me everything. You had the chance to go to Essos and to have a good life. Instead you came back to spread lies about my husband.” Shae was hurt to hear Sansa call Tyrion “her husband”. Sansa was looking at her with fury and disgust. She never looked at Shae this way before. Sansa continued to talk.

“If I was Cersei you would already be dead. But you’re lucky, I’m not Cersei. You leave in an hour. Lord Varys organized another transport for you to Pentos. I suggest this time you never come back. Because if you ever set foot again in Westeros, I’ll have your head. And you’ll never see Tyrion again. He’s my husband now. We’re both done with you.”

Sansa turned around and knocked on the door. As the guards were unlocking it, Shae decided she had to tell her the truth.

“I told you to not trust him. Men only want one thing from a pretty girl. You really thought he wanted to help you only for your mother. You should ask Tyrion. He told me only an idiot would trust him.”
Sansa turned again to face Shae, a questioning look on her face. “What are you talking about?”

“Who do you think convinced me to come back? That wasn’t my idea. I met him at Gulltown. He told me he was planning to smuggle you out of King’s Landing. That’s why I accepted to talk against you at the trial. I thought you wouldn’t be there to face the consequences. He was going to get you out of here.”

“Who are you talking about? Who tried to get me out of King’s Landing?” Sansa really was stupid right now. Shae had to sigh.

“A man who claims he loved your mother. I think you know who I’m talking about.”

Sansa was looking at her with an unbelieving face. The door was opened behind her. After a moment, Sansa composed herself again. “You leave in an hour. Bronn will come to escort you to your ship. Guards will make sure you won’t come back again.” Sansa left the cell. As the door shut, Shae yelled one last warning for her.

“Don’t trust him! Don’t trust anybody!”

Shae hoped Sansa believed what she told her. It was the truth. She had met him in Gulltown. He convinced her to come back to the capital to take her revenge on Tyrion. Without him, she would have continued her journey to Pentos and nothing of all this would have happened. With some luck, she helped Sansa one last time with her words. If Sansa didn’t believe her, then Shae didn’t know what would happen to her.

An hour later, Bronn arrived to escort her. Shae was brought to a ship that looked much like the one she took the last time. She had her own cabin with the same commodities than the last time. With all the dirt she had on her, she took a quick bath. She felt much better afterwards. Bronn stayed with her until the ship left. She didn’t hate the sellsword’s company. They drank some wine Shae had in the cabin. She recognized it when she tasted it. It was one of Tyrion’s favourites. She put her cup aside.

“So, this time you’re leaving for good,” said Bronn out of nowhere. Shae didn’t look back at him. “Did you really think it was forever? Those people are highborn. We are lowborn in their eyes. They can be good highborn people, but they still see us as lowborn all the same. When they throw us away, we must adapt.” Shae heard Bronn sigh, but she didn’t look at him either. “Things could be worse. We both made a good way since I brought you to his tent in the Riverlands. You’re going to have a good life in Pentos, a very comfortable one, and I am going to marry some lady and have a title. We managed to improve our situation quite well. Perhaps that’s not what we would like in a perfect world, but it’s still better than what we had before. And the world is not perfect. Just remember this: Never fall in love again. It only makes us suffer.”

Shae agreed with Bronn that her situation was still better than before she met Tyrion, but for her it was small solace. Shae had wanted to live with Tyrion ever since she realized she loved him. But she wouldn’t. She couldn’t come back a second time. She had no future with her lion now. His future was with Sansa. However, Bronn’s last words made her curious. She looked at him.

“Have you ever been in love?”

The sellsword took his time to answer. “No. But I saw my eldest brother fall in love and die for it. We lived on a farm. He was many years older than me, a real man. The only one to protect me and my sister from our parents. But one day, he made the mistake to fall in love with the wife of a neighbor. They would meet during the day or in the night, hoping the husband wouldn’t know about it, but after some time, he discovered he was cheated. He called all his family and they came one morning to gut us all. They killed my brother first, then my parents. I wasn’t bothered at all they
killed my parents, they were horrible people, but my brother… And then, they raped my sister, and killed her when they were done. I barely managed to escape. The husband’s sister… what a woman she was! She swung an axe at me when I tried to escape. I dodged it and planted a knife in her belly. My first kill. I was only ten. I left the farm and never came back. I became a sellsword. That was my only way to survive.”

Shae remained silent after Bronn was done with his story, but he wasn’t done talking yet. “That’s why I decided to never fall in love. If my brother hadn’t fallen in love with this woman, who knows, life could have been different for me. You know that when Tyrion learned he would have to marry the Stark girl, I told him he could keep you if he wanted you. He only had to wed the Stark girl and to bed you. He would have two women and a kingdom. He only answered he would have two women to despise him and a kingdom to join them. I warned him he was wasting time trying to get people to love him, and that he would end up the most popular dead man in town that way. He didn’t listen, and he nearly ended up dead.”

Shae didn’t want to talk about that. She had nothing to say about it. The matter was over now. Tyrion would live with Sansa and have children with her, not with Shae. Her heart was bleeding at the thought.

“Do you think he loves her?” Shae was quite sure Tyrion was interested in Sansa. Who wouldn’t? Shae wasn’t blind. Sansa was very beautiful, and would only get more beautiful with every year that passed. Shae, on the other hand, had her best years behind her. She was twenty-four. Sansa could give to Tyrion everything Shae couldn’t provide him. As for what Shae could give to her lion, Sansa could offer him the same things, but better. Shae only had her experience to distinguish her from Sansa in Tyrion’s eyes, and she was quite sure this difference would disappear with time once Tyrion and Sansa shared the same bed. But she needed to know if Tyrion loved Sansa.

Bronn shrugged. “Who knows? I hope he doesn’t, for his own sake. The girl is quite pretty, no one can say the contrary. I guess it depends if he still sees her as a child. If you saw her during the trial, you wouldn’t say she’s a child anymore. Tomorrow she and Tyrion will be acknowledged by the king as Lord and Lady of Casterly Rock and as many other things. The boy will even recognize the young girl as Lady of Winterfell. That will be quite a change compared to the beating. But I think the girl is at least about to fall in love with him. You don’t make a defense like that for your husband when his family killed yours, unless you feel something for him.”

They heard shouts outside. They were preparing to sail. Bronn laid his cup on the table and raised. “It’s been a pleasure to know you, my lady. Be happy in your new life.”

“Do you think I should forget him?” Shae didn’t know what to do. Should she forget Tyrion? She asked the question to Bronn. The sellsword looked at her with a sad expression.

“You can try, but I tried to forget my brother and my sister, and I never succeeded. I guess we can never forget the people we love. Another reason to not fall in love. Once we do, there’s no way to get rid of it. We have it for life, and we must learn to live with it.” Bronn patted her shoulder. “Enjoy the life in Pentos.”

After Bronn left, Shae remained alone in her cabin. After a moment, she felt the ship moving, leaving the harbor. She went to the window and looked at King’s Landing one last time as it disappeared on the horizon. Shae had thought for some time it was her home, but it wasn’t. It wasn’t meant to be her home. During all the trip, she felt she was getting farther and farther from her love each hour. They made a stop at Gulltown again, but this time Shae didn’t leave her cabin. She didn’t want to take the risk to meet Baelish again. When they arrived at Pentos, she began her new life. Her new life without her lion.
Chapter End Notes

From now on, I will publish two chapters each week instead of three like before. My chapters are getting longer and I don't have as much time as I used to, but the fic will go on, don't worry.

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
She stood alone on the docks in the middle of the afternoon, holding a necklace with blue amethysts in her right hand. *I don’t have anything else left. That’s all. Take it. Wear it. Let my name have one more moment in the sun before it disappears from the world.* She trusted Ser Dontos, and he betrayed her for gold. Sansa had a very hard time with everything that had happened. So many people she thought she could trust turned on her these last times. Ser Dontos. Shae. Lord Baelish. Now Sansa found herself stupid to have trusted a man who owned half the brothels in King’s Landing. She thought she could trust him only because he once loved her mother. Now she knew the whole truth.

Sansa had gone to see Shae yesterday when the Master of Whisperers told her he would send the young woman to Pentos for good. Sansa wasn’t sure if she could trust Varys, but he led her to Lancel. *You’re not looking at the right place, Lady Sansa. You must search the army of wolves.* Lancel Lannister accused her brother of slaughtering thousands of men with an army of wolves the day she was beaten by Ser Meryn. It took some time for Sansa to understand what Varys meant, but when Sansa learned that Ser Lancel came to King’s Landing with his father, she thought it might be the meaning of the Spider’s words. She went to discuss with Lancel and convinced him to testify about the day she was beaten. After a few conversations, Lancel came to tell her everything. He wanted so much to atone for his sins that Sansa managed to convince him to tell everything not only about that day, but also about his relationship with Cersei and his role in Robert Baratheon’s death. All the same, Varys was so mysterious that Sansa couldn’t decide to trust him without doubt.

The Master of Whisperers had wanted to know if Sansa wished to have one last discussion with her former handmaiden. Sansa hesitated, but finally she decided to confront Shae about her betrayal. But she didn’t expect what Shae told her. *Who do you think convinced me to come back? That wasn’t my idea. I met him at Gulltown. He told he was planning to smuggle you out of King’s Landing. That’s why I accepted to talk against you at the trial. I thought you wouldn’t be there to face the consequences. He was going to get you out of here. A man who claims he loved your mother. I think you know who I’m talking about.* Of course Sansa knew who Shae was talking about: Littlefinger.

Sansa had frozen when she realized who Shae had been talking about. Ser Dontos told her when he tried to kidnap her. *I’m taking you to your friend, no matter what you say.* Lord Baelish told her she could be sure he was her friend. And of course he had the means to pay Ser Dontos handsomely. He was in the Vale of Arryn now. He could get Sansa out by ship. That was how he left King’s Landing. He convinced Shae to come back and testify against Tyrion. It was possible that he met her in Gulltown. After all, the city was part of the Vale of Arryn. However, Sansa hadn’t been sure. Shae told so many lies at the trial. How could Sansa be sure her former friend wasn’t lying again?
She had gone to see Tyrion and reported him Shae’s words. Tyrion looked quite surprised when Sansa revealed him everything Shae told her, but it didn’t last long. He then revealed to Sansa everything Littlefinger did while her father was in King’s Landing. He made her father believe the gold cloaks were on his side when he tried to arrest Joffrey and Cersei, and then turned Janos Slynt and his men against him. All her father’s household members were slaughtered because of him. Even worse, Lord Baelish was at the origin of the war between the Lannisters and the Starks. Her brother Bran was victim of an assassination attempt at Winterfell a few days after she left with Arya and her father. The assassin died, but he had a very expansive dagger on him, too expansive for a common footpad. Littlefinger told her mother the dagger was his, but that he lost it against Tyrion. Tyrion swore he never tried to kill her brother, and that he never saw the dagger before her mother showed it to him. Furthermore, Baelish claimed Tyrion won it by betting on Ser Loras against his brother Jaime during a tournament for Joffrey’s name day, and Tyrion never bet against his brother.

Sansa had feared the worst for a moment. What if Tyrion really tried to kill her brother? But as she thought about it, it didn’t make sense for her. Tyrion himself had nothing against Bran, and Sansa couldn’t imagine Tyrion trying to kill a ten-years-old boy. She couldn’t even remember him ordering someone’s death when he was Hand of the King. He exiled Janos Slynt for murdering babies. Furthermore, Sansa had crossed the path of Ser Jaime this morning and asked him about the gamble’s habits of his brother. Ser Jaime confirmed that Tyrion never bet against him. Sansa was quite persuaded now that Lord Baelish lied about the dagger. The lie led to Tyrion’s arrest by her mother, which started the war between their two families. Sansa still wondered why Lord Baelish lied to her mother. Tyrion suspected Littlefinger wanted a war. The war had been very good for him after all. He was now a great lord and about to marry the Lady of the Vale, Sansa’s aunt Lysa Arryn. That made him the acting Lord of the Vale. As for his attempt to kidnap Sansa, Tyrion thought it could be explained perhaps by her aunt’s will to see Sansa safe, but he doubted it since she did nothing to help Sansa’s family during the war. Or Baelish and the Lady Arryn wanted to get their hands on her because she was the key to the North. Tyrion admitted he didn’t know what game Littlefinger was playing, but he was obviously playing a game for his own benefit.

Sansa had to admit Tyrion’s theories were quite plausible. After all, her aunt Lysa didn’t lift a finger to help her family at any moment in the war. Perhaps she felt remorse and wanted to save Sansa since she was the last child of her sister still alive, but the coincidence with Lord Baelish’s attitude was very strange. Also, why so much mystery? Why didn’t she only have Ser Dontos say that her aunt wanted to bring her to safety? And if her aunt allied herself with Baelish after everything he did… It was very complicated. Sansa didn’t know what to believe for sure. But now she knew she couldn’t trust Petyr Baelish. And if her aunt Lysa was working with him now, whether she knew about his schemes or not, Sansa couldn’t trust her in any occasion. She really had to choose her friends more carefully. She tightened the necklace in her hand, allowing anger to grow in her. They tried to use her. Just like the Tyrells they were only interested in her for her claim, except Margaery. Sansa threw the necklace into the water and watched it flood as it sank deep into the bay. She knew better who to trust now.

Sansa turned on her heels and left the extremity of the docks to join Mira who was waiting for her. Sansa hoped she didn’t make a mistake by trusting her. Who else would betray her? Brienne? Mira? Margaery? Tyrion? The thought that he could betray brought her close to despair for a moment, but Sansa recovered quickly. She didn’t see why Tyrion would betray her. He risked his life for hers more than once when nothing obliged him to do it. He had no interest in saving her from Joffrey or to protect her from him before they were married. He was forced to marry her as much as she was forced to marry him. And he never gave her a single reason to doubt about his loyalty. Tyrion wouldn’t betray her, and he wasn’t using her. If he really acted for personal interests with her, Sansa wouldn’t be a virgin right now. She chased the idea from her head. She reached Mira.

“My lady,” Mira said as she bowed her head.
“Mira, I think you can call me by my name now. You’re more a friend than a handmaiden to me.”

“My lady, I don’t think it would be appropriate. Even less now that you’re the Lady of Casterly Rock.”

Sansa looked straight in Mira’s eyes. “Mira, I order you to call me by my name, at least when we are alone.” Sansa folded her hands before her as she spoke, a serious expression on her face that let no place to discussion. That was a posture she developed recently for when she gave an order and wanted to make it clear it wasn’t to be questioned.

Mira gave an acknowledging sign of head. “As you wish, Sansa.”

Sansa smiled at her friend and took her arm under her own as they walked back to her chambers. Sansa didn’t have to fear any disapproving look now. She and Mira were no longer outcasts in the Red Keep after Cersei’s demise. Ser Kevan had recognized the royal decree Tyrion delivered before his arrest that made the Forresters the only ironwood suppliers of the Crown. The fact both of them testified for Tyrion at the trial only enhanced their public image. And even without all this, Mira was now officially a handmaiden in service of the new Lady of Casterly Rock.

Sansa still had some difficulty to accept this new situation. Only this morning, two ladies of the Westerlands went to her as she walked to the docks to ask her for the privilege to sew with her. One of them was the wife of Lord Desmond Crakehall, who Sansa remembered for laughing at her and Tyrion while they walked in the gardens. That was the entire opposite of the situation Sansa knew not long after her father’s arrest. Back then, people who used to speak with her avoided her at all cost. Now, people who mocked her or Tyrion suddenly tried to get her attention. She had been surprised by the welcome Margaery’s entourage gave her yesterday when she visited her friend. They welcomed her with open arms, just like in the time she thought she would marry Ser Loras. Even more surprising, they treated her with more respect than Sansa ever expected from them. Before her marriage with Tyrion, Margaery’s cousins and friends talked to her as if she was one of them and a friend like another, but now they talked to her as if Sansa was superior to them. Since Sansa was now one of the greatest ladies in the Seven Kingdoms, she guessed it wasn’t unusual, but she still found it very strange that people’s behavior toward her changed so quickly. She would have to be careful with that. Some would try to take advantage of her by trying to gain her trust, pretending to be her friends only to get a favor.

On their way back to her chambers, Sansa and Mira were approached by three other people. Ser Addam Marbrand, the Commander of the City Watch, mainly wished her a good day but also asked subtly if she couldn’t convince her husband to send him back on the battlefields instead of keeping him in King’s Landing. Another lady of a lesser branch of House Lannister asked her if she would allow her daughter to become Sansa’s handmaiden. A squire of some knight asked her if she would grant his master the honor to dance with him during the ceremony in a few hours. Sansa felt overwhelmed when she and Mira finally got into her chambers. She didn’t know what to do with all this unwanted attention. She was also uncomfortable now that everyone called her Lady Lannister. She didn’t know how to feel about the fact she was the first lady of the family who slaughtered hers. She knew that would happen if Tyrion survived the trial, but she never really thought about its implications before now. She focused so much on getting Tyrion not guilty that she couldn’t think about anything else at this moment. Now she didn’t know what to do anymore. She never wanted to be the Lady of Casterly Rock. But now she was. She remembered Margaery told her she had to make the best of her circumstances. Sansa was no longer bothered very much by the fact Tyrion was her husband. She had come to appreciate him very much, even more after she saw him about to die at the end of the trial. She wanted him to live at all cost. But it bothered her to bear the name of the Lannisters and to be their lady. She guessed she would have to live with it. And she preferred to be the Lady Lannister if that meant Tyrion could be the Lord of Casterly Rock instead to have Cersei at
the head of this family.

Sansa sat in her chair close to her boudoir. She had to prepare for the ceremony that would take place in two hours. Joffrey would acknowledge her and Tyrion in all their lands and titles, including the title of Lady of Winterfell for her. Sansa still had some difficulty to believe it was true. Of course it was just a title. The Boltons were still holding the North, and she would only get back Winterfell once she would have a son, and the North once this son would come of age… if she ever had a son. Sansa didn’t know if she wanted to give herself to Tyrion. The thought of being intimate with him frightened her. Perhaps that was stupid. They were married. One day or another, Sansa knew they would have to do their duty. Tyrion was always kind with her. He swore to protect her and to never hurt her, and respected his promises. In fact, he respected them in circumstances where anyone else wouldn’t respect them. Even when they slept together, he did nothing. He didn’t even touch her. In fact, Sansa was touching him more than he did. She was laying her head against his arm every night since the end of the trial. She wanted to be sure he was there and that no one would try to take him from her again as Cersei did this cursed morning. She was afraid someone else would try to kill him. She didn’t want him to die. Sansa noticed she slept much better this way.

“Sansa, there is something I would like to talk to you about.” Mira’s voice drew Sansa out of her thoughts. She turned to face her friend.

“Of course. What is it?”

Mira took some time before she answered. “When we visited Lady Margaery and her friends yesterday, she asked me if I wanted to come back into her service. I didn’t give her an answer, I wanted to know your opinion about it.”

“Do you want to be Margaery’s handmaiden again?” Sansa was somewhat afraid of Mira’s answer. She was the closest person she had for a friend here in King’s Landing, except Tyrion perhaps.

“My lady… Sansa, I appreciate very much to be your handmaiden, and to be honest I don’t want to leave your service, but with the royal decree about my family, I am the only one left to serve as intermediate between the Crown and the Whitehills when they will try to sell ironwood. And if I want my family to be reinstated in Ironrath one day, I need to be present in the capital, and I will need Lady Margaery’s support when she will be queen. I cannot go to Casterly Rock. And I still have many friends among Lady Margaery’s retinue.”

Sansa was sad at the idea to see Mira leave her service. The northern girl had become a very close friend during these past weeks. She was one of the few people whose loyalty Sansa was sure of. Mira was loyal to the death. Even after Margaery removed her, she never said a single word against her. Sansa could tell her deepest and most secret thoughts without fearing Mira to divulge them to anybody. She was quite alike Brienne on this aspect, but to the opposite of Sansa’s sworn shield, Mira was clever, intelligent and pragmatic. She helped Sansa a lot in preparing Tyrion’s defense. She was at the same time Sansa’s handmaiden, friend, confident, and advisor. And Mira was a Northerner just like Sansa. She could understand what Sansa felt. Sansa would miss her. But she had to admit Mira was right. It was in her interest to remain here in King’s Landing. In some way, the royal decree forced her to stay here. Sansa wanted to re-establish her family in Winterfell someday. She couldn’t blame Mira for wishing the same for her own. She couldn’t force her friend to follow her at Casterly Rock.

“It’s alright, Mira. I understand. But know that if you ever are in trouble, or if you ever want to leave Margaery’s service, I’ll have a place for you. I would only want you to remain at my side until I leave.”

“Of course, my lady. Thank you,” Mira said with a grateful smile.
“It’s Sansa.” She felt like Margaery telling to call her by her name. “Now, let’s prepare for the ceremony. It will take place soon.”

For the two following hours, Sansa prepared for the upcoming ceremony with Mira’s help. She took a bath, put lemon perfume at several places on her body (behind her ears, under her chin, on the back of her neck), and let Mira adjust her gown. It was a red gown with golden lion symbols at the hem. The gown needed several adjustments before it fitted with Sansa’s body. She suspected it was a gown that previously belonged to Cersei. She hated to wear something the Queen Regent wore before, but she had no choice. Tyrion had explained to her she would have to wear the Lannister colors on this occasion. They probably didn’t have enough time to make a red gown with her measurements. Sansa could do with the color, but she would get rid of this gown as soon as the ceremony was over. Which meant she would have to wait a long time since there would be a feast afterwards. Mira then braided her hair in a very complex way similar to her headdress during her wedding. Finally came the most important part for Sansa, and the most simple. Mira put the necklace around Sansa’s neck. Sansa remembered who she was. She was a Stark hidden under Lannister colors. She was a wolf disguised as a lion.

Sansa looked at her image in the glass. She had to admit she was beautiful, just like for her wedding. But to be honest, to the opposite of her wedding, she was quite happy for this day. Joffrey would acknowledge her as Lady of Winterfell. She had mixed feelings about being the Lady of Casterly Rock, but she jubilated at the idea people would all know she was the true heir to Winterfell. The door opened at this moment and Tyrion entered. He wore red clothes as well and looked taller in them. Sansa thought, to her own surprise, that he looked quite handsome like this.

“Lady Sansa. Lady Mira.” Tyrion said their names with a smile for both of them, but Sansa thought she saw something different in his eyes when he looked at her. They seemed to shine for a moment.

“You’re very handsome, Tyrion.” She told something like that before their wedding, only this time it wasn’t only a courtesy.

“Oh, yes. The lord of your dreams. But you do look glorious, as usual.” Tyrion said it with a grin and Sansa had to chuckle lightly. It looked so much like a repetition of their wedding day. Mira didn’t let escape a sound, but Sansa felt she was smiling. “Lady Mira, would you leave me alone with my wife a moment.”

“Of course, Lord Tyrion. Lady Sansa.” With a bow to both of them, Mira left the room. Tyrion watched her leave and turned to face Sansa again when she was gone.

“Well, here we are.”

“Yes. Here we are.” Sansa could only repeat the words of her husband. They both understood what it meant.

“I guess you didn’t expect to become the Lady of House Lannister a few months later when we were wed.” Sansa nodded her head to show she didn’t. That looked so unbelievable. She had gone from a ward of the king to the Lady of the Westerlands within a few months. She would never have expected that. “Sansa, I would need to speak with you about something before we go to the ceremony. I should have talked to you about it before. Perhaps we could sit.”

Sansa agreed and they sat at the table where they took so many of their meals together. Tyrion took some time before he talked.

“Sansa, tell me, how do you feel about all this?” he asked her.
“About what?”

“About being my wife, and the Lady of House Lannister. I know you must probably not like it to be the first lady of the family who destroyed yours.

Sansa didn’t really know what to answer. Her thoughts about this question were unclear even for herself. “I don’t know.” That was all she could say. “But I know I have no choice. I won’t disappoint you,” she added quickly.

Tyrion chuckled. “I don’t think you could. Especially after the way you rescued me. You were impressive.” Sansa’s face reddened a little. She looked down. “But you are wrong about one thing. You do have a choice.”

Sansa looked up at Tyrion. He continued to speak. “My uncle proposed, or more precisely advised me yesterday to annul our marriage. It’s possible since we didn’t consummate it and the High Septon is on our side.”

That wasn’t something Sansa expected. Their marriage could be annulled. “What did you tell him?”

“ Mostly, to go to hell. I refused. I even ordered him to force Joffrey to acknowledge you as Lady of Casterly Rock and Winterfell today. It wasn’t planned originally. Joffrey was only supposed to recognize my titles.”

Sansa was agape before these news. She ignored Tyrion asked to have her rights recognized by the king. She thought it was something normal to be acknowledged at the same time than her husband. Well, perhaps she should have wondered why the Lannisters confirmed her rights on Winterfell. She was only supposed to produce the future Lord Lannister of Winterfell, not to be the Lady of Winterfell herself, and for now she wasn’t about to give the lord in question to Tyrion. In some way, she was touched by the fact Tyrion insisted on this. How stupid she was to consider him as an enemy for a time.

“I’m sorry about this.” Tyrion’s words startled her. Why was he sorry? “I should have asked you before. Only my uncle told me I should be better to choose another wife and I got angry because of this.” Tyrion stopped a moment and looked away before he focused his eyes on her again. “Sansa, if you don’t want this, I would understand. I can stop it if you want. You don’t have to remain married to me if you don’t want to. I can ask for the annulment if that is your wish.”

Sansa wasn’t sure how to react. Tyrion was offering her to annul their marriage. She didn’t have to be Sansa Lannister any longer. She only had to say the word and she would be free again. Free. Free? Sansa realized how foolish this idea was. She would never be free again. All her family was dead. She was in the hand of the Lannisters.

“If our marriage is annulled, what will happen?” she asked.

“Well, I’ll have to find another wife. Kevan believes I should find a more suitable one.” Tyrion scoffed and Sansa notices he rolled his eyes. “That’s not a prospect I rejoice.”

“I meant… what will happen to me?”

Tyrion looked at her with the same sorry look he had when he came to announce their marriage or when he was talking to her after the death of Robb and her mother. Sansa thought he pressed his lips one against the other. “I won’t lie to you. You will no longer be under my protection. You will be Joffrey’s ward again, and my uncle is most likely to marry you to another Lannister. You are still the key to the North, he won’t allow you to marry someone else.” Sansa turned white when she heard it.
“You don’t have to fear too much, Sansa. Many of my cousins are decent men, and they are much younger and more comely than me. They’re not at all like Lancel or Joffrey. I could make sure you don’t marry a bad one.”

Sansa really saw she wouldn’t be free. Ser Kevan Lannister would never let her go. Tyrion was defending her for now, but once they wouldn’t be married, he wouldn’t be able to do anything. She would be forced to marry another Lannister. She would still be Sansa Lannister. The only difference would be that she wouldn’t be the Lady of Casterly Rock, and Sansa wasn’t sure if that really was a positive argument for the annulment. Despite Tyrion’s comforting words, she didn’t believe she would be any better without him. Her new husband wouldn’t give her the choice to share her bed or not with him. He would want to claim the North through her. She would be a prisoner again, but not well treated as she was right now. She realized Tyrion didn’t look quite keen about it either.

“What do you want?” she asked her husband. “Do you want to annul our marriage?”

Tyrion looked at her very long he answered. “No. I don’t want. To be frank, I don’t want someone else at my side. You’re really someone fantastic Sansa. I couldn’t ask for a better wife. And I don’t want to marry a woman who will only want to give me her hand so she may become the Lady of the Westerlands. But I don’t want to force you to be my wife. I don’t want to force anything upon you anymore.”

Sansa saw the same sincerity she always saw on Tyrion’s face when they talked. He wanted her as his wife, but not against her will. He was giving her a choice, something no one ever gave to her. She wouldn’t have the freedom Tyrion granted her with anyone else. She remembered what Lady Margaery told her about making the best of her circumstances. Her situation could only get worse if she found herself married to another man. But with Tyrion, she had a chance. A chance for a better life, and perhaps even a chance for happiness someday. This marriage was offering her so many more possibilities than any other by allowing her to be the Lady of Casterly Rock. She didn’t like very much the idea to be the Lady Lannister, but compared to all her other options, it was the better choice. She couldn’t reject it, especially not after Tyrion was so kind with her. She took her decision.

“I don’t want me neither. I don’t want to try another marriage. I didn’t get you out of this trial safe to break our marriage.”

Sansa thought she saw relief on Tyrion’s face. He rose from his chair and went to her side. “Come, then. Let us do our duty.”

Tyrion offered his right hand and Sansa took it. They smiled at each other. They would face Joffrey and everyone else together from now on. As they walked to the Great Hall where the ceremony would take place, Sansa told Tyrion about the many people who started to make demands to her. Tyrion acted as if he was annoyed and surprised by this, but his reaction was so exaggerated that Sansa realized immediately he was joking. Tyrion sadly told her that it was only the beginning and would only get worse. Sansa wasn’t prepared to this attention and rain of requests. Tyrion advised her to never accept a demand unless it didn’t engage them to anything. It was better to always say she would consider the request and discuss it with him if need be, then to give an answer later or no answer at all. Sometimes, people forgot about the requests they made previously. They could simply see her and think it was an opportunity to get something from her, so she didn’t have to worry too much about some demands.

Mira was accompanying them, staying a few feet behind. Mira could attract a lot of attention, but she also knew when she had to remain silent and discreet. She never joined a conversation between Tyrion and Sansa until they asked her to. But it didn’t really matter since both involved Mira in their conversations quite often. Tyrion knew her before she was Sansa’s handmaiden and he seemed to
appreciate Mira. Sansa and Tyrion were also flanked by ten Lannister soldiers. As they approached the Great Hall, Sansa understood why they needed so many guards. Many people weren’t inside the Throne Room, probably because there wasn’t enough space for all the highborn people in King’s Landing. Those who didn’t manage to find a place had to wait outside. The Lannister men secured a path through the little crowd and kept the people out of their way.

When they finally arrived before the huge doors of the Great Hall, they stood there, waiting for Joffrey to order the doors to open. A gold cloak left when they arrived, probably to tell the king and his Hand they were here. Sansa played with her fingers as they waited. She was excited to be true. She would be recognized as Lady of two of the greatest castles of the Seven Kingdoms, including the one where she grew up. She would no longer be a pawn in this game. She started to play when she went to Ser Dontos to tell him she wouldn’t leave. That worked out quite well. Cersei was shamed, Sansa had an informal alliance with Margaery who would be the queen very soon, and she was about to become one of the most powerful ladies of Westeros. She was also happy Tyrion was there to be recognized too, and his presence reassured her. She wasn’t sure if she would be able to stand her ground before Joffrey if her previous betrothed did something wrong. With Tyrion at her side, she felt more confident. She knew she could count on him to help her. And he could count on her to help him. They heard a loud voice behind the doors and the noises they heard coming from the other side before, probably conversations between the people attending the ceremony, died out. The doors opened slowly. Sansa exchanged one last look with Tyrion. He smiled reassuringly at her and she gave him back a smile to tell him she was alright. And they walked through the doors.

An alley led to the Iron Throne, bordered on each side by crowded people. Sansa recognized some of them. On the right side stood mostly knights, lords and ladies of the Crownlands and the Westerlands. On the left side were the knights, the lords and the ladies of the Reach. They were all looking at her and Tyrion. Sansa maintained a neutral expression. She made sure her pace was adjusted to Tyrion’s. His injury hadn’t entirely healed, so he had to walk slower than before and his short legs didn’t help either. Sansa noticed Bronn among the people on the right. Also there were Lady Stokeworth and her two daughters, Falyse and Lollys. Closer to the throne were Varys, Prince Oberyn and his paramour, Ser Jaime, Brienne and Pycelle. Sansa wondered what the latter was doing here now that everyone knew how he lied at the trial. On the left were the Tyrells and their bannermen. Margaery was smiling widely at her. She allowed a little smile on her lips in her direction. She and Tyrion reached the first steps of the dais and stopped a few feet before, looking up at Joffrey and Ser Kevan.

It was quite obvious Joffrey wasn’t happy. How could he be happy? He was forced to acknowledge Sansa as Lady of Winterfell and Casterly Rock. Not long ago, he was still ordering his kingsguards to beat her while he pointed a loaded crossbow in her direction. He did this from the same place he sat now. Ser Kevan was standing tall next to Joffrey. Cersei wasn’t there. It was obvious the Hand was the one to make sure Joffrey would act as a king. Joffrey looked up at Kevan who nodded.

Joffrey sighed. “Uncle, step forward."

Tyrion advanced to the first steps and slowly bent the knee before Joffrey to not hurt himself. “Your Grace.”

“Tyrion of the House Lannister, considering the unfortunate death of Lord Tywin Lannister, I, Joffrey of the House Baratheon, the First of my Name, King of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm, hereby acknowledge you in all your titles and lands as Lord of Casterly Rock, Shield of Lannisport, Lord of the Westerlands and Warden of the West.”

Tyrion raised. “You honor me, your Grace. I renew my pledge to serve you, respect your laws, and
Tyrion stepped back to his place next to Sansa. She felt Joffrey’s gaze on her for a very long time. He was obviously even more displeased by the part to come than the one where he recognized Tyrion as a great lord, and the first part had already been difficult for him. There was only hatred and contempt for her in his eyes. Sansa wouldn’t avert her eyes from him. She was no longer his toy. She was his aunt by marriage now. She held his gaze with the same neutral expression she had ever since she entered the Great Hall, showing him he couldn’t scare her like he did before. She maintained her posture for quite some time, looking back at him directly in the eyes, not flinching by an inch. He couldn’t hurt her anymore. Joffrey began to look quite uncomfortable in the throne. He wasn’t used to a silent defiance like the one she opposed him. How could she once believe he would be a great king? As soon as someone stood up before him, he cowered like a little boy behind the skirts of his mother. Only Cersei wasn’t here to help him now. Sansa saw to that a few days ago. There was only Kevan Lannister and when Joffrey looked at him, probably for some help, he only made a slight move of his head in Sansa’s direction.

“Lady Sansa, step forward.” His voice was uncertain. Sansa advanced and curtsied before him, but she looked at him directly in the eyes.

“Your Grace.”

“Lady Sansa,” began Joffrey with some trembling in his voice, “as Lord Tyrion’s wife, I acknowledge you as Lady of Casterly Rock and Lady of the Westerlands.” Joffrey made a pause and looked back at Kevan once again who had to encourage him once more. Joffrey turned again to Sansa and continued. “Considering the death of your brother, the traitor Robb Stark, I also acknowledge you as Lady of Winterfell.”

Sansa rose. “Thank you, your Grace. I pledge to serve you, respect your laws, and come to your help when asked.” She went back to her place beside Tyrion. Both stood tall before Joffrey. Ser Kevan advanced on the dais before Joffrey. He declared:

“Here stand before us Tyrion of the House Lannister, Lord of Casterly Rock, Shield of Lannisport, Lord of the Westerlands and Warden of the West, and his wife, Lady Sansa of Houses Lannister and Stark, Lady of Casterly Rock, Lady of the Westerlands and Lady of Winterfell.”

The people in the Great Hall exploded in claps. That wasn’t something Sansa expected, but she liked it. For so long she was mocked as the daughter of a traitor, but now she was respected. It felt good. It was some sort of revenge in her eyes. Cersei was down, Joffrey had to recognize her, and finally she had powerful allies she could rely on. At this moment, she felt powerful. She and Tyrion walked hand in hand as they left the Great Hall and went to the Small Hall for the feast.

Chapter End Notes

Joffrey didn’t prove to be very difficult for himself, but there’s still the feast that follows.

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
Sansa XII

Chapter Notes

Originally, this chapter was supposed to make a single chapter with the previous one, but before its length, I decided to split it in two parts. Now comes the rest of the ceremony where Sansa is recognized three times as a Lady.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

SANSA XII

In some ways, the feast reminded Sansa of her wedding. However, this time, she made sure Tyrion didn’t drink too much wine. She didn’t want another scene like the one during their wedding. Ever since he woke up, she made sure there was no wine in their chambers. Apparently, wine and Milk of the poppy didn’t make a good mix. Tyrion had stopped to drink Milk of the Poppy, but she preferred to not let him drink all the same. The drug was a good excuse, though she couldn’t control his drinking when he was in his solar working as Master of Coin. Tyrion complained about it, but his complaints looked like half jokes. Only half.

She and Tyrion had to receive the thanks of many people who came to their table. After some time, the music began and people started to dance. Sansa joined the dance not long after it began. Tyrion stayed behind. His stature would make it stupid if he tried to dance with her. Ser Kevan Lannister was the first one to dance with her. He told her she was beautiful. She danced with many other people, including Ser Addam Marbrand, Lord Redwyne, Lord Crakehall, Ser Eldrick Sarsfield and Lord Merryweather. She also danced with Lord Rosby who went close to cough blood on her. It was a chance she wore red. There were Loras Tyrell and his father, Lord Mace, with who she danced as well. The father tried clumsily to apologize for declaring Tyrion guilty while Ser Loras told her the same courtesies he once told her. It was obvious he wasn’t very excited to dance with her.

The most pleasant dance she had was with Tommen, Joffrey’s younger brother. Tommen was about sixteen-years-old, but he looked much younger than he was. He loved cats and was the exact opposite of Joffrey. He wasn’t called “Sweet Tommen” for nothing. Sansa wouldn’t have bothered to marry him instead of Joffrey long ago. For Tommen, their dance was more a game than anything else. He told her he wanted to be married as well and that he was taller than his uncle. Sansa could only agree and chuckle at the same time. After a moment, she wanted to go back to Tyrion she saw discussing with Bronn, but she was intercepted by the last person she wanted to see right now.

“Sansa.” Joffrey stood in her way.

“Your Grace.” Sansa held his gaze, but he was obviously drunk. He didn’t seem to care about her defiance now. He didn’t even care to call her by her title, as if she was still his betrothed.

“Where are you going?”

“I’m going back to my husband, your Grace, where I must be.”
Joffrey sneered. “Where you must be? I am the king. It is unfitting for a lady to refuse a dance with her king when he just gave her so many privileges she didn’t deserve.”

Sansa did as if she didn’t hear the last remark. “I’m sorry, your Grace, but I must go back to my husband.” She tried to get around Joffrey, but he moved again to stop her.

“You may be Lady of something or another, but before me you are nothing. I am the king, and the king orders you to dance with him.” He had the horrible mad eyes he always had when he decided to supposedly act as king. Sansa would rather dance for hours alone with Tyrion before thousands of people laughing at them instead of dancing ten seconds with Joffrey, but she had no choice. She couldn’t refuse an order like this from the king. With some hope, the moment would pass quickly. She put back her armor of courtesies.

“As you wish, your Grace.”

They began to dance. Joffrey danced quite well, but for Sansa it didn’t matter. He was a monster, and in this moment it was plain. His sadistic smile remained on his lips for all the dance. How could a monster dance so beautifully? She only wanted the dance to end, but Joffrey held her very tightly. He began to speak with a low and terrible voice after a few seconds.

“I heard you’re still a maiden. Are you?”

“We hear many things, your Grace. Many rumors are running all over the Red Keep. Most of them are nonsense.”

For a moment, Joffrey didn’t seem to know how to answer. “I know you’re still a maiden. You shouldn’t be. You’re a flowered woman now. If my uncle doesn’t want you, I’ll take you myself.”

Sansa’s heart was pounding in her chest. “You’re to marry Margaery.”

“A king can have other women. Whores. My father did. My uncle will bring you to my bed whenever I command it.”

“He won’t.” How did he dare to treat her like a whore? She was Tyrion’s wife. He would never allow anyone to touch her. He didn’t even allow himself to touch her. Sansa said the words firmly because she knew they were true. She wouldn’t let this monster who killed her father put fear in her heart. She was no longer a frightened little girl. She was a married woman, a lady who sent his mad mother away. She held his gaze, but it seemed the wine put Joffrey in a state where he really believed he was powerful.

“He will, or I’ll have his head.” Then you’ll be fucking you own bride with a wooden cock, as he told you before. Sansa kept this thought for her. How much she would have liked to tell him before everyone. But she knew better. “A King Aegon, he had any woman he wanted, whether they were married or no. I’ll have you too, this very night. And if my uncle dares to object as he did the last time, he will die, and I’ll make you my personal whore. And I’ll force you to look at his head on a spike each day for hours.”

Joffrey’s grip on her had tightened, but Sansa broke their dance all of a sudden. She wouldn’t let him do it. “You killed my father. You should remember a Lannister always pays her debts, your Grace. If you dare to threaten me or my husband again in any way, I’ll kill you. Your dogs may kill me afterwards, but they won’t be able to bring you back to life. You touch me again, and you die, your Grace. I’ll show you the same mercy you showed to my father.”

Sansa put as much venom in her words to let him know what she thought of him. At this time, she
was ready to kill him, just like on the bridge when he showed her father’s head. He couldn’t frighten her or force her to be a singing little bird who did as she was told. Joffrey looked stunned before her words. He probably never expected Sansa would talk back to him this way. Sansa saw that no one realized something was going on. Everyone was dancing or too drunk to notice them, and she and Joffrey had spoken too low for everyone else to hear. However, Tyrion was looking strangely at her. He probably realized something was going on. She saw him talking to Bronn in whispers.

“What did you say?” Joffrey showed the same incredulous expression he had when Tyrion threatened to castrate him. He was stupid, but that also made him dangerous. Did Sansa make a mistake? She should have ignored him instead and take precautions against him after the feast.

“Your Grace. My lady.” Ser Kevan appeared on Sansa’s right. Joffrey’s mad eyes turned immediately to him. “Please excuse me, your Grace, but I would like to have a private discussion with Lady Lannister. Lady Margaery is waiting. She would like to dance with you.”

Joffrey looked at Ser Kevan with an open mouth, apparently confused. “Margaery? Ah… yes. I should go and talk to her.” He turned his eyes back to Sansa before he left. “I will make you pay for this.” And he left. Sansa should have felt scared by his words, but she didn’t. His hand was shaking as he said it. His words looked more like empty threats than anything else.

“My lady, please follow me. There are things that I would like to talk to you about.” Sansa followed Ser Kevan on his proposition. She had no intention to stay on the dance floor. They made their way to the balcony over the dais where she and Tyrion had their places. Sansa noticed that except Tyrion and Bronn, no one seemed to have noticed the incident. She prevented another scene at least. She sent a look to Tyrion, hoping he would understand she was alright.

When they finally reached the top, they were alone, except for two guards. Ser Kevan sent them away. He then turned to Sansa. Was he going to lecture her about her attitude with the king? She hoped not. She was in no mood for this now. Joffrey threatened to rape her and kill her husband. She was in every right to be angry at him.

“I guess I arrived at the right moment. I know what Joffrey is capable of. I expected he would try something after I forced him to do this ceremony. I’m sorry if he acted improperly toward you, my lady.”

Sansa didn’t expect such words. She only found a hollow answer like the ones she made in all circumstances like these ones when she wasn’t sure what she should say. “The king was kind. He only insisted very much to dance with me for a long time, so I acted a little abruptly with him to go back to my husband. It’s my own fault.”

Ser Kevan didn’t seem to believe her after a moment of reflection. “As I told you before, my lady, I’m not your enemy. I want to control this king as much as the others to prevent him from doing follies. I know very well the threats he made to you in the past. Tell me what he told you. I am the Hand of the King. I’m the best placed to control him.”

Sansa wasn’t sure if she could trust Kevan Lannister. He looked like Lord Tywin under many aspects, but he also looked kinder and less ruthless. Tyrion had no bad comments to do about his uncle, except he always did what Lord Tywin said. Except that, he didn’t look like a horrible man like Tywin Lannister. He declared Tyrion not guilty and was about to send Cersei away. And didn’t he just save her from Joffrey’s wrath? Sansa decided to tell him everything about the threats Joffrey just made. She also told him about the threats during her wedding.

“I see. I’ll double my guards before your door for this night, and I’ll also warn Jaime about this so the Kingsguard keeps an eye on Joffrey. Don’t be afraid about it. Joffrey may forget it for a long time if
he doesn’t see you often. I would suggest you stay away from him as much as you can.” I already do, Sansa thought. “There’s also something else I would like to talk to you about, my lady. You hate the Lannisters, don’t you?”

The question surprised Sansa even more than the comments about Joffrey. “I don’t.” She wore her armor of courtesies once again.

“If I were you, I don’t think I would love a family who killed my father, my mother and my eldest brother.” Ser Kevan spoke very seriously. He wasn’t leaving his eyes from her. Again Sansa had the impression to see some of Tywin Lannister in him, but he didn’t have the frightening and cold glare of the late Lord of Casterly Rock. He was serious, but not intimidating.

“They were traitors. I guess they got what they deserved.” She refused to abandon her armor in this moment. She still had too much uncertainty about this man.

“Some may agree with you,” the knight admitted. “On the other hand, Joffrey promised your father he could take the black if he confessed his treason. Your father confessed and Joffrey ordered him executed. You would have the right to be angry at least about this. A king should keep his word. As for your brother and your mother, I think everyone in the Seven Kingdoms despises the Freys for breaking the guest rights. No one deserves to die this way.”

Sansa felt a sudden anger rising in her. He was speaking calmly about the death of her family, as if it meant nothing. “Joffrey forced me to watch the head of my father, but also the one of the septa who raised and trained me, and of all the other people of my father’s household who I knew ever since I was born, planted on spikes. My brother was stabbed in the heart by one of his own men, then his head was cut and his body paraded with his direwolf’s head on it. His wife was murdered in front of his own eyes, stabbed multiple times in the belly while she was pregnant. My mother’s throat was cut to the bone, and then her body was thrown in the river. So forgive me if I don’t love your family very much.”

Kevan Lannister looked down for a moment. “I understand. You must know that I never wanted this to happen, my lady. My brother didn’t want it either. But we were in war, and in war people die.”

“Really? You didn’t want it? Lord Tywin didn’t want it? Strange for someone who organized the Red Wedding.”

“It’s true. But I would like to ask you a question. If your brother Robb Stark had taken King’s Landing, would he have spared Joffrey? Or Cersei? Or Jaime? Tywin? Tommen? Myrcella? Or even your husband?”

“My brother would never have killed Tommen or Myrcella, they are children. And he would never have killed Tyrion, he was kind to me.”

“Then your brother was a fool.” Sansa’s anger rose again. “What do you think Tommen and Myrcella would have done a few years later when fully grown? Do you think they would have forgotten who killed their mother, their brother, their uncle and their grandfather? Do you think they would have accepted that your brother murdered most of their family without retaliating one day? As for Tyrion, I’m not quite convinced by your words. Should I remind you that your mother arrested him under false accusations and wanted him executed for a crime he was innocent?”

“She received false information. She wasn’t responsible for that.”

“Tyrion told me about Baelish’s lies. And yet she’s the one who trusted Baelish. She’s the one who arrested Tyrion, even if she knew perfectly it would start a war between her family and mine. She
chose war.” Sansa wanted to protest, but Ser Kevan continued before she could. “My brother Tywin was ruthless and cruel, it’s true, but only when he thought it was necessary. He wasn’t cruel because he enjoyed it. He went to war because your mother imprisoned Tyrion. If she hadn’t done it, there wouldn’t have been any war. My brother didn’t even want a full-scale war. He sent Gregor Clegane to ravage the Riverlands to force your father to chase him personally, then to capture him and trade him for Tyrion. He never wanted a war that would spread through all the Seven Kingdoms. He never wanted your father to die, far from it. Everyone at the Green Fork, even Tywin, considered Joffrey’s decision was foolish because we couldn’t exchange your father to make peace. Your brother refused to make peace, even when it became obvious he couldn’t win the war. He refused the exchange of you and your sister against Jaime. He offered us peace conditions we couldn’t accept, and I’m quite sure he knew it. It was obvious that this conflict would end by the near destruction of one of our houses. A good lord knows when he cannot fight, and your brother refused to admit he was lost after Blackwater. He should have known his only chance to survive would have been to bend the knee. Instead he continued a lost fight to avenge his father. Your family is responsible in some way of its own destruction. You started this conflict.”

Sansa wanted to retort, but she found nothing to say. Lord Tywin’s brother still had something to say.

“As for the Red Wedding, Tywin was the mind behind it, it’s true, but he wasn’t the one to swing the sword. Nothing obliged the Boltons or the Freys to do these horrible things. They accepted Tywin’s proposition when they could refuse. They are the ones who betrayed your brother and broke the guest rights. And the horrible things they did to your kin’s dead bodies weren’t ordered by my brother, not even the death of your mother. You can blame us all you want, but the Lannisters could blame you for many atrocities your own family committed.”

“Atrocities? My brother never committed any atrocity. He didn’t slaughter people at a wedding.” Sansa wouldn’t let him soil her family’s honor.

“The brother of my sister-in-law, Ser Stafford Lannister, died at the Battle of Oxcross. The Westerlands were plundered by your brother’s armies up to Lannisport. My nephew, Lyonel Frey, the son of my sister Genna, died at the Whispering Wood. My two sons, Martyn and Willem, were butchered in their cell when they were prisoners by one of your brother’s bannermen. They were fifteen, only children.”

Sansa was shocked by everything Ser Kevan said. She needed some time to gather her thoughts. “My brother wasn’t responsible for the death of your sons. He executed Lord Karstark afterwards for what he did to them.”

“Did it bring my children back to life?” Sansa had nothing to answer again. “He allowed Lord Karstark to kill them. They were under his protection. Does hating you and your family will bring them back to me? No. Will hating us bring back your family to you?” She didn’t have an answer to that either. “Then you should try to not hate the Lannisters. We are no worse than many other families in Westeros. And all the members of House Lannister are not responsible for every horrible act made against your family, just like you’re not responsible for the death of my children. And if you ever wish to get back Winterfell one day, we are your best hope. As I told you, I’m not your enemy. We don’t have to be enemies.”

Kevan Lannister spoke quietly during all this time, but he used a firm voice all the same. She didn’t know what to make of everything he just told her. Sansa had to admit the Lannisters weren’t entirely responsible of all this war. Littlefinger started all of this with his lies. Her mother arrested Tyrion as well, and she tried to have him executed, persuaded he tried to kill Bran. Sansa had to admit her family had been quite unfair with Tyrion. Her mother put him on trial and arrested him when he was
innocent. She wanted him to die even after he saved her on the Eastern Road. Bronn told her one day how Tyrion killed a man who tried to kill her mother with a shield. Sansa hadn’t been better. She trusted Littlefinger as well, and didn’t trust Tyrion even after he saved her from Joffrey. Perhaps her brother did a mistake as well by not treating with Tywin Lannister after the Battle of Blackwater. Perhaps he would be still alive if he had done so. And she couldn’t blame Ser Kevan if he hated her family. His two sons were murdered when they were under Robb’s protection. From what Sansa could see, he seemed to genuinely wish they didn’t have to hate each other.

“I’ll need time, Ser Kevan.” That was all she could offer for now. She could trust Tyrion, perhaps Ser Jaime to a certain point, but she would need time for the other Lannisters.

“I understand.” He made what she thought was a comprehensive nod. His face softened. “There is something else I need to tell you, my lady. About Tyrion.”

“I’m listening.” She wondered what Kevan Lannister had to say about his nephew. Why did he want to talk to her about Tyrion?

“Tyrion cares about you. It’s quite obvious. And from what I’ve seen up to now, you don’t hate him.”

“No, I don’t.” Sansa didn’t hate Tyrion, quite the opposite in fact. She considered Tyrion as a friend. Even a very close friend.

“I would like you to take care of him.”

“This is my duty as his wife.”

“No, you don’t understand. He needs you. Not only as a wife to stand beside him during official events or to have children. He needs you in his life. He needs someone to share his life with. Someone who will look after him. Someone who cares about him, who wants him to be happy. Someone who will make him happy. You understand what I mean?”

Sansa took some time to answer. “Yes, I think I do.”

“Good. Now if you’ll excuse me, my lady, I’ll go and watch the king.”

Ser Kevan went away, leaving Sansa alone on the balcony. She remained here for some time, wondering what he meant exactly by taking care of Tyrion. She wouldn’t abandon him, for sure, but she didn’t know precisely what Tyrion’s uncle had wanted to say. She finally left as well and went back to her table. Tyrion was there, drinking. He found a jug of wine somewhere it seemed. Sansa took the jug from him as soon as she arrived and put it far away enough from him. It wasn’t the time to get drunk with the altercation she had with Joffrey a few minutes ago. Tyrion didn’t seem to care about the loss of his wine. He looked essentially relieved to see her again. When he asked her what happened with Joffrey, she told him they would discuss it once back in their chambers. The rest of the feast went swiftly and without incident. Sansa and Tyrion talked a lot, and some other people came to engage a conversation with them, including Ser Jaime, Margaery and Mira. They both finally retired and went back to theirs rooms. Mira followed them as befits a handmaiden. She helped Sansa to change and prepare herself for the night as Tyrion prepared himself in another corner of the room, out of her sight. When Mira was gone, Tyrion approached Sansa.

“So, perhaps you could tell me what was the problem with Joffrey this time,” he asked. Sansa explained the threats Joffrey made, today and during their wedding. Tyrion’s face turned to the same expression he had when Joffrey was beating her.
“Why didn’t you tell me before?” he asked angrily.

“That was our wedding night. And I didn’t know if I could trust you at this moment,” Sansa argued.

Tyrion’s softened. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be angry at you. But if he ever presumes I will allow him to touch you, he’s wrong. The next time he makes threats like that I’ll geld him for real.”

Sansa stared in horror at Tyrion. “You can’t do that! They will take your head as soon as you do it! I don’t want you to die!” Sansa wouldn’t bother if Joffrey ended an eunuch, but she didn’t save Tyrion from his sister only to see him die by Joffrey’s hand. She wouldn’t allow that to happen.

Tyrion had a dumbfounded expression on his face after she told this. He chuckled. “Don’t worry, with some luck that won’t be necessary, though it could make some good to Joffrey to realize he cannot do as he pleases. He’s really mad. Threatening to rape the Lady of Casterly Rock! I don’t want to imagine what my father would have done to the Mad King if he tried to rape my mother.”

“Anyway your uncle already doubled the guard before our door and warned your brother about it. Joffrey won’t do anything for tonight.”

“Good thing for him!” declared Tyrion in a theatrical voice. “Because if he does try something on you, his own wedding night might be quite difficult. Perhaps Lady Margaery wouldn’t complain about it.”

Sansa couldn’t help but laugh at it, just like Tyrion. But the laugh had a bitter taste. She wondered what would be this marriage for Margaery. For now the betrothal was alright, she could control Joffrey, but considering what happened to the girls Tyrion once sent to Joffrey, Sansa was afraid what may happen to her during her wedding night. Sansa was also afraid about herself. She was the Lady of Casterly Rock and Winterfell, Joffrey himself acknowledged her, but he still saw her as a toy he could play with whenever he wanted. Would she ever be safe? She averted her gaze from Tyrion’s face. She didn’t want him to see her sudden distress.

For all the good it did. “Sansa, are you alright?” Tyron noticed her change of behavior.

Sansa let it go. “What if Joffrey does what he told me he would do?” Her voice was trembling.

“He won’t.” Tyrion placed his right hand on hers. She still sat in her chair and he was standing next to her. “I promised to protect you when we were wed. I won’t let him do it.”

Sansa looked into Tyrion’s eyes. Green eyes, full of sincerity, care and concern for her. Not long ago she didn’t want to look at these eyes, but now they reassured her. They calmed her.

“Now, it should be time to sleep,” he said all of a sudden. “I think I will go back to the couch now. I don’t have enough pain left as an excuse to share your bed.”

“No!” Perhaps Sansa said the word a little bit too quickly and loudly for her taste as Tyrion went in the direction of the couch. He turned to face her, obviously surprised. She recovered quickly and took a more neutral face. “I mean, you’re not fully healed, and I know it’s uncomfortable on the couch. Anyway it doesn’t bother me to have you at my side in the same bed. I trust you.” And I feel safer and better when you’re with me. She didn’t dare to express her thoughts aloud.

“Very well. I won’t complain about it. You’re right, the bed is much more comfortable than the couch.”

Tyrion blew out the candles as she laid under the covers. Her husband joined her not long after. After a few minutes she had the impression he was asleep. Sansa was shaking. Despite Tyrion’s
reassurances, she feared Joffrey might appear from nowhere and execute his threat. She was afraid, afraid for her and afraid for Tyrion. Carefully, she moved to him and laid her head on his shoulder. She remembered the night before his arrest. It seemed to be so long ago, from another age, and yet it happened barely two months ago. He held her in his arms this night and calmed her. It had been the best night of sleep she had for a very long time. After he went out of prison, she decided she had to keep a physical contact with him when they were asleep. She didn’t want him to be taken away from her as Cersei did this morning. But this night, she needed to feel closer to him.

“What are you doing?” It seemed Tyrion wasn’t sleeping if she relied on his question.

“I just feel better this way.” I want to feel safer in your arms. As if he read her thoughts, Tyrion passed an arm around her shoulders. Her shaking lessened. There was a time when she would shake at the simple idea of Tyrion touching her, but now it was different.

“I won’t do anything. I promise,” he assured her.

“I know,” she simply said. She listened to her heartbeat and felt calm overrunning her. After a moment, she realized it was Tyrion’s heartbeat she was listening to, but she was already drifting into sleep.

In her sleep, Sansa dreamed again of her father, telling her he would find someone worthy of her once she would be old enough. Tyrion was there again behind him. Afterwards, she heard in her dreams the same song she heard the night after the first day of the trial. It had been the day she learned Shae and Tyrion were lovers, and this discovery nearly annihilated her. However, it wasn’t the first part of the song she heard this time like a few days ago. It was the second part.

_Can't believe the words I hear_

_It's like an answer to a prayer_

_And when I look around I see,_

_This place, this time, this friend of mine_

_I know it's hard but found somehow_

_To look into your heart and to forgive me now_

_You've given me the strength to see just where my journey ends_

_You've given me the strength to carry on_

_I see the path from this dark place_

_I see my future_

_And your forgiveness has set me free_

_Oh, and I can see another way_
I can face another day

I can see the path

I see my future

I see the path from this dark place

I see my future

I see the path from this dark place

Chapter End Notes

For the song at the end: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-J1AD1O_ijA

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
Tyrion woke up from a dreamless and short sleep before the sun came out. He hadn’t slept very long, but he slept well. His sleep was much better for a week since the trial was over. For one, the bed was much more comfortable than the couch. He never told Sansa, but to sleep on the couch sometimes left him with aches in the back. However, Tyrion slept in featherbeds long before his marriage and always had the same problems. He would often spend whole nights reading because he couldn’t sleep. He could function with only a few hours of rest each night, even none occasionally. But now, he was able to sleep much better. His sleep was less troubled by nightmares than before. He had a suspicion the reason for his enhanced sleep was the person laying at his side. Sansa was on his left, still sleeping. Tyrion remembered she leaned her forehead against his left arm last night when they fell asleep. Tyrion noticed she also had a hand on his chest now. That wasn’t the first time it happened. Another morning Tyrion had woken up in this situation as well. Sansa probably put her hand in this position unconsciously in her sleep each time, because Tyrion didn’t remember she did it while he was awaken, and Sansa fell asleep quicker than him. Carefully, Tyrion moved away from his wife and held her hand in the air before he slowly laid it down on the mattress. He didn’t want to awake her. She deserved to sleep, and she looked so much at peace in this moment. It was as if nothing could trouble her, and Tyrion didn’t want to trouble her for one of the rare moments that belonged to her, and only to her.

Tyrion got dressed without a noise and left their chamber as silently as he could. Sansa didn’t move. She still had this thin smile she always had when she was asleep, or at least she had since Tyrion left the cells. Tyrion closed the door very carefully and walked to his solar. Sansa needed rest. Tyrion remained awaken until very late yesterday. He had so many problems to solve and so little time for that. He spent the last days working tirelessly. Lord Gyles Rosby left the finances of the Realm in a sorry state for the short month he was Master of Coin. Even with Cersei’s decision to stop the payments to the Iron Bank and the Faith, the Crown didn’t have enough money to rebuild the royal fleet. Lord Rosby himself lent to the Crown to pay for the new ships Cersei ordered Lord Tyrell to build. He even borrowed from other minor houses of the Crownlands like the Stokeworths. As a result, the Crown’s debts increased again while Tyrion was absent. And now he had to repair the damage caused by the payment’s interruption. A representative of the Iron Bank had come yesterday to ask for the payments to start again. Kevan had ordered them to start again as soon as he arrived, but the first payment hadn’t reached Braavos yet, or at least hadn’t yet arrived when the emissary left Braavos. Tyrion spent hours discussing with the man, giving all the guarantees he could that the Crown would pay its debts on time. Tyrion described the temporary cessation as an accident due to the sudden death of the Hand of the King. Tyrion managed to calm the representative by telling him
the Crown was supported by the Reach and the Westerlands, and that House Tyrell and House Lannister were more than capable to make sure it would give its due to the Iron Bank. Tyrion thought he probably did the best he could in these circumstances, especially since he gave the representative a large amount of gold to compensate the delay. With some hope, the Iron Bank wouldn’t start to fund their enemies.

As for the Faith, Tyrion managed to solve the problem without too much difficulties. His return at the office of Master of Coin, along with his new title as Lord of Casterly Rock and his good relation with the High Septon allowed the Crown to start again the payments to the Faith without penalties. He also succeeded in convincing Mace Tyrell to lend more money to the Crown in order to repay the other creditors in time. The Fat Flower accepted a lower interest rate (5% instead of 15%) and also confirmed his engagement to pay for half the cost of the royal wedding, even the extra cost caused by the delay Cersei imposed. It seemed the Fat Flower didn’t want to upset Tyrion now that he was Lord of the Westerlands, especially after he declared Tyrion guilty at the trial. The Lord of Highgarden was right to not anger him. He knew Tyrion was innocent, and he sentenced him to die all the same. Tyrion wondered what Cersei promised him for his vote. The Tyrells should be better to not cause any other problem to Tyrion, or else they would see how he paid his debts.

The delay of the wedding had increased its cost by nearly a fifth. A lot of food were wasted because of it. Tyrion wanted to curse Cersei. He worked like a demon to keep the Crown away from bankruptcy, and Cersei destroyed months of work in a single one with her foolish decisions. Tyrion was infuriated to always clean the mess she caused. He decided to lend more money to the Crown and to not ask for the repayment in time of the previous debts it amassed towards Casterly Rock when his father was still alive, but he raised the interest rate from 15% to 20% (as high as the Iron Bank), not only on the new borrowings, but also on the previous ones. He was tired to pay the price for Cersei’s errors. Joffrey would have to pay for it. In two years, when the Crown should start to pay him back, Tyrion would make sure Joffrey would pay.

In the meantime, to keep enough money to the Crown, Tyrion had to double the tax on whoring. He also decided to levy a temporary tax on the wine imported to King’s Landing for the royal wedding. The Redwynes and some Dornishmen wouldn’t be happy, since the winesellers were the ones to pay it, but he was short of ideas. Anyway, it was only temporary in order to replenish the coffers of the Crown enough to have some money to spend from time to time. Tyrion planned the tax to be abandoned in a month. His successor would have to deal with the long-term problems more carefully when he would leave for Casterly Rock.

Tyrion reached his solar and started to work. He may have an hour or two before he had to go back in his chambers and bring Sansa with him to the breakfast. The royal wedding was taking place today. Tyrion was eager for it to be over. He was eager to leave for Casterly Rock. He thought Sansa was eager to leave as well. She didn’t want to spend any more time near Joffrey. Two days ago an altercation occurred in the courtyard. Joffrey intercepted Sansa with his two dogs, Meryn Trant and Boros Blount, as she was walking. Luckily, the courtyard was full of Lannister soldiers and Bronn wasn’t far either. Joffrey probably realized all of a sudden he couldn’t use the Lady of the Westerlands like he wanted. However, it was obvious Sansa wanted to leave this place and Tyrion agreed with her. He hoped she would like Casterly Rock.

Tyrion had become quite close to Sansa during the days following his release and his near death, and not only because now they slept close in the same bed and maintained a physical contact while asleep. He didn’t do much for that closeness. In fact, Sansa was the one to do most of the work. She never went to sleep before Tyrion was back from his solar late in the night. Tyrion told her to sleep before his arrival, but Sansa refused. In some way Tyrion was happy to see Sansa was awaken when he came back. They could exchange a few words before they went to bed, but Tyrion feared Sansa wouldn’t sleep long enough this way. That’s why he always made sure to not awake her when he
left their bed soon in the morning. She always waited for him for dinner as well. For Tyrion, dinners had become moments of grace. They were the only times he wasn’t working. He wished they could last longer, but there was too much work to do. All the same, he always had good conversations with Sansa at these moments. There were even some ideas to solve problems that came to his mind while talking to her. She lifted his spirit when no one else could. It was also in these times that Sansa told him how she was pursued by an army of people now.

Tyrion understood what Sansa meant. He had similar problems, but not at the same level. As Master of Coin, he could easily send away flatterers who only came to ask him a favor or another by pretending he was too busy, which was the case most of the time anyway. However, he couldn’t refuse to see everyone. There were important lords and ladies of the Westerlands in King’s Landing for the royal wedding and he couldn’t turn down every demand of meeting by these noble people. He had to maintain good relations with his bannermen and to show them respect. By luck, his huge duties provided him with an excuse so the minor lords couldn’t blame him. Tyrion only had to receive people like Ser Addam Marbrand or Lord Desmond Crakehall who belonged to powerful families.

Sansa, on the other hand, just discovered what it meant to be a new great lady. She just became the Lady of House Lannister. Technically, she was the richest woman in the Seven Kingdoms, and one of the most powerful. The way she neutralized Cersei at the trial also proved to everyone she was someone to take seriously. She annihilated the power of the Queen Regent within a few days, which was no small task. People saw her as someone very powerful and with a lot of influence, and tried to gain her trust or her friendship as she just reached her position. They saw an opportunity since she reached the power so quickly and suddenly. Sansa had to be careful, and she was. Her experiences with Joffrey, Cersei, Littlefinger and Ser Dontos taught her to be careful in choosing her friends and her allies. She was careful even with Margery. Tyrion could only approve her. The future queen was a smiling and very generous young woman, but she could be dangerous as well. But Tyrion preferred to have Margery as queen instead of his sister. Sansa was mostly tired of all the people sticking around her. Tyrion knew it would last for some time. If Sansa showed to the others she couldn’t be controlled or manipulated, most of the parasites following her would stop. But there would always be some to try. Tyrion explained it to Sansa during one of their dinners and she looked able to handle the situation. She was simply exceeded by all this unwanted attention.

Tyrion managed to find other people who had unpaid debts towards the Crown during the short time he spent working. He hoped this time they weren’t people Joffrey executed. It was already difficult to chase the children whose fathers owed money to the king. Not only was it difficult to find them, many times they had no way to pay back their debts. Of the few they found, Tyrion convinced most of them to take the black instead of facing the king’s justice. Joffrey’s justice ended most of the time with some part of the body missing on the poor debtors. There were other times they were lucky enough to find some relative who paid the debts to save them. Tyrion was quite relieved that it could still happen. Not long after dawn came, he went back to his chambers.

He crossed the path of Mira Forrester on his way back. He had to see her more often these last times. As Master of Coin, he was in charge of the reconstruction of the royal fleet along with the Master of Ships. Lord Mace Tyrell wasn’t quite competent for the duty to be true. Lord Redwyne would have been a better choice. Sadly, they couldn’t remove the Lord of Highgarden from his position on the small council without insulting him. The result was Tyrion was the one really making sure the reconstruction would be done well. In fact, there was no construction at all for now. The sorry state of the Crown’s finances forced Tyrion to maintain his uncle’s decision to suspend the rebuilding of the royal fleet indefinitely. For now, they were only buying materials for the future construction. The Whitehills already sent a first shipment of ironwood from White Harbor a few days ago and it would arrive in King’s Landing very soon. Tyrion had to discuss with Lady Mira about the price of the wares, and they both agreed about one thing: keeping it as low as possible. Mira Forrester had the
complete control over the price and the quantity of ironwood the Whitehills could sell to the Crown, and she wasn’t about to negotiate for a higher price when it would benefit the people who murdered her family. Anyway, she wasn’t expecting ironwood of good quality and it was for her and Tyrion quite a good excuse to maintain the price on ironwood at a minimum. This way Tyrion could lower the expenses of the Crown, and Mira Forrester could make the Whitehills pay in some way for their crimes. Both gained from it.

“Lady Mira,” he greeted her.

“Lord Tyrion.” Always polite and courteous like a true lady. I understand why she and Sansa became friends so quickly.

“Eager for the wedding?”

“As much as I can be. I’m mostly happy for Lady Margaery.” Tyrion didn’t hear much joy in her voice. He never really saw her happy in fact. Tyrion couldn’t blame her. She lost her whole family within a few months, and yet she managed to face it with more serenity than Sansa, though Tyrion could imagine what happened inside this head under the black hair.

“Sansa told me you’ll soon be in the queen’s service again.” They continued to talk as they walked towards Tyrion and Sansa’s apartments.

“Yes, when you will leave for Casterly Rock. Lady Margaery would like to have me back at her service, and anyway I must stay for the ironwood business.”

“Indeed. Since we speak of it, the first shipment should arrive very soon, perhaps tomorrow. I can count on you to make sure the merchandise is of good quality.”

“The Whitehills are the ones who can make sure it’s of good quality, but since they only know how to destroy ironwood forests, I fear the shipment will not contain the best ironwood there is.” Tyrion sensed it was an understatement.

They arrived at the chambers and entered. Sansa was already stirring into the bed. Tyrion let Lady Mira prepare his wife for the day, but first Sansa had to take a bath. It was a special day after all. They had a bathtub room next to their bedroom and Tyrion read one of his books as he waited for Sansa to be done. It was better for her to take her bath first since her own preparation that would follow took more time than Tyrion’s. After Sansa left the bathroom, Tyrion abandoned his book, The Price of Inequality by Archmaester Stiglitz, and took a bath as well. With Podrick’s help, he was ready for the breakfast before Sansa.

When finally Sansa was ready, they left. They both wore simple clothes for the breakfast. Their finest garbs would be for the wedding ceremony and the feast with seventy-seven courses. Anyway, Sansa was beautiful whatever she wore. He spoke of many things with her as they walked to the gardens where the breakfast would take place, and they involved Lady Mira and Podrick in the conversation as well. Podrick was walking side by side with the northern girl, carrying a huge book. It was Tyrion’s and Sansa’s gift they would give to Joffrey during the breakfast. Following the Reach traditions, Margaery would break her fast with the other Tyrell women while the Tyrell men and the Lannisters would break it with the king. For the occasion, they had to give a present to Joffrey, and Tyrion thought a book wouldn’t be a bad idea. Perhaps that would help Joffrey to be somewhat a better king if miracles were possible. He hoped Joffrey would give a better treatment to the book than to the last gift Tyrion gave him. He still remembered the horrible state Daisy was when Ros brought her back to the Tower of the Hand, and Tyrion knew what happened to Ros later when Joffrey used her as a target practice. He tried to banish these dark memories from his mind as they sat to the large table for the breakfast.
The breakfast would have been very pleasant if it wasn’t for Joffrey’s and Cersei’s presences. Tyrion hadn’t wanted her to be present at the wedding at all, but Kevan said it was for the better. Cersei was supposed to leave tomorrow for Rosby. That would be her last appearance in court, as Margaery would become queen during the day, and it would have a good effect on the appearance of House Lannister if Cersei looked respectable for one last time before she left, as if she regretted what she had done. Anyway she was watched by several Lannister guards, Kevan made sure she would cause no trouble and she sat far away from the king, at the same table but far away. She wouldn’t even be able to talk to him. Tommen was beside her.

“Nothing like a hearty breakfast to whet one’s appetite for the seventy-seven course feast to follow,” Tyrion told Sansa at a moment. Tyrion mainly spoke with her as they ate. They both sat at Joffrey’s right, and sadly there was only Kevan to separate him from his repulsive nephew. Kevan was mostly speaking with Joffrey, and by luck this kept the attention of the boy away from Tyrion and Sansa. Sansa didn’t have much more luck since only Tommen separated her from Cersei. She engaged the conversation with Tommen a few times, and each time Cersei threw her daggers with her eyes. Tommen didn’t seem to notice it, but Sansa did and mostly talked with Tyrion afterwards. Among the people on Joffrey’s left were his soon-to-be father-in-law Mace Tyrell and Pycelle.

The moment to give Joffrey his wedding presents arrived. But first, Cersei solemnly presented him the wife’s cloak he would drape over Margaery’s shoulders. “I donned this cloak when Robert took me for his queen. It is the same cloak my mother Lady Joanna, a true Lady of Casterly Rock, wore when she wed my lord father.” Tyrion noticed the mention of a true Lady of Casterly Rock. It wasn’t difficult to guess what Cersei meant. He put his hand on Sansa’s to show her she had his support.

Presents began to flow before Joffrey. Jalabhar Xho gave a great bow of golden wood and a quiver of long arrows fletched with green and scarlet feathers. Lady Tanda Stokeworth offered a pair of supple riding boots. Oberyn Martell presented him a red gold brooch wrought in the shape of a scorpion, but Tyrion thought Oberyn would have liked instead to offer a real scorpion who would kill Joffrey at this very moment. Tyrion remembered the discussion he had with Prince Oberyn two days ago. He asked something to Tyrion, but he had to decline the demand. That was too dangerous. He hoped the Red Viper wouldn’t do something even more dangerous after this refusal. Ser Addam Marbrand offered silver spurs. Paxter Redwyne, Lord of the Arbor, presented a wooden model of a war galley of two hundred oars being built even now on the Arbor.

“If it pleases your Grace,” said the lord, “she will be called King Joffrey’s Valor.”

Joffrey showed how he was pleased by his next words. “I will make it my flagship when I sail to Dragonstone to kill my traitor uncle Stannis.” Tyrion doubted Joffrey would ever embark a ship to Dragonstone before Stannis was dead. He had statues of him built to show his victory over Robb Stark through the Red Keep, even though he did nothing. And Tyrion didn’t see how killing people at a wedding deserved praise.

Lord Mace Tyrell was the next to present his gift: a huge golden chalice with two ornate curved handles and the seven sigils of the seven great houses, including the direwolf of the Starks. Probably the Tyrells had it made before the Red Wedding.

“From House Tyrell and the people of the Reach, your Grace, it is my honor to present you with this wedding cup. May you and my daughter Margaery drink deep and live long.”

“A handsome goblet, my lord,” complimented Joffrey. “Or shall I call you Father?”

“I shall be honored, your Grace.” Lord Tyrell bowed with a great smile. Tyrion hoped Joffrey wouldn’t give the Lord of Highgarden reasons to hate him afterwards, especially after the wedding night.
Tyrion’s and Sansa’s gift was brought by Podrick after Lord Tyrell’s cup. Tyrion rose from his chair and came before Joffrey to present it.

“A book?” Joffrey asked. *Of course, it’s a book. It’s probably the first time you look at one.*

_The Lives of Four Kings._ Grand Maester Kaeth’s history of the reigns of Daeron the Young Dragon, Baelor the Blessed, Aegon the Unworthy, and Daeron the Good. A book every king should read.

It wasn’t difficult for anyone who knew Joffrey even a little to see he wasn’t pleased. “Your uncle is right, your Grace. In all of Westeros there are only four copies of that book illuminated in Kaeth’s own hand. This is one of them.” Tyrion appreciated Kevan’s help, but he didn’t know if it would be enough. He started to withdraw when Joffrey finally spoke.

“Now that the war is won, we should all find time for wisdom. Thank you, Uncle.”

Tyrion wasn’t sure what to make of Joffrey’s reaction. That wasn’t really what he expected and he doubted the sincerity of his nephew’s words. He went back to his seat and interrogated Sansa with a questioning expression on his face. By her own expression, Sansa told him she didn’t know what to think of it either.

Ser Balon Swann arrived at this moment, carrying a sword. Tyrion knew what it was. As Kevan rose, he regretted he didn’t send Ice back to Sansa’s brother along with Ned Stark’s bones. “One of only two Valyrian steel swords in the capital, your Grace, freshly forged in your honor,” Kevan said.

Joffrey looked as if he received a new toy and left his seat to take it out of its scabbard. He started to move it in all directions and to slash through the air as people were puffing in surprise and admiration. He looked like he wanted to kill someone with that right away.

“Careful, your Grace. Nothing cuts like Valyrian steel.” For one time, Pycelle was speaking some reason. Tyrion hoped Joffrey would accidentally kill himself with it. The world would be much safer without him.

“So they say.”

Joffrey was too much focused on his sword to look listening to the old man’s words. Suddenly, he decided to test the sharpness of his new toy and cut the book Tyrion just offered him in two, then in three, four, five. Sheets flew in the air as the book was turned into pieces. Tyrion should have expected that. He shouldn’t have searched so long for Grandmaester Kaeth’s work only to see it destroyed. Joffrey looked arrogantly at Tyrion. He looked down, but inside he was burning in rage. This boy really needed a lesson. If there’s someone Tyrion’s father should have put back to his place before he died, it was Joffrey.

“Such a great sword should have a name. What shall I call her?”

People started to shout names after Joffrey’s question. _Stormbringer. Terminus. Widow’s Wail. Wolfsbane._

“Widow’s Wail, I like that. Every time I use it, it’ll be like cutting off Ned Stark’s head all over again.” Tyrion felt Sansa’s hand clapping more tightly around his. He tried to comfort her with a movement of his thumb over hers as Joffrey went back to his place. Everyone was silent and looking away, many trying to look as if they were only interested by the content of their plates. No one seemed to enjoy what just happened, except Joffrey and Cersei. The last one was smiling cruelly at Tyrion and Sansa. Joffrey seemed to believe that wasn’t enough.
“Sharp! I told you, I am no stranger to Valyrian steel.” Tyrion’s mind started to work when he heard these words. He remembered three discussions. One he had with Catelyn Stark a long time ago, another with his brother Jaime not long after he came back to King’s Landing. He also remembered a third one he surprised between Joffrey and the Hound at Winterfell. “My father had no time for books. If you read less, Uncle Imp, perhaps Lady Sansa would have a baby in her belly by now. Don’t be so sad, Sansa, once I’ve gotten Queen Margaery with child I’ll visit your bedchamber and show my little uncle how it’s done. You and my uncle owe me a better present anyway. This one is all chopped to pieces.”

Tyrion could barely contain his fury now, but he chose another path than the one he took at his own wedding. He wasn’t drunk enough. His mind was his best weapon, and it just gave him a perfect sword to silence Joffrey for a while. He forced a smile upon his face. “Perhaps I could give you a knife, your Grace. To match your sword. A dagger of the same fine Valyrian steel… with a dragonbone hilt. What do you think of it? Along with a bag of silver maybe.”

Joffrey looked dumbfounded at him for a moment, then finally stammered. “You… yes, a dagger to match my sword… Good. A… a gold hilt with rubies in it. Dragonbone is too plain.”

“As you wish, your Grace.” Tyrion put a wide smile to make him understand. Joffrey didn’t dare to talk for the rest of the breakfast, except for thanking shortly the people who offered him the last presents. During this time, Tyrion remained in his thoughts. He had the answer he wanted. He knew who tried to have Brandon Stark killed. And this person knew that he knew it.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
This chapter is the longest one I wrote up to now. A lot happens in it, and I really liked to write it.

Discover how the royal wedding is different from what it was in the show. Remember that now Tyrion and Sansa are Lord and Lady of Casterly Rock, Cersei doesn't really wield any real power and the necklace with the poison disappeared in Blackwater Bay. Things may happen differently.

Reviews for this chapter will be more than appreciated.

They walked to their rooms in Maegor’s Holdfast. The breakfast could have gone worse, but considering Joffrey was present, Sansa didn’t hope it would be without clash. And sadly, she had been right. Between the destruction of the book and Joffrey’s misplaced comments, Sansa feared Tyrion may say or do something stupid like during their wedding feast, but luckily he suggested to offer Joffrey another present that seemed to please him. Joffrey didn’t dare to speak after that. He looked entirely surprised by Tyrion’s idea.

When she thought about it, Sansa found Joffrey’s reaction quite strange. Why didn’t he say anything after Tyrion proposed him another gift? Was he so dumbfounded by Tyrion’s offer that he didn’t know what to say afterwards? For sure, Sansa supposed a dagger made of Valyrian steel and with a dragonbone hilt was no small gift, but still. There was something strange in the way Joffrey behaved. Perhaps he couldn’t find anything to say after Tyrion proposed such a present in replacement.

Tyrion’s behaviour was strange as well. He didn’t say a word. It was as if she didn’t exist in this moment. He looked lost in his thoughts. Perhaps he was only in a bad mood after Joffrey just hack to pieces such a precious book. Sansa only had to look at Tyrion’s desk in their bedroom to see how he loved to read. There were nights he spent entirely on reading. He probably spent more time to read than she spent herself to pray.

“I’m sorry for the book.” She really was.

Tyrion suddenly seemed to realize she was here. “Oh, it was Joffrey’s book. He had the right to do what he liked with it. Now there are only three copies of Grandmaester Kaeth’s work left in the world. Too bad he chose to use it that way. He might have learned a thing or two if he’d read it. I should have known better. I should have seen… a good many things.”

Tyrion’s mind seemed far away. “Perhaps he will be more pleased by the dagger. He seemed to like the idea,” she suggested.

“Perhaps. Though I have doubts.” Tyrion really acted strangely, but turned to look at her. “Joffrey
quarreled with your brother Robb at Winterfell. Was there any ill feeling between Bran and Joffrey as well?"

Sansa was quite confused by the question. "Bran? No, not that I remember. Bran was a sweet boy. Everyone loved him. He and Tommen fought with wooden swords, but just for play. He liked all these things, riding, fighting, climbing… Until he fell from the tower. We always feared he would fall someday. And finally it happened. And then Theon Greyjoy killed him, but it was later."

Sansa felt tears threatening to flood her eyes, but she maintained them inside. It was still difficult to think about her dead brothers. She felt Tyrion’s thumb rubbing the back of her hand. It was comforting. She looked back at him and saw the same sorry eyes he had so often in her presence.

“I’m sorry for your brothers. You loved your brothers, much as I love Jaime.”

There would have been a time when Sansa would have denied it and stated her family were traitors, just like when Tyrion arrived at King’s Landing and she really talked to him for the first time. But she knew him better now. She nodded to show it was the case. “And now they’re dead,” she added mournfully.

“Not all of them. You still have one who’s alive.” Sansa realized Tyrion was right. Jon was at the Wall, protected from the Crown thanks to his belonging to the Night’s Watch. “You should write to him.”

That wasn’t the first time Tyrion suggested Sansa asked news about Jon. She wasn’t sure about it. “I was never close to Jon. Arya spent much more time with him. I always considered him as a bastard more than a brother.” Sansa regretted she treated Jon differently from Robb, Bran and Rickon now, but she couldn’t change the past. Perhaps Jon wouldn’t even want to speak to her.

“Yes, he’s a bastard, but he’s your brother all the same. And he is the last member of your family who’s still alive, and you are his last sister. You should write to him. Nothing stops you any longer. The Night’s Watch may even be happy to know the Lady of Casterly Rock is exchanging letters with her brother at the Wall. They always like to have links with the powerful families so they may get help when need be.”

Sansa remained thoughtful for a moment. She didn’t know what to do about it. Finally, she couldn’t make a choice. “I’ll think about it.”

They reached their rooms and entered. It wouldn’t be too long before they had to go to the Great Sept of Baelor to attend the royal wedding. Sansa wasn’t in any hurry or eagerness to assist it. She didn’t want to be close to Joffrey for another second, even less after his threats during the breakfast. She had reddened and wanted to push him from the top of a tower at this moment. She wasn’t his pawn anymore. She was Tyrion’s wife, the Lady of the Westerlands, and he had no right to treat her this way like he used to do. She never wanted so much to apply the maxim A Lannister always pays her debts. Sadly, because of her new status as Lady of House Lannister, she had no choice but to be present at the wedding. She couldn’t pretend an illness to the stomach or something similar like she could before.

“You never asked me why your mother arrested me before the war. I mean, you never asked me before I told you the whole truth about it.” Sansa noticed Tyrion was looking away from her as he asked the question.

“Well, she accused you of trying to murder Bran because of Littlefinger’s lies. I know it wasn’t true. She made a mistake. Why?”
“In fact, once we arrived at the Eyrie your aunt accused me as well to have murdered your uncle, Jon Arryn.”

Tyrion was acting very strangely, as if he was ashamed of something. He had the same behaviour than when he told her about his first wife. He refused to look directly into her eyes and remained at a respectful distance from her. Why was he acting this way?

“Sansa, I never tried to harm your brother Brann in any way.”

“Of course, I know.” For Sansa, Tyrion trying to harm a child was simply impossible.

“And I mean no harm to you.”

“I know.” Sansa didn’t understand. Why did he tell her all these things? She already knew them after so much time. “Why are you telling me this?”

Tyrion tightened his lips before he answered. “There is something I must tell you, but not right now, with the wedding and everything. I’ll tell you tomorrow.” He approached and took her hand and his own. “I just want you to know one thing. I won’t ever hurt you.”

Sansa smiled. He didn’t have to tell her. “Tyrion, it’s been a very long time now that I’ve known that.”

They remained in this position for quite a long time, just looking in the eyes of the other. Finally, Tyrion broke the moment and released her hand from his. “I need to speak with my brother. Don’t worry, I’ll be back in time to accompany you to the ceremony. That won’t take long.”

Tyrion just left her like this. She wished they had remained in this position for more time. His eyes were beautiful. She never really realized how beautiful they were until now. Sansa had been sitting during the whole conversation, so they had been of the same height at this moment, just like when they walked in the gardens. Sansa had felt attracted to him. She felt she could have stayed this way, lost into his eyes, for hours. He was kind. He was brave. He was gentle. He was strong. He was everything her father once promised her, and even more. How blind she had been. She wished Tyrion was still there. Why did he leave to see his brother? There were so many things she wanted to tell him right now. And yet, if he was there, right before her, she didn’t know what she would tell him.

Sansa remained lost in her thoughts for a very long time. She remembered the day she and Tyrion were wed. She had been more than nervous at this moment. She had feared the moment they would have to retire to their wedding bed and come as husband and wife. By luck, Tyrion’s drunkenness spared them the bedding ceremony, and he was merciful enough to not force her to consummate their marriage. But right now, she thought about the time they shared a kiss during the wedding ceremony. Sansa couldn’t really remember how it was. She thought she felt nothing when he kissed her. She didn’t remember feeling anything. Perhaps in her tense state she shielded herself against any feeling. She wished she could remember how this kiss had been. She wondered how it would be to kiss her husband, how it would be to feel his lips on hers. Tyrion may surprise you. From what I’ve heard, he’s quite experienced. She was beginning to wonder what type of experience he had.

The door opened and Mira came in. She looked around before she talked to her mistress. Sansa knew it was because she wanted to make sure no one else was present when she would call her by her name. “Sansa.”

“Mira, I’m glad to see you again. Did you like the breakfast?” Mira was among the handmaidens who served the food during the breakfast with the king. She remained discreet as always in these
moments.

“As much as I could like it, Sansa.” Sansa knew by her facial expression and the look in her eyes what she meant. Joffrey’s behaviour had been unpleasant for everyone. Sansa noticed Mira was holding something in her hands. It looked like a gown.

“What is it, Mira?”

“It’s your gown for the wedding.” Sansa looked surprised at her. The gown Mira was holding was red. Cersei already sent her a brown gown with golden sides and sleeves. Mira seemed to notice her questioning look, “Lord Tyrion ordered a new one to be made for you as soon as he could. He thought you deserved something better for the occasion.”

Tyrion never told her about it. Mira went to the bed and unfolded the gown on it for Sansa to see it entirely. Sansa couldn’t believe what she saw. She remembered the golden gown she had for her own wedding. It had been gorgeous, but Sansa didn’t like it because of the situation and the lion motives on it. This one was even more amazing. It was a deep red gown made of silk, with thin lines of gold and silver running all over its surface and joining where Sansa’s heart would be when she would wear the gown. The neckline was golden, the hem was silver. Mira turned it to show her the interior of the gown. All the fabric inside was silver colored. Red outside, silver inside. Lannister outside, Stark inside. Sansa never thought she could like a Lannister gown so much.

Mira was smiling at her. “You knew,” Sansa told her on an accusing tone.

“Forgive me, my lady.” Mira apologized, without losing her smile. “Lord Tyrion wanted it to be a surprise, but he asked me about your preferences. He turned half the dressmakers of King’s Landing mad with it. They worked day and night on this gown.” Sansa could barely hold a cry of joy. She stared at the gown in wonder. “I think it will be much more beautiful on you, Sansa.”

Sansa came back to life and positioned herself so Mira may help her to don the gown. Mira took care of her hair after. She braided Sansa’s hair in a very complicated way with many braids. She added a gorgeous golden hair net on it to hold it all, with two bigger braids falling before her shoulders. Finally she put Sansa’s necklace around her neck. That was the most important thing. Sansa would never go to Margaery’s wedding without the necklace Tyrion gave her. When Sansa looked at her reflection in the glass, she realized how beautiful it looked. The dressmakers really outdid themselves. She would have to reward them. Sansa realized it was time to leave for the wedding. Where was Tyrion? She wondered what he would think of her.

Tyron arrived two minutes later. He wore a handsome black doublet with several symbols that made him look taller than usual. Sansa rose to welcome him, and also to allow him to see how she really looked in her new gown. After he shut the door behind him, he stayed here, his mouth half-open. Sansa was smiling at him. He’s impressed. He seemed to recover after a moment.

“My lady. Lady Mira, may you leave me alone with my wife a moment. Wait for us outside, it won’t take very long.”

“Of course. My lord. My lady.” Mira left and Sansa was alone with Tyrion. He stood there, not moving, only looking at her. It lasted quite a long time. Sansa wondered what he thought. Why was he saying nothing?

“Is there something wrong?”

Tyron seemed to wake up a second time. “Sorry, Sansa. It’s just… I didn’t think you could be more beautiful than you already are.” Sansa flushed from head to toe. “I guess I must stop to compliment
you, or else you’ll turn redder than the gown.”

They both chuckled. “Thank you, Tyrion. I like it.”

“I hope you’ll like the other surprise as well.”

Another surprise? Tyrion took something inside his doublet. It was a leather box that looked like the one he gave to Sansa for her fifteenth name day, but this one looked bigger. He closed the distance between them and opened the box under her eyes. It contained a medallion constituted of a huge red ruby with a little golden lion above it. The chain was entirely made of gold. Sansa knelt to observe it more closely. It was very beautiful.

“The Ladies of Casterly wore this for five centuries. My mother was the last one to wear it.”

Sansa looked at Tyrion. He seemed to expect a reply from her. “Thank you. It’s really beautiful. Do you really think I should wear it?” Sansa wasn’t sure if she should wear a medallion that belonged to Tyrion’s mother before.

“Of course.” Tyrion looked as if he never heard something more stupid. “It’s yours now.”

“Thank you.” That was all Sansa could say. It really was gorgeous, no matter it was red.

“Can I…?” He made gestures with his hands. He wanted to put it around her neck.

“Yes, of course.” Sansa turned her back to allow her husband to pass the necklace around her neck. He dismissed her two braids behind her temporarily and passed the golden link around her neck, attaching its two extremities behind her. Then he put back her braids into place before her shoulders. She felt his hands brushing her skin around her neck and shuddered at the feeling. Tyrion went back before her and she rose. He observed her a moment and declared: “You’re perfect. Far too much perfect for me.”

“No, you’re very handsome as well.” Before their wedding, she told him he was handsome, but didn’t believe it. Now she did.

Tyrion chuckled. “Yes. The husband of your dreams.” He didn’t believe her. He continued before Sansa could deny it. “I think it’s time to go. We cannot miss the wedding of my nephew.” He offered a hand and Sansa took it.

They walked through the Red Keep without incident and went to their litter. Mira was following behind them and walked beside their litter, just like Bronn and Podrick. Tyrion closed the shutters, saying the people of King’s Landing would probably throw dung at them if they saw him, and he didn’t want them to ruin her gown. Sansa wasn’t sure if it was true, but she complied all the same. She knew people weren’t always loved as they should. Tyrion did more than anyone else in the government for the people of King’s Landing, and despite this he told her one day he was the most despised member of the small council in all the city. People blamed him for the ills of the city during the time he was acting Hand of the King. And things hadn’t gone better after he became Master of Coin. Sansa knew it was possible. She had been hated by the people as well because she was betrothed to Joffrey during a period of starvation and because her family were seen as traitors.

“I’m afraid we’re going to have a problem at the wedding,” Tyrion suddenly said.

“What do you mean?”

“People won’t be able to choose who to look at: the bride, or you.”
Sansa flushed again. “They will all be looking at Margaery. She’s the one who’s getting married.”

“If I wasn’t your husband, I would look at you instead to look at her.”

“And because you’re my husband, you’ll be looking at Margaery instead of me?” Sansa asked it on a playful tone.

“Yes, because it is my duty to look at the groom and the bride, and because I won’t be seeing you for the first time when you’ll enter the Great Sept. The other way I wouldn’t be able to look away from you more than a few seconds.”

Sansa wanted him to stop complimenting her. She would really end redder than the gown. It seemed he understood that, so they talked about that thing and another until they reached the Great Sept of Baelor. When they entered, Sansa thought she saw some people turn their head to look at her. It seemed Tyrion wasn’t entirely wrong. As Lord and Lady of Casterly Rock, she and Tyrion had to speak to several of their bannermen who were present for the occasion. Sansa had tried to memorize all their names over the past few days, but she still had issues with some of them, especially those she never met up to now, or those she only saw a single time. There were so many people who talked to her during the last week. She couldn’t remember them all. Tyrion on the other hand knew all of them, though he said he regretted Podrick wasn’t there to help her. The squire knew all the sigils of the families of the Westerlands, but he had to wait outside the Great Sept. They talked with many highborn people, Sansa mostly with the ladies, Tyrion with the lords, until Ser Kevan walked in their direction.

“My lord. My lady.” It was strange for Sansa to hear Ser Kevan Lannister calling Tyrion his lord, but she guessed it shouldn’t be surprising since Tyrion was Ser Kevan’s lord now. “I would need to speak to you in private, Tyrion. It’s an urgent matter.”

Tyrion looked at his uncle for a moment, then turned to Sansa. “That won’t be long. I’m sure you can handle the other lords without me for a few minutes.” Sansa nodded. She spent the last week dealing with people crawling before or behind her, so a few minutes alone was no challenge for her.

Tyrion left with his uncle. They were only gone for a few seconds when she heard someone in her back. “Lady Lannister. You really grow more beautiful every day.”

Sansa turned to face Ser Loras Tyrell. Some time ago, she might have flushed and her heart may have threatened to explode in her chest, but now her heart didn’t react to his presence. It only reacted to the presence of one man and only one. “Ser Loras. It’s really kind of you. I’m sure you’re very eager to be the brother-in-law of our king.”

“Loras is as eager about this as he was eager to marry Cersei.” Lady Olenna Tyrell appeared right next to her grandson. “I think we owe you some thanks. Without you, the heir of Highgarden may have ended up married to a woman unable to give him children.”

The Queen of Thorns was the only one who could say such things so naturally. Well, Tyrion could as well, but he was more careful about where, when and to who he told these things. Margaery’s grandmother didn’t hold back in any case. That brought Sansa to make a bold statement as well.

“I’m sure your son thought about this during the trial.”

“Oh, Mace was always an idiot. He’s only an oaf. I’m very sorry about the fears he caused to you. I warned him it was dangerous to try to ride a lion, but as always he didn’t listen. A good thing the Red Viper was here to correct his mistakes, or who knows the situation we would be in. Anyway, we have a great debt towards you, Sansa.”
Sansa wished she could speak so freely all the time. Perhaps she would be able to do so once she would be at Casterly Rock. Ser Loras chose this moment to take his leave. “If you will pardon me, my ladies. I wish you a good day.”

He wasn’t interested by the conversation, it was quite obvious. Sansa was left with the Queen of Thorns, something she didn’t hate at all. She was much less boring than anyone else. Only Tyrion could compete with her about making lively conversations. Sansa noticed the mother of Lord Tyrell was looking down at her neck with a strange expression. It didn’t last long, but she thought she saw something like surprise and incomprehension on her face for a moment.

“This is a beautiful necklace you have here. May I have a closer look at it?”

“Of course, Lady Olenna.” The Queen of Thorns took the ruby into her right hand and examined it closely. Her expression was indecipherable. “It belonged to my husband’s mother. He gave it to me today.”

Lady Olenna let go the necklace. “What a kind and generous husband you have.” The Tyrell matriarch took a step back and looked at Sansa from head to toe. “You look exquisite. The wind has been at you, though.” She took a somber expression. “I haven’t had the opportunity to tell you how sorry I was to hear about your brother. War is war, but killing a man at a wedding, horrid. What sort of monster would do such a thing? As if men need more reasons to fear marriage. Now that peace has come and all is right with the world, I hope your husband will be able to bring you to Highgarden for a visit. It would do you good to see some of the world.”

“I thank you, Lady Olenna. But my husband and I must first go to Casterly Rock. I have to see the castle whose lady I am now. I must learn and perform my duties first, but I would be very happy to visit Highgarden as soon as I can.”

“You are very wise, Sansa. Try to stay like you are and to influence your husband. I would like to say it is a sad thing that you didn’t marry my grandson, but I’m afraid it is only sad for us and all too good for you.”

Sansa could only agree inside with the old woman. “I’m sure you’ll find another suitable wife for your son.”

“Oh, no doubt about it. He’s still the most desirable bachelor in all the Seven Kingdoms. Young women who love knights will all flock towards him in the hope he may ask for their hand.” Just as I once hoped. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll join these other ladies of the Reach who are only here in the hope to get some favor from their lord’s mother.” The Lady Olenna left towards some women clad in Reach clothes. Sansa recognized a few of them for spending time with them along with Margaery during the last days.

Before Sansa could move again, someone else addressed her from her left. “Sansa.” She turned and came face to face with Tommen. “Oh, forgive me… Lady Lannister.”

Sansa had to smile. The young boy looked so shy before her. “Hi, Tommen. I’m glad to see you. You are very handsome today.”

The boy flushed. He remembered Sansa of Podrick for a second. “Thank you, Sansa. Sorry, my lady.”

“You can call me Sansa, Tommen. There’s no problem. We’re of the same age and of the same family now. No need for formalities.”
“Thank you, Sansa.” He looked happy and relieved. He was the total opposite of Joffrey. How could two brothers be so different? Sansa thought a moment about herself and Arya, but it didn’t count. Even she and Arya were more alike than Joffrey and Tommen. Tommen continued to speak. “I don’t know how to call you anymore. I always called you by your name before, but now you’re my aunt and the Lady of Casterly Rock. I don’t know any longer by which name to call you.”

“Sansa will be enough, Tommen.” He really was a sweet boy, even more for his age.

“Tommen!” Sansa knew this voice only too well. The Queen Regent was before her and Tommen within a few seconds. She wore a black gown to show she mourned her father. Sansa thought she probably mourned much more her failed attempts to have Tyrion killed. “I told you to stay close to me.”

“Sorry, mother. I was only talking to Sansa.” Tommen looked down at his feet. Cersei seemed to notice Sansa’s presence for the first time.

“Ah, hello little dove.” The queen pronounced the two last word with venom.

“Your Grace.” For the short time you can still be called that way, Sansa reflected, “I’m afraid it is inappropriate to call a lady by such a nickname, especially when she is the lady of your house.” Perhaps Sansa should have talked more carefully to Cersei, but it seemed her discussion with the Queen of Thorns made her tongue looser. Anyway, she was in no mood to spare any torment to Cersei after she tried to kill Tyrion.

“Oh, forgive me. I forgot you were married now. After all, you’re not far from an unwed young girl. Something is still missing to your marriage.”

It wasn’t difficult to figure out what the woman meant. Sansa didn’t let herself being taken aback by her remark. “You are all forgiven, your Grace. I’m sure you know much more than me on this matter. After all, you have three children coming from a complete and successful marriage with the king. It’s a good thing everyone knows Lord Renly and Lord Stannis are liars.”

Cersei’s face lost her satisfied smile. “Of course, everyone knows they were liars. Just like your father and your brother.” A smile spread again on the queen’s face, but Sansa didn’t blink. She remained impassive, holding the queen’s gaze. Cersei couldn’t hurt her using her family anymore. The queen kept her smile for a certain time, but she realized quite quickly her words didn’t have the desired effect on Sansa. Cersei could talk, but it was all she could do. She had no power. Her words were wind.

“What is this?” Following the queen’s glare, Sansa guessed she was looking at her neck.

“It’s a necklace, your Grace.” Cersei herself was wearing a huge necklace exhibiting three big golden circles with images of lions. The two necklaces Sansa wore were more than simple in comparison.

“How dare you! This necklace belonged to my mother. Take it off right now!”

“No, she won’t.” Tyrion appeared from behind Sansa. “I offered it to her. The Lady of Casterly Rock is the only one who may wear this necklace.”

“She is no lady of Casterly Rock. Her whole family is a bunch of traitors.”

“I must contradict you, your Grace.” Sansa spoke calmly. She wouldn’t stoop to Cersei’s level. “Your son, our king, recognized me as Lady of Casterly Rock, Lady of the Westerlands, and Lady of Winterfell. I’m sure you wouldn’t make the mistake to speak against your son’s decisions.” Cersei
was agape before her words, it was quite obvious. “Anyway, my family are no traitors. I am a Lannister now. Would you say your own family are traitors?”

Cersei couldn’t find an answer to that. She could only say in a low voice. “You will never be a Lannister. You may wear our colors, but you will never be one of us. Come, Tommen.”

Cersei left with a confused and sad Tommen. The boy surely didn’t like what he just saw. Sansa was again alone with Tyrion.

“Are you alright?” he asked.

“Yes, I am. Thank you.”

“You got yourself out of this quite well. We should take place, the bride is about to arrive.”

People were effectively taking their places as they spoke. Tyrion and Sansa found themselves on the right side of the alley Margaery would cross with her father, at the first rank with Ser Kevan Lannister and Tommen. Cersei was left behind Tommen and beside Ser Jaime. Sansa felt the queen’s eyes upon her. The Tyrells were on the left side of the sept.

Margaery entered, standing tall with the sun behind her. She wore a light white gown with leaves and branches drawn on it. Her gown left her arms and chest bare. Her brown hair were forming some sort of peak over her head with many curls. She walked graciously through the alley at the arm of her father. When they reached the level where Joffrey stood, Lord Mace released Margaery from his arm and let Joffrey take it, bowing deeply before him. Margaery was smiling at Joffrey.

Sansa knew Margaery wasn’t happy to marry Joffrey. She was happy to marry the king, nothing more. When Sansa thought about it, that was probably the case for her too before. She had been happy to marry Joffrey because he was the prince. She thought she was marrying a charming prince, like one in the stories. It had been approximately the same when she thought she would marry Ser Loras. She thought she was marrying the handsome knight like those in the stories. She was in love with the prince and the Knight of Flowers. She wasn’t in love with Joffrey or Loras. She thought about the man standing on her left. With Tyrion, it was different. She liked him for who he was, not for who she thought he was. His titles didn’t attract her. It was so different. She was happy with him. Not happy like when she was happy about marrying the prince or the knight. It had been a child’s happiness. She had thought everything would be perfect like in the stories. Life wasn’t a story, now she knew it. Her marriage with Tyrion wasn’t a perfect one, far from it, but it was a marriage where she could trust her husband, share good moments with him despite the horrible things that happened to both of them.

The ceremony went without incident. Joffrey was of the same height than Margaery, so she didn’t have to kneel so he could wrap her into the Lannister cloak. Sansa wondered why he put a Lannister cloak on her shoulders. Shouldn’t it be a Baratheon cloak? The High Septon said the usual words, then tied Joffrey’s and Margaery’s hand with a white ribbon, proclaiming their union after the groom and the bride said their vows. The High Septon said Joffrey was from Houses Lannister and Baratheon, naming House Lannister first. Then finally Joffrey pledged his supposed love with a kiss as people applauded. Tyrion and she joined the applause, not with much enthusiasm. Joffrey and Margaery turned to face the crowd, hand in hand.

“We have a new queen,” said Sansa in a low voice to her husband, rolling her eyes.

“Better her than you.” Sansa could only agree with Tyrion.

Margaery and Joffrey led the long parade from the Great Sept to the gardens of the Red Keep where
the seventy-seven courses feast would take place. Sansa found herself sitting on the dais on the married pair’s left. Tyrion was on her right, Tommen on her left. Only Tommen separated her from Cersei, and only Ser Kevan separated Tyrion from Joffrey. Singers, musicians, jugglers, fools and other artists filled the spaces between the many tables. The feast began after a prayer by the High Septon and a toast from Joffrey for Margaery.

The first service was a creamy soup of mushrooms and buttered snails, served in gilded bowls. Tyrion finished very quickly, and to Sansa’s despair, he filled entirely a cup of wine. Sansa didn’t like to see Tyrion drink. She never saw someone drink so much. She made sure during the breakfast he wouldn’t have more than a cup, and she would make sure of the same for this feast. Sansa seized the jug next to him and put it far away, close to Tommen. She knew Joffrey’s brother wouldn’t drink wine.

“What are you doing?” Tyrion complained.

“You’re not going to spend the feast drinking.” She said it on a firm tone, the same that showed it was no use to argue.

“I don’t drink Milk of the Poppy anymore.”

“No, but you still drink too much.”

“With all the food we’re going to eat, I’m going to need a lot of wine.”

“I’ll give you back the jug at the tenth service.”

“The tenth? My lady, you’re really cruel.”

“For your own good. That’s what a good wife must do.”

They argued with amused and mocking voices. That wasn’t entirely serious. Sansa knew Tyrion drank in his solar while working, but she didn’t want to see him drunk again. Tyrion wasn’t angry at her for that. He only played the hurt husband who just lost his wine. But Sansa knew he would empty the jug quite quickly if she let it before him.

“Sansa, you’re going to make me the most sober man in the Seven Kingdoms.” They both burst into laughs, which brought some looks from Ser Kevan and even Joffrey and Margaery. Sansa noticed Ser Kevan was looking at her with a little smile. He seemed to enjoy the situation as well. Sansa never saw his brother smile, and Tyrion told her once Lord Tywin never smiled.

The second course was a pastry coffin filled with pork, pine nuts, and eggs. Tyrion was done with it before Sansa was at the half. How could he eat so quickly? “Two done. Seventy-five to come,” he commented.

A first singer came to perform before Joffrey and Margaery. He called himself Hamish the Harper and performed a new song he just invented, *Lord Renly’s Ride*. The song told the sad story about Renly repenting his attempt to usurp Joffrey’s Crown after his death and how he defied the Lord of Death to come back to life in order to protect the Realm against Lord Stannis. Sansa saw Margaery’s about to cry as the song ended and Renly flew to Highgarden to steal one last look at his true love’s face. Sansa had to admit the song was beautiful. If she heard it a few years ago, she would have wept.

“Renly Baratheon never repented of anything in his life, but if I was a judge in a contest, he would win a gilded lute,” Tyrion said.
“I agree. The song may not be true, but it’s beautiful all the same.” That reminded Sansa of the bard at Winterfell.

Many other songs were played. There were songs from the Westerlands, ballads from the Reach, some Dornish songs. *A Rose of Gold. Maiden, Mother, and Crone. My Lady Wife.* Sansa worshiped the last one when she still lived in Winterfell. She remembered the bard who came one day sang it. There were many singers and jugglers who performed for them. Sansa had to listen to many versions of *The Rains of Castamere.* She knew this song was made to honor Tywin Lannister, but seven times seemed a little too much. After the first version, she spent the following ones talking with Tyrion. She asked him questions about Casterly Rock. She wanted to know how it looked before they went there. Tyrion didn’t seem to complain about talking during the songs. He didn’t seem to appreciate so many versions of *The Rains of Castamere* either.

There were a few songs that surprised Sansa and she liked to listen. A young woman named Karliene performed *My Featherbed, Mother’s Hymn* and *The Song of the Seven*… and, she had to admit it, a very beautiful and sad version of *The Rains of Castamere.* She had a wonderful voice and a very good bard to accompany her. Sansa thought she would like to hear more songs from her. There was also a man with a black beard who came with many musicians, including drummers, pipers and fiddlers. They played a beautiful song, describing it like a miracle of sound. The song was very pleasant, though Sansa wasn’t sure about its signification at the beginning.

*When winter comes*

*When life is frozen*

*When the moors they hide away under the snow*

*Fingers of doom*

*Will clutch the chosen*

*All beasts will shiver, from the lion to the crow*

*When winter comes*

*When times are starkest*

*When the wailing of the wolves fades with the sun*

*The wilds are numb*

*The days are darkest*

*The fates of many cease to rest on only one*

*Walls will not hold the winter*

*Over and under crawl*

*Walls will not hold the winter*
The song brought back to Sansa memories about the stories Old Nan used to tell them. This song strangely remembered her of the ones about the White Walkers. Joffrey didn’t really seemed to care about this song, but Sansa did. In the end she decided she liked it.

During an umpteenth version of *The Rains of Castamere*, Joffrey showed he was bored by this song him too. “Very good. Very good. Off you go.” He threw a few pieces to the musicians, sending them away. The three poor men picked up as many pieces as they could on the floor before they quickly left. A few people laughed among the guests, but everyone on the dais wasn’t. Sansa noticed Margaery whispering something to Joffrey. The king rose and tapped his goblet with a spoon.

“Everyone. The queen would like to say a few words.” People applauded as the new queen rose. She was the one people really loved in the royal couple.

“We are so fortunate to enjoy this marvelous food and drink. Not all among us are so lucky. To thank the gods for bringing the recent war to a just end, King Joffrey has decreed that the leftovers from our feast be given to the poorest in his city.”

People applauded and Sansa joined them, though not with as much enthusiasm as she wished. She
didn’t agree with the fact the war came to a just end. This war was a mistake and a nonsense ever since the beginning. All this was caused by a few lies from a brothelkeeper. However, Sansa appreciated Margaery and she knew she was sincere when she decided to help the others. Of course, she knew Margaery used it as a way to be popular as well, but all the same, Sansa guessed it was better than to have the leftovers thrown into Blackwater Bay or left for dogs.

“Good thing. With the number of children still starving in the city and the many people who would kill for a radish, that may help to reduce the starvation a little.” Tyrion looked bitter as he spoke. Sansa knew how he found the royal wedding extravagant. Also, it was unfair in some way. Tyrion made a lot of effort whilst he was Hand of the King to make sure the population of King’s Landing could eat... after the Tyrells closed the Roseroad. He didn’t receive the recognition he deserved.

Sansa leaned towards him and whispered in his ear. “You did more for these people than everyone else. I know it.” She kissed him on the cheek. He looked surprised for a moment, but then smiled at her. He seemed happy.

Sansa saw Brienne come before Joffrey and Margaery and bow before them. “My king. My queen.” She wore a very simple blue gown. There were no ornaments or symbols on it, except the sigil of her house. She was probably the person dressed in the simplest way here, and yet Sansa could only think it didn’t suit her at all. Brienne really was in her element when wearing the complete set of a knight, along with a sword and a dagger at her belt, but she couldn’t wear it at the royal wedding. It was so strange and... unnatural to see her dressed this way.

Margaery rose to welcome her and took her hand. “Lady Brienne. So good of you to come.”

“I’m no lady, your Grace.”

“Did you just bow?” This comment came from Cersei. She was laughing at Brienne.

“Apologies, your Grace. I never did master the curtsey.”

“You’re the one who put a sword through Renly Baratheon.” It was Joffrey this time who spoke, but Margaery came to Brienne’s help immediately.

“That’s not true, my love. Brienne had nothing to do with it.” It was a good thing Margaery quickly corrected Joffrey. Brienne wouldn’t tell the story about the shadow.

“A shame. I’d knight the man that put an end to that deviant’s life.” As if you didn’t have a more deviant life.

Brienne managed to keep her composure despite Joffrey’s impertinence. “I just wanted to congratulate you both and wish you good fortune. The country has been at war too long. I hope your reign is long and peaceful.”

“Yes, yes.” Joffrey was bored, as always. Let’s hope his reign is peaceful and short as possible.

“Thank you. I hope we see more of you.” Sansa doubted Margaery’s words would come true. Brienne was going to accompany her and Tyrion to Casterly Rock when they would leave in a few days. And for now, Sansa wasn’t about to come back to King’s Landing any sooner once she would leave it. Brienne left, but Sansa saw Cersei intercepting her before she was too far away. She didn’t hear their conversation, but from Brienne’s expression, she thought Cersei told her something that scared her. When Cersei came back to her place beside Tommen, Sansa noticed an assassin look on her face. She would have to talk about it to Brienne later.

In the meantime, Tyrion was talking with his uncle. Sansa thought she heard the name of Alysanne
Lefford. The name of Lefford wasn’t unfamiliar to her. Moon Boy started to juggle with balls, not very well. Joffrey decided to make his show more entertaining.

“A gold dragon to whoever knocks my fool’s hat off.”

The fool was immediately receiving oranges, peaches, apples, and any other food that could be thrown from everywhere. Sansa wished it was Ser Dontos who had been present to receive the food. Which service were they at now? They were eating crabs boiled in fiery eastern spices, trenchers filled with chunks of chopped mutton stewed in almond milk with carrots, raisins, and onions, and fish tarts fresh from the ovens. The latter was so hot it burned the fingers. Sansa didn’t recognize some of the food they served since she never saw it before, so Tyrion had to explain her what it was. She guessed she could allow Tyrion to have another cup of wine. She poured wine for both of them. She needed wine as well.

“Oh, thank you,” Tyrion said as she filled his cup. “A toast. To the new Lady of Casterly Rock, and of Winterfell.” They collided their cups and drink. Sansa had to smile. She hoped this wedding feast wouldn’t last too long. Joffrey turned more insufferable and improper each time he opened the mouth. She wanted to be alone with Tyrion.

Suddenly, other clanks from spoon’s knocks on a goblet brought the silence. Ser Kevan stood up. “My lords, my ladies. We are here today to celebrate a new century. Three hundred years ago, Aegon the Conqueror landed in this very place and built his very first fortress of wood and earth. Within two years, he united seven kingdoms previously separated, constantly at war with each other. Aegon wasn’t called the Conqueror for nothing, but despite the wars he led, he was a man of peace. By the unity he brought to the Seven Kingdoms, he gave peace and prosperity to millions of people. Through the centuries that followed, many men contributed to maintain the work Aegon did. One of them left us not long ago. Tywin Lannister, Lord of Casterly Rock, Shield of Lannisport, Lord of the Westerlands, and Warden of the West, was Hand of the King for twenty years under Aerys the Second, then again recently for his grandson, King Joffrey. Some people disapproved, even despised him, but despite all of this, he brought peace and prosperity to the Seven Kingdoms and worked harder than most Hands of the King all over history. He left us recently, dying peacefully. I would ask everyone to observe a minute of silence in the memory of this man who dedicated his life to the Realm.”

People remained silent for what looked like a minute. Sansa saw Joffrey struggling to say nothing, barely contained by Margaery’s hand on his arm and her smiles. Sansa wondered if he was drunk. He probably was. What would happen next? The minute passed.

“Now, let’s drink to the peace he brought. Let’s drink to the king he served and his new queen, and let’s drink to the new Lord and the new Lady of Casterly Rock, Lord Tyrion and Lady Sansa of House Lannister.”

People cheered all around as they raised their cup. Sansa felt Ser Kevan looking at her and Tyrion while he drank, a smile on his face. He really was different from his brother.

“Thank you, Uncle,” Tyrion told him in a low voice.

Sansa saw Prince Oberyn and his paramour approaching them. “Lord Tyrion. Lady Sansa.”

“Prince Oberyn. Lady Ellaria.” Tyrion was the one to greet them. So that was the name of this woman. Ellaria.

“I’m no lady, my lord,” the woman pointed out. “But I appreciate the intention.”
“How should I call you then?”

“Ellaria will be quite enough,” the prince intervened. “I don’t believe you have met her, Lady Sansa. I present you my paramour, Ellaria Sand.”

No, indeed. Sansa never spoke to her. She only saw her from afar a few times. Sansa was surprised Prince Oberyn brought her here. She knew by her name she was a bastard of Dorne, but it wasn’t the time to talk about it. She extended her hand to the woman. “It is a pleasure to meet you, Ellaria.”

“The pleasure is all mine, my lady. My lord.” She made little curtsies, but it was obvious she didn’t really know how to make one. Sansa ignored it. Her gown left her chest and half her belly bare, much like Prince Oberyn’s clothes.

“I hope you both enjoy the feast with what it cost. I heard it emptied the coffers of the Crown.” Sansa knew what the prince meant. Tyrion answered diplomatically.

“That’s not a problem. Even if the chests of the Crown were empty the war is over. We have all the time we need to fill them again.”

“Unless there is another war. There would be very good reasons for many people in my country to start a new war against a lord who protects assassins.” Prince Oberyn’s voice was threatening. Sansa didn’t like it. “In some places the highborn frown upon those of low birth. In other places the rape and murder of women and children is considered distasteful. What a fortunate thing for you, Lord Lannister, that you sent your niece Myrcella to live in the latter sort of place.”

Sansa looked at Tyrion. He was staring directly at the prince. What did it mean? Was Oberyn Martell threatening Tyrion to have Myrcella killed? Why would Dornishmen kill her? She was to marry the heir to Sunspear. After a moment, Tyrion put a smile on his face. “We both don’t have to worry, Prince Oberyn. I think we both know my lifestyle is not so far from the Dornish way of life, at least until recently. And it so happens that I agree with you. I can assure you that no one can murder or rape with impunity as long as I am Lord of the Westerlands.”

Prince Oberyn seemed to consider what Tyrion just said, then smiled as well. “I see. Then we have an agreement.”

“We’ll talk about it later. Come to see me tomorrow in my solar.”

Oberyn Martell and Ellaria Sand left. Sansa didn’t really know what she just witnessed. She was about to ask the question to Tyrion when there were new taps on a goblet. It was Joffrey again. What stupidity would he make this time?

“Everyone, silence. Clear the floor. There’s been too much amusement here today. A royal wedding is not an amusement. A royal wedding is history. The time has come for all of us to contemplate our history. My lords, my ladies…” As Joffrey spoke, a servant opened the mouth of a giant lion’s head. Then Joffrey theatrically shouted. “I give you King Joffrey, Renly, Stannis, Robb Stark, Balon Greyjoy. The War of the Five Kings.”

Five dwarves emerged from the lion’s mouth. Each of them represented one of the five kings. The one representing Joffrey rode a fake lion, Renly rode a man with blond hair (probably Ser Loras), Stannis a woman with red hair and huge breasts, Robb a normal horse, and Balon Greyjoy a kraken. Sansa’s brother was presented with a wolf’s head. Sansa looked at Tyrion. He didn’t seem pleased by the show, and neither she was.

The dwarf personifying Joffrey declared: “Let the war begin.” Stannis started by beating Renly while
Robb was defeating Balon Greyjoy and proclaiming himself King in the North. Then Joffrey sent an arrow on Stannis and his uncle exploded with wildfire. Then Stannis fled and only Robb and Joffrey were left. Sansa heard Tyrion say something to Podrick who was right behind them.

“Pay each of them twenty gold when this is done. We’ll have to find another way to thank the king.”

When the dwarves appeared, most of the people were laughing and applauding. However, as the performance went on, the laughter diminished. Ser Loras left the dais. Margaery had a hand on her mouth and was obviously displeased. All the Tyrells were, and most of the Lannisters. Tommen laughed at the beginning, but now he didn’t. Only Cersei and Joffrey seemed to enjoy it. Robb and Joffrey were now face to face. They charged three times one against the other. Sansa felt Tyrion’s hand wrapping hers. At the third charge, the wolf’s head fell from her brother’s body.

Sansa wasn’t at the wedding anymore. Well, she wasn’t at this wedding anymore. She was at another one, and she saw her brother stabbed in the heart, laying on the floor, multiple arrows piercing his body, the trace of a stabbing where his heart was. Another body, the one of a woman with black hair and tanned skin, her belly all bloody and heavy with child, was lying next to her brother’s corpse. She heard a scream, a scream she never heard before, but she knew to who it belonged. Her mother was there, standing with a hollow look. Then a man came from behind and cut her throat. And she saw someone removing her brother’s head with a sword while his body was brought outside. A man was sitting at the high table, drinking deeply with a wide smile. He was old, very old. She knew who it was. Walder Frey. And she looked at the other man who cut her mother’s throat. She never saw him before, no more than his great-grandfather, but she knew it was him. Black Walder. And another man was standing aside, holding the dagger he threw through her brother’s heart, a flawed man on his clothes. Roose Bolton.

Sansa felt a pressure on her shoulder. She came back to reality. She wasn’t at the Twins. She was in the Red Keep in King’s Landing. And she didn’t assist to the marriage of her uncle, but to the marriage of her nephew. A nephew she never wanted. A nephew who was mocking her brother’s death with jousting dwarves. Sansa looked at her left shoulder and realized Mira’s hand was on it. Her friend looked at her with a sorry look, then retreated behind Sansa. The Lady of Casterly Rock also realized her husband’s hand was still on hers. He was still watching the show, but it had come to an end. Most of the people were silent and seemed to wish they were somewhere else. There were a few applauses when the jousters bowed before Joffrey and Margaery. The king was laughing so hard he spit wine. Margaery never looked so unhappy to be married to Joffrey.

“Well fought. Well fought.” Joffrey was rising from his seat, a red purse in his hand. “Here you are. Champion’s purse. Though, you’re not the champion yet, are you? A true champion defeats all the challengers. Surely there are others out there who still dare to challenge my reign. Uncle. How about you? I’m sure they have a spare costume.”

This show wasn’t only meant for Joffrey to mock his opponents. He wanted to humiliate Tyrion of course. Sansa was boiling in fury. She had to bite her tongue to not yell at this monster. He was cruel, stupid, ill-bred, nasty, arrogant, smug, and ugly. He may look handsome from the outside to some people, but inside he was uglier than the Hound was outside. Sansa wanted to kill him right now for everything he forced her to endure since she left Winterfell, but also for everything he did to Tyrion and everyone else as well. But she couldn’t. She couldn’t kill the king. She refrained herself with great difficulty. She could feel Tyrion was tightening his grip on her hand. She tried to give a squeeze to his hand with her own before he did something foolish, but he was already putting his hand away from hers and rising from his seat, which didn’t change very much his height. Sansa saw Tyrion make the smile he always did when he was about to give a good reply to someone. And she wasn’t deceived.
“One taste of combat was enough for me, your Grace. I would like to keep what remains of my face. I think you should fight him. This was but a poor imitation of your own bravery on the field of battle. I speak as a firsthand witness. Climb down from the high table with your new Valyrian sword and show everyone how a true king wins his throne. Be careful, though. This one is clearly mad with lust. It would be tragedy for the king to lose his virtue hours before his wedding night.”

There were light laughter that followed Tyrion’s speech as he sat again. Everyone was looking intently at Joffrey, fearing or expecting what he would do next. Tyrion just humiliated him before everyone at his own wedding. Sansa didn’t blame Tyrion very much. Perhaps if Joffrey asked her the same she wouldn’t have been able to control herself, but she feared what might happen next. He shouldn’t have said this.

Joffrey grabbed his cup of wine and slowly walked on the dais until he was right behind Tyrion. Then he slowly shed the content of his cup on Tyrion’s head. Sansa noticed Cersei was the only person smiling at the situation. She really was Joffrey’s mother. Tyrion probably had a hard time to not throw his own cup at Joffrey. It seems he managed to control himself. Sansa did well by preventing him to drink.

“A fine vintage. Shame that it spilled.” Tyrion tasted the wine flowing on his face to emphasize what he said.

“It did not spill.” Joffrey refused to get out of the situation through the bait Tyrion was offering.

“My love, come back to me. It’s time for my father’s toast.” Sansa was very grateful towards Margaery in this instant. Sadly, Joffrey didn’t look like he wanted to let it go.

“Well, how does he expect me to toast without wine? Uncle, you can be my cupbearer seeing as you’re too cowardly to fight.”

Too cowardly to fight? You flew away from the battlements when your uncle was fighting to save your life. “Your Grace does me a great honor,” Tyrion commented.

“It’s not meant as an honor.” Joffrey really wouldn’t let Tyrion go with this.

Tyrion smiled again. “But I’m afraid I must refuse the appointment. I’m no fit for the task.”

“This is no appointment. This is an order. I am the king, and I make of you my cupbearer. So you’re going to serve me my wine.”

Tyrion waited for some more time, then replied again. “I’m going to do even better, your Grace. I will offer you my own wine.” Tyrion pushed his own goblet still half full before him. “It may not be an honor to be your cupbearer, but it is a great honor for someone to be offered the wine of a lord.”

Joffrey stared at Tyrion in fury and approached their place. He was right before them now, standing tall. “I said you would be my cupbearer. And I have nothing to receive from you. I am the king, and I decided you would be my cupbearer, Imp.”

Tyrion withstood Joffrey’s gaze for a long time, obviously angry at his nephew. Sansa was furious as well, but they both had to keep their calm. Finally, Tyrion left his seat and travelled all the way around the high table to Joffrey. The king was smiling cruelly at him. Sansa hoped it wouldn’t last long. Joffrey was handing his goblet to Tyrion when something even Sansa didn’t expect happened when Tyrion reached the king.

A hand slapped Joffrey on his right cheek. The goblet fell on the floor. Joffrey was staring in shock at Tyrion. Sansa’s husband just hit the king before everyone. Some cries followed the act.
“One word, and I hit you again.” Tyrion was pointing a finger towards Joffrey’s head. The king didn’t yet recover from his surprise.

“How dare you…” Another slap on his other cheek welcomed his attempt to speak.

“You’ll listen to me, nephew. You may be king. You have many rights, but you also have duties. Your father thought he could do as he liked and neglected his duties. You should ask your mother what happened to him if you don’t want to end the same way.”

Joffrey was furious. “You’re talking…” Another slap stopped Joffrey from speaking.

“I’m not over yet. You probably want to hide behind your mother’s skirts like you always did. But now it’s time for you to act like a king. You will go to your bride, kneel before her and apologize for your improper behaviour that ruined her wedding. Then you will sit back at your place beside her and behave like a king should for the rest of the feast. Do you understand?”

Joffrey looked terrified now. He wasn’t used to people talking to him without fearing his wrath. “You can’t…”

Tyrion slapped him another time. “Do you understand?”

Joffrey was shaking of all his body. There was no more anger in his eyes. He was afraid. He looked like the day Nymeria bit him and Arya threatened him with his own sword. He was a coward, nothing more. Even with his fine clothes and his crown, and even if he was taller than Tyrion, right in this moment he was nothing, and everyone could see it. After a moment, Joffrey finally obeyed and went to Margaery to apologize. Tyrion then excused himself, saying he needed a change of clothes. Sansa followed him, giving as an excuse she was tired. Mira and Podrick followed on her heels. There was a huge silence in the gardens and no one dared to speak.

When back to their chambers, Tyrion went to wash himself and change his wet clothes. That was such a nice doublet. Mira proposed to Sansa to change her clothes as well, but she refused. She didn’t want to get changed. When Tyrion came back, he was clad in more daily clothes.

“I’m sorry you had to be witness to this, Sansa.”

“You shouldn’t have done this.” Sansa let her feelings go out. “Joffrey could order to have you arrested anytime. We were going to leave for Casterly Rock in a few days. Why did you have to ruin everything?”

“I ruined nothing, Sansa. Joffrey is scared of me, you saw him. Kevan will make sure he stays in line. Perhaps what I just did put something good within his empty head.”

“Joffrey will come back for you before you leave. As soon as he finds back his certainty, he will order his guards to kill you.”

“If he ever does, the guards will know better than to obey him. My uncle is Hand of the King, I am the Lord of Casterly Rock, and my brother is the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard. Only the kingsguards are under Joffrey’s direct command now, and most of them know better than to obey his foolish orders. Only Meryn Trant and Boros Blount are stupid enough for that, and with Brienne, Bronn, the other kingsguards and all the Lannister guards inside the Red Keep, they won’t have many chances to carry out any order from Joffrey against me.”

“But they could try all the same. They only need a single moment when you’re alone or when Bronn and the other guards are distracted and they can kill you. I don’t want you to die. I forbid you to die.”
Sansa nearly yelled her last words. She wouldn’t accept it if Tyrion died, not when they were so close to leave this hell of a city. Tyrion patted her hands gently, then held them between his own. “I’m not going to die, Sansa. We’re safe. We’ll be far from here in a few days, and all this will only be a bad dream then.” He broke his hold on her hands and walked away from her, looking at the wall. “I had to do it. I’m tired of Joffrey’s cruelty. Someone has to teach him he can’t do everything he wants. If he understood that, I would never have been arrested by your mother for Joffrey’s crime.”

*Arrested by my mother for Joffrey’s crime?* “What do you mean?” What was Tyrion talking about? Her mother arrested him for Bran’s attempt of murder. Then it dawned on her. “Tyrion?”

“Joffrey paid the man who tried to kill your brother Bran.” He turned to face her. “I discovered it at the breakfast this morning. Do you remember the dagger I proposed to offer him? You saw his reaction. I described the same dagger that was used against Bran and that your mother showed me.”

Tyrion explained her everything. He surprised a discussion at Winterfell between Joffrey and the Hound. *Send a dog to kill a wolf,* his nephew had said. Tyrion talked with his brother after the breakfast and Ser Jaime told him the dagger effectively belonged to Littlefinger and that he lost it in a bet, but not to Tyrion. He lost it to King Robert. The king said while they were at Winterfell one day that people were too weak to give mercy to a crippled child like they did to a horse with a broken leg. Only Cersei and her children were present when he said that. Joffrey was hungry for a pat on the head from his father and probably thought, vicious as he was, that he was doing something Robert approved by sending a footpad to murder Bran. The dagger was probably among the weapons that followed the king to Winterfell in his wheelhouse.

When Tyrion had told everything, Sansa couldn’t understand. “All this war… for that! Because of Joffrey?” Sansa took her head between her hands. After a moment, she began to cry. Her father. Her mother. Robb. Bran. Rickon. Arya. All of them died because of this. Because of Joffrey’s cruelty. All this was his fault. He was a monster. He always was a monster. And Sansa had loved him. How could she be so stupid? She should have known. She saw who Joffrey was the day Nymeria attacked him. Why didn’t she realize who he was at this moment? Arya knew it right at this moment, and she was two years younger than Sansa. How couldn’t Sansa see what was so plain for her little sister? *I’m stupid. A stupid little girl with stupid dreams who never learns.*

She felt Tyrion’s hand on his shoulder. “I’m sorry, Sansa.”

Sansa turned to look at him. He was looking at her, a sorry look in his eyes. “Sorry? It’s Joffrey who should be. You should have killed him at the feast.” Anger substituted to despair. “Without him, nothing of all this would ever have happened. I would still have a family. He killed all of them. I want him dead.”

Tyrion hushed her and took her shoulders with his hands. She was shouting loudly as she could. “Don’t say it too loud. Sansa, to be honest, right now, I would like to see Joffrey dead. I was nearly pushed for a few hundred feet fall because of him, and anyway he tried to kill an innocent boy, and for the most stupid reason there is. I nearly regret now I never tried to have him killed. The world would be a much better place without him. But we can’t kill him. He’s the king, whether we like it or not.”

Sansa knew Tyrion’s words were true, but it didn’t help her to feel any better. All the same, she couldn’t let her anger dominate her. She calmed herself. “You’re right.” She still had tears on her cheeks. Tyrion took a handkerchief from inside his doublet and passed it on her cheeks. His eyes were full of compassion, like always. These were the times she loved the most to have him by her side. He was the only one who really showed her compassion ever since the beginning.
“We should stay here for the rest of the day. It wouldn’t do any good to go back to the feast, and with some hope, Joffrey will have forgotten everything tomorrow. Let’s hope Margaery can distract him well enough like she always does.”

Tyrion’s words caused Sansa to worry about Margaery. “Do you think she will be alright?” She didn’t want to see Margaery mistreated the way she was. What would Joffrey do to her during their wedding night?

“Well, she’s among the few people who can control Joffrey. On the other side, we just saw that her control over him wasn’t infallible. I guess all we can do is pray.” After a moment of silence he added: “Try to not think too much about it, Sansa. It’s no use to worry all the time. There’s nothing we can do for her anyway.”

Sansa wasn’t entirely reassured by Tyrion’s words, but he wasn’t wrong. There was nothing she could do for Margaery. They were at the end of the afternoon when they left the feast. They spent the hours left before night to discuss. They were in no good mood, but to talk helped them to spend time. Tyrion was the one to speak the most, describing Casterly Rock in all its details. Sansa thought she was beginning to have a good idea what the castle looked like, inside and outside. She talked about Winterfell as well, and Tyrion looked quite interested to learn more about it. They also took a small dinner late in the evening, and Sansa had to stop Tyrion from drinking again. When the time came to sleep, Sansa had Mira help her to slip on her nightgown. Tyrion didn’t try to sleep on the couch like he tried a few days ago.

As soon as they were both into bed, Sansa rested her head on his chest. She wanted to feel him close to her tonight. He passed an arm around her shoulders like after the ceremony when she was recognized Lady of Casterly Rock. She felt good in his arms. She listened to his heartbeat. It was steady. Sansa felt at peace, but she couldn’t manage to fall asleep. In fact she didn’t want to sleep. She felt too good this way, and there was a disturbing thought that refused to leave her mind. The bedding ceremony probably took place at this hour. Right now, Margaery was probably doing what Sansa should have done if things had been different. The simple thought of this sent shivers through her spine.

“You’re shaking.” Tyrion seemed to have realized it.

“It’s just… I could be in Margaery’s place, right now.” She shivered more violently for a short moment. “That could be me.”

“You don’t have to fear Joffrey anymore. He cannot hurt you now. He may think he still can, but he can’t.” Tyrion kissed the top of her head. She felt his breath through her hair. It was warm, comforting. His hand also began to wander on her back. Sansa shuddered, but not out of fear this time. She knew Tyrion would never hurt her. The sensation of his hand moving made her feel good. She closed her eyes and allowed the feeling to fill her. She felt she could stay in that position forever.

“Thank you,” she whispered after a moment.

“You don’t have to thank me for anything, Sansa. I have duties towards you as much as you have some towards me. And everything I could do wouldn’t erase the sufferings my family inflicted to you.”

“I don’t care. You had nothing to do with it. You’re different.”

Tyrion sighed. His hand left her back. “I wish I was. I’m a monster, just like the others. Only I won’t savage you.”
Sansa raised her head to look into his eyes. “I forbid you to call yourself a monster.”

Without thinking, Sansa leaned over Tyrion and kissed him on the lips. His mouth tasted wine. After a moment, she felt his own lips returning her kiss. Sansa kissed him more deeply, and Tyrion deepened the kiss as well. It felt so good. She didn’t want to stop.

There was a sudden hammering on the door outside. “My lord. My lord.” The broke their kiss and looked at each other. Tyrion seemed confused, and Sansa was confused as well. The knocks on the door and the calls continued.

“Excuse me, my lady.” Tyrion left the bed and walked to the door. What have I just done? Did I really do it? Did I kiss him? What took me to do it? Tyrion opened the door. From where she was, Sansa couldn’t see who he was talking to.

“What is it?”

“My lord. The king is dead.”

Chapter End Notes

By the way, the song I wrote here really exists. This is a song performed by Gavin Dunne, alias Miracle of Sound, who wrote this song specially about Game of Thrones. It is called "When winter comes". You can find it here on Youtube with an excellent videoclip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDt3jeXGfDU

Also, the young woman named Karliene who performs four songs from the books during the feast really exists and she really did a version of each of these songs. Here are the links.
- The Rains of Castamere: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2l7wzOaODYQ
- Mother's Hymn: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKvOQXPrMA
- The Song of the Seven: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_alO42jYmo
- My featherbed: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SogjdgwYy9c

I just couldn't resist to include them in my fic. These songs are really wonderful.

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
Tyrion XI

Chapter Notes

Here, Joffrey's body is found, and Tyrion reflects on what happened at the end of the last chapter.

After the precedent chapter, this one is very short and may look pitiful when compared to the royal wedding. The next chapter will have more content.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

TYRION XI

“My lord. The king is dead.”

The words the Lannister guard told him resonated in Tyrion’s head. The king is dead. Tyrion didn’t think he could be more stunned this evening. Not after what his wife just did. Tyrion regained his senses quickly.

“I’m coming. Just let me a minute.”

Tyrion went to the couch where he left his clothes for the day and put them over his night clothes. He turned to Sansa, still on the bed, before he left the room.

“Please stay here. I’ll come back as soon as I can.” And he left.

There were about ten guards before their door. Tyrion brought half of them with him and ordered the others to protect their lady at all cost. Thoughts were flooding Tyrion’s mind. Joffrey was dead. Did gods show some justice after all? Did they decide to punish Joffrey for all his crimes? Did they punish Tyrion’s father as well for his own crimes? Tyrion stopped to believe in gods not long after… He didn’t want to think about it. There were no gods. His father died of a heart attack in his sleep. As for Joffrey, he would know very soon. There was something else on Tyrion’s mind, but he couldn’t allow himself to think about it right now. The king just died, that was all he could think about. That and Sansa’s protection.

They arrived at Joffrey’s chambers. There were two kingsguards, Ser Boros Blount and Ser Balon Swann, and other Lannister soldiers. They let Tyrion enter as soon as they saw him. Kevan was already there, looking at a body on the floor. Joffrey’s body. Tyrion approached to have a better look at it. His nephew never seemed so ugly. His face was all purple and there was blood streaming from his nose, his mouth and his eyes. These eyes were hollow, looking at the roof without seeing anything. Blood covered the extremity of his hands as well. A cup of wine was on the floor, reversed. The puddle of a red liquid stretched close to Joffrey as well. Tyrion saw enough wine in his life to know the puddle was one of wine. Tyrion realized someone was whining. Margaery Tyrell was on the bed, still with the same clothes she wore at the wedding. She was curling up as far as she could, her eyes fixed on Joffrey’s body.

“My son! Let me see my son!” Tyrion was startled by the voice. He heard her scream far too often to
not recognize her immediately. Cersei irrupted in the room, wearing a dressing gown. Tyrion noticed she had nothing else under it. She froze before the scene, looking mouth wide open at her son’s body. She ran to him, knelt and took his head between her hands and on her knees. She was crying, and for real this time. The tears weren’t false as they were during the trial.

“My son. No. No.”

She buried her head into his neck. Tyrion had some pity for his sister in this moment. He always hated Joffrey, but he couldn’t blame Cersei for loving her son, no matter how cruel he was. He was still her son. Right now she was only a mother holding her dead son in her arms. Tyrion realized that Jaime had entered the room as well, a hollow gaze on his face as he stared at the scene before him. His son just died for him too. Tyrion wondered what was going on in Jaime’s head at this moment.

“What happened?” Tyrion asked to one in particular. He hoped Jaime, Kevan, or even Margaery may explain everything that happened. The king just died and Tyrion had no idea how it happened. But it wasn’t his brother or his uncle who spoke next, but his sister. She raised her head, looking at him with hatred.

“You did this. You poisoned my son.” She turned her head to the bed, looking at Margaery still staying away. “You conspired with her. Take them. Take them! Take them! TAKE THEM!”

No one reacted to Cersei’s order. She looked all around her. “I ordered you to arrest them! What are you waiting for?”

“Cersei, that’s enough! Guards!” Kevan’s voice thundered in the piece. Many men in red and the two kingsguards came in. “Vylarr, bring my niece back to her chambers. Ser Balon, Ser Boros, accompany Lady Margaery back to her old rooms in the Maidenvault. Keep two guards at her door in all circumstances.”

Margaery followed the kingsguards without complaints, but the same couldn’t be said about Cersei as Lannister men brought her outside.

“I told you! He’s going to kill us all. He killed our father, now my son! Can’t you see it? He’s a monster. He will be our downfall to us all.”

Finally her yelling faint as she was brought far from them. “She just lost her son. She doesn’t know what she’s saying.”

Tyrion was quite skeptical about his brother’s words. “Perhaps she doesn’t know wat she’s saying, but she believes it all the same.”

“It’s no time for this.” Kevan brought them back to the reality. “Our king just died. I didn’t ask you here to complain about Cersei’s madness.” Their uncle sighed. “Tywin, and now Joffrey. What’s going on here?”

Tyrion approached Joffrey’s body again and looked more closely at his face. “I’m no maester, but I don’t think this is a natural death. To me it seems he was poisoned.”

“Of course he was poisoned. I questioned Lady Margaery before you arrived. She was in a state of shock, but from what she told us, Joffrey choked not long after they came to their bridal chamber. They were drinking wine when suddenly Joffrey began to choke. At first he was only coughing, but it got worse. Within a few seconds he was convulsing on the floor, unable to breathe.”

Tyrion looked at the cup of wine on the floor and took it. There was nothing left in it. “We won’t be able to search for what was in it.” He put the cup on the table. There was a jug of wine on it, barely
started, and another empty cup next to it. “Did Joffrey eat anything before he choked? Anything that may have obstructed his respiratory tracts?”

“There was no food in the room, and Margaery Tyrell didn’t say a thing about eating. She only mentioned wine.”

Tyrion was looking at the jug on the table. From the appearance, he would say its content was Arbor gold. “We should have this wine examined.”

“I agree. I’ll have Pycelle examine it as soon as possible.”

“May I suggest we have it examined by another maester as well, perhaps two? I don’t really trust Pycelle’s judgment these times for myself.” The Red Viper knew more about poison than the Grand Maester. The thought unsettled Tyrion. Could Oberyn have done it?

“I was already planning to have two other maesters examining the content separately.” It was relief for Tyrion. Kevan turned to Jaime. “I would like you to stand guard for Tommen tonight. He is our king now. I’ll go and tell him everything tomorrow on the morning. Let him sleep for now.”

“Yes, Uncle.” Jaime left the room with one last look at his son. He looked somewhere else. Kevan and Tyrion were left all alone.

“Tyrion, it’s a catastrophe. Our alliance with the Tyrells is what allows us to maintain our power on all the Seven Kingdoms. Without their armies and their resources, we cannot keep Tommen on the Iron Throne. The Martells won’t fight with us, nor the Vale of Arryn.”

Tyrion nodded. “You’re right, Uncle. We need the Tyrells at all cost.”

“And yet, if Margaery poisoned Joffrey, we won’t be able to keep this alliance, no matter what we do.”

Tyrion looked at his uncle. “You believe Margaery Tyrell did this? You really believe she’s the one who killed Joffrey?”

“If the poison was put into Joffrey’s cup, then it’s the only possibility. They were alone in this room. No one else could have poisoned Joffrey’s wine.”

Tyrion thought about this for a moment. “You’re right. If the poison was added to the wine after it was poured into Joffrey’s cup, or if the poison was in the cup before the wine was poured, then only Joffrey or Margaery could poison it. And Joffrey was too selfish and not stupid enough to poison his own wine. And yet, Margaery had no reason to wish Joffrey’s death. She married him to become queen, just like when she married Renly before. That was the only reason why she married Joffrey. With Joffrey dead, she is no longer the queen. That wouldn’t make sense for her to murder her husband.”

“You’re not wrong. Though there could be another explanation. We both know Joffrey can be dangerous with women. Your wife learned it at her expenses.” Tyrion couldn’t deny it. “Perhaps Margaery thought she was in danger.”

Tyrion shook his head. “Her clothes and her hair were in a perfect state, and she had no injury or any bruise on her. Joffrey didn’t mistreat her.”

“It’s still possible he threatened her.” Kevan’s suggestion could be true, but Tyrion found it unlikely.

“Then it means she had a poison on her for this very situation. Do you really think a woman who
wants to defend herself against a possible abusive husband would carry poison with her? I would hide a knife inside my gown in her stead.”

“You’re right, it seems quite unlikely. And yet, if the poison was in the cup, that’s the only plausible explanation.”

“Unless the poison wasn’t in the cup, but in the jug. Then there are many people who could have poisoned it before it was brought in this room.”

“For that, we must wait for the analysis by the maesters.”

Tyrion and Kevan remained silent for a moment. Tyrion looked at the other cup on the table, the one he didn’t pick on the floor. He seized it and passed a finger inside. It was clean. Nothing was poured in it.

“Did Lady Margaery say that both of them, she and Joffrey, were drinking?” He put back the goblet to his place.

Kevan looked thoughtful for a moment. “No. She only said Joffrey started to cough after he drank. She didn’t specify if she drank or not.”

“In this case, the poison could well be in the jug, and Joffrey was the only one to be poisoned because he was the only one to take wine from it. Many other people could have put poison into the jug.”

“We won’t know it for sure until the maesters examine it. For now, everyone will remain in the Red Keep. No one will be allowed to leave before we have a better idea who did this. I’m sorry Tyrion, but you won’t be able to leave for the Westerlands as soon as we planned.”

Tyrion tightened his lips. Sansa wouldn’t like that. He looked at his uncle in the eyes. “I hope you don’t believe that I’m involved in this.”

“No, Tyrion, I don’t believe it’s you. Though some people may believe it after the scene at the feast. You shouldn’t have done it.”

“Joffrey needed a lesson. He behaved like a child during the whole feast. You saw what he did.”

“Of course, he needed a lesson, I’m quite aware of that. But you should have waited for another opportunity, a more private one.” Kevan looked away. “I know how it must be difficult. Tywin had to support this kind of humiliation when he was serving as Hand for the Mad King. And a Lannister always pays his debts. He showed it at the end of the rebellion.”

There was a huge silence that followed before Kevan spoke again. “I would like you to maintain a low profile, you and your wife, until we have a better idea of who killed Joffrey.”

“Well, with my size, that won’t be difficult,” Tyrion mocked. “I’ll tell Sansa to be discreet, but she’s used to it. That won’t be a problem for her.”

Kevan looked worried at him. “Tyrion, reassure me. You really have nothing to do with this?”

“Of course, I don’t. The world is a better place without Joffrey, no one will deny it, but I have nothing to do with his death. After I left the feast I remained with Sansa in our chambers until a guard knocked at our door and told us the king was dead.”

Kevan nodded to show he understood. “I will need you to be present at the small council tomorrow
in the morning. We’ll have to shed light on all this and to question anyone who may know something about the murder.”

Tyrion nodded in approval. “Understood, Uncle. Now excuse me, I’ll go back to Sansa. She must wonder what’s going on.”

“You.” His uncle called for him as he walked to the door. “Do you think she could be linked to this?”

Tyrion stared back at his uncle with an incomprehensible gaze. “You believe she did this?”

“If what you say is true and that she remained in your chambers for all the time after the feast, then she didn’t poison Joffrey for sure, but that could be a conspiracy. And a conspiracy may involve her. She’s among the many people who had very good reasons to wish Joffrey’s death.”

“Half the people of Westeros hated Joffrey, and the other half didn’t care about him. If we are to suspect every one of them, we’ll never find the culprit.”

“I cannot exclude this eventuality, Tyrion. I hope she had nothing to do with this, just like I hope the Tyrells have nothing to do with it, but our hopes don’t matter here. All that matters for now is to find Joffrey’s assassin. You have to understand this.”

Tyrion fixed Kevan deeply. “I will help you to find who killed Joffrey, Uncle. But Sansa has nothing to do with his death. Of that I’m sure.”

Tyrion walked away from the room, escorted by his men. His mind was in turmoil. So many things happened during the last hour. In fact, so many things happened during the last two months. His father’s death, his arrest, the trial, Ser Osmund’s attempt of murder against him, his rise as Lord of the Westerlands, the royal wedding, the accidents with Joffrey, the discovery of more of Littlefinger’s treacheries… and Shae’s departure.

Thinking of Shae caused him to feel sad. He didn’t have the chance to see her before she left. Tyrion could have seen her. Varys told him not long before she left. But Tyrion decided to not visit her one last time. If he had gone to her, or anywhere else, he didn’t know what he would have done. He didn’t know if he would have fucked her, hit her or killed her. He didn’t want to do any of these things to her. What Shae told at the trial utterly destroyed him. He never felt so much betrayed in his life. He loved Shae, and she just turned on him. And he knew from Varys now that she did it for gold and a good marriage. Despite this, Tyrion couldn’t help but still feel he loved her. She was manipulated by Baelish. Tyrion wanted nothing more than to chop the head off the body of this brothelkeeper. The war, his imprisonment at the Eyrie, the destruction of Sansa’s family, Shae’s betrayal… Tyrion wished he could have him killed right now, but he couldn’t. The man was in the Vale, and they couldn’t risk to turn another kingdom against them.

Tyrion still felt it wasn’t entirely Shae’s fault. She was manipulated by this man, and Tyrion had Bronn tell her so horrible things. He didn’t believe them. Shae was no whore in his eyes. She was the woman he loved. The first woman he loved ever since Tysha. He only said all these things to save her. Tyrion wished he saw her one last time, but another part of him told him it was better this way. Tyrion didn’t lie entirely when he sent Podrick to Shae. He knew somewhere inside him that a time like this would come, but he didn’t want it to happen. He was happy with Shae, but he had to admit he couldn’t spend his life with her, even after his father died. He was a Lannister of Casterly Rock. And I’m Shae the funny whore. He remembered what she told him so often.

Anyway, Tyrion didn’t want to hurt Sansa anymore. What he said about the fact he had to uphold his vows and that he didn’t want Sansa to suffer because of him was true in some way. He knew that
one day or another, he would have to do his duty by her. Shae would have to leave them sooner or later, and Tyrion waited for the last moment to make her leave. He didn’t want to shame Sansa any longer. It was already a miracle she didn’t hate him after she learned he was fucking her handmaiden. He couldn’t let her suffer anymore.

Tyrion had to admit he didn’t think about Shae very much these last days. The upcoming wedding, his new responsibilities as Master of Coin and Lord of Casterly Rock, all of this barely left him time to think about her. And there was Sansa as well. She had been so present after the trial was over. Each moment Tyrion didn’t spend to work, Sansa had been with him. Tyrion enjoyed his time with her, and he enjoyed it more each time. She saved him from Cersei. People now saw her for who she really was. Tyrion couldn’t believe he was married with such an impressive young woman, and a woman who didn’t seem to hate him. She even seemed to like him, and that was quite baffling for Tyrion considering everything his family did to hers, even more after he discovered Joffrey was the one behind the assassination’s attempt on her brother. He didn’t expect she would kiss him after he revealed it to her.

Tyrion was beginning to wonder if all of this was only a dream. His father was dead and he was now the Lord of Casterly Rock. Cersei had no more power. He had a lovely wife who seemed to love him sometimes. Surely he was imagining it. The kiss was probably only a dream, something out of his imagination. It wouldn’t be the first time his pervert thoughts played tricks on him. When he was in his cell, he dreamed of Sansa one night... He preferred to not think again about this dream. Even for him, it was too perverted. He dreamed of Shae more than often, and it never bothered him... at least before his marriage. After he was married to Sansa, his dreams of Shae slowly faded until they totally disappeared. By luck he didn’t do any other dream of this sort afterwards. He didn’t want to use Sansa as a phantasm. She was still only a child. Surely he simply dreamed about the kiss.

And yet, Tyrion couldn’t believe it was a dream or his imagination in any sort of way. The kiss was sweet, but hesitant, inexperienced. It wasn’t like when he imagined a woman kissing him. Sansa’s kiss was so... innocent. She didn’t kiss like whores who were expert at this. That came from a girl who never did it in her life, or who didn’t do it very often up to now. There was only a single other woman who ever kissed Tyrion this way in his whole life. Tyrion didn’t want to think about it. He didn’t know what to make of all this. It was very hard for him to believe Sansa kissed him willingly. He would have to think about it all over again, and to speak with Sansa.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: a new POV.
Mira I

Chapter Notes

So, here is the new POV character I promised: Mira Forrester.

This is a chapter I was very excited to post. When I started to write this fic, I didn't plan to have Mira as a POV character, but I loved her storyline so much in Telltale Game that I decided to involve her more deeply in the story.

The fate of House Forrester will be explored more and more as the story advances. Jon, Davos, Daenerys and Arya storylines will also become more important as the changes in the events in King's Landing affect their stories. I may also include the POV of another Forrester.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

MIRA I

The Great Sept of Baelor was overcrowded with people. Two days ago, Mira knew the same people all stood here, though she wasn’t present at the time. But she knew there were smiles and cheers at the moment. Now, all faces were mournful. Faces were sad, but Mira knew the true feelings were probably different for many people, to begin with the Lord and the Lady of Casterly Rock.

The body of the king was laid at the center of the Sept, on a huge rectangular stone, a sword between his hands, stones with his eyes painted on it covering his real eyes. The real eyes would never open again. Mira knew Sansa was happy in some way about this. Joffrey made her life a living hell, and Lord Tyrion was probably no sadder than her after the way his nephew treated him during the wedding feast. Mira wouldn’t shed a tear for Joffrey’s death either. Such a monster didn’t deserve to live. She looked at his brother, Tommen, standing before Joffrey’s body and accepting the condolences he and Cersei Lannister received from everyone else. Ser Kevan Lannister, the Hand of the King, completed the trio standing tall before Joffrey’s body as the others formed lines to pay their last respects to their king. Most of these people probably never respected Joffrey.

Sansa and her husband arrived before Tommen, his mother and the Hand. The former Queen Regent refused to lift her eyes from her son’s body, but Tommen accepted their condolences pretty well. Sansa hugged him, and Lord Tyrion patted his arm since he wasn’t tall enough to pat his shoulder. Everyone wore black. All this was mostly appearance and nothing more. Mira didn’t want to think what would happen if everyone here saw who the others really were under their false behaviours. King’s Landing was so different from the North. Honor didn’t seem to matter at all in this place. Sometimes she wondered what her family would think of her. Her father. Her mother. Rodrik. Asher. Talia. Ethan. Ryon. She hoped some of them were still alive, but she didn’t want to hold on futile hopes if they were dead. It was better for her to do as if they were all gone and to mourn them. It wasn’t for Joffrey she wore black clothes today, but for all her family. Even Gared, Duncan Tuttle’s son, disappeared at the Wall. She mourned him as well. And she mourned Ironrath too, her home. Mira wouldn’t cry. She would be strong for her family. Iron from Ice.
She saw Lady Margaery approach the body as well, along with Lady Olenna, Lord Mace, Ser Loras and all her entourage who followed her everywhere. Mira knew all of them. Leonette. Janna. Merry. Elinor. Alla. Megga. Sera. To see all of them brought a smile on Mira’s lips. She succeeded to re-establish her good relations with all of them after Margaery welcomed her again. Mira was glad Margaery forgave her what she did. Mira regretted she caused problems to her, but she had no choice. Everything she did had been for her family. Margaery understood and Mira was welcomed again among the girls of the Reach. She saw Sansa and Lord Tyrion coming back in her direction since she stood before the huge doors of the sept, waiting for them. They weren’t going to spend more time than necessary here, and she didn’t blame them. But she couldn’t leave right now. She had to do something first. Sansa and her husband arrived at her level.

“My lord. My lady. If it doesn’t bother you, I will stay a while longer. I would like to pay my respects to our new king and his mother.”

Both looked quite surprised by her demand, but Sansa allowed her to stay if she wished to. Mira walked to Joffrey’s body as her mistress and her lord left the sept. The line was long, so the Tyrells were done giving their condolences before she was any close to the body. Their path crossed hers as they walked outside the sept. Lady Margaery’s eyes met her own. She stopped before her.

“Mira.”

“My lady.” Mira noticed the two Lannister men following Lady Margaery. They were supposedly here for her protection after Joffrey’s murder, but she knew the real reason of their presence. “All my condolences for your loss. I can’t imagine how horrible it must be to lose a husband twice.”

Mira was sincere in the feelings she expressed, but her words weren’t true. She had to say what she had to say here, and she couldn’t say Lady Margaery didn’t love Lord Renly and Joffrey at all. Margaery knew that. They had a way to communicate between them using appropriate words depending of the situation. Lady Margaery hugged her, a great smile upon her face. Lady Olenna kissed her on the cheek, Lord Mace and Ser Loras made a little bow before her, and Margaery’s other friends greeted her on their way. Only Sera hugged her as well.

“That’s horrible,” she said.

“Everything is going to be alright,” Mira reassured her friend.

“I wish I had your faith in this.”

Mira knew what Sera meant as her friend walked away. Margaery was suspected. Sansa was as well by Ser Kevan, but much less. The poison was put in a jug of wine Sera brought to Joffrey and Margaery’s chamber not long after the bedding ceremony. That meant Sera was in trouble again. Mira couldn’t allow Lady Margaery or Sera to be accused of the murder. They were innocent. She had to do something.

She finally reached the center of the sept after a very long waiting. “Your Grace.” She curtsied before Tommen. The boy was looking at her with a curious look. Then his eyes widened.

“I recognize you. You’re Sansa’s friend. Mira, that’s your name.”

“Yes, that’s it.” She had to smile. He looked like a good boy. He remembered her of Ethan when she left Ironrath. “And I’m Lady Sansa’s handmaiden in fact, though I’m also her friend. My lord Hand.”

She bowed her head in Ser Kevan’s direction. “My lady,” he said with respect. Mira had spent some time with the man for the ironwood business. Less time than with Lord Tyrion, but some time all the
same. He was a good man, trying sincerely to do what he thought was best for the Realm and his family. He offered his condolences for her family’s death the first time they met.

Mira turned again to Tommen. “I’m sorry for your loss, your Grace. Really I am. I know what it is to lose a brother.”

Mira wasn’t sorry for Joffrey’s death, but Tommen was a very kind boy and she knew he was surely deeply affected by his brother’s death. She was sorry he had to feel it, and sorry he would have to be king now.

“Thank you, Lady Mira. I heard what happened to your brothers, and to the rest of your family. That’s horrible. They didn’t deserve to die. No more than Joffrey.”

\textit{Joffrey deserved to die much more than them.} She kept the thought for her. Tommen was sincere. She felt touched by his words.

“Her brothers were traitors.” Cersei’s voice was sad and angry at the same time. She didn’t move her eyes away from her eldest son. “All her family were traitors. And she is a traitor. She should be the one dead right now, and Joffrey should live. He was the king, your brother, and he was killed.”

Ser Jaime Lannister approached at this moment and put his left hand on his sister’s shoulders, whispering a few words in her ear. She seemed to calm down a little. Mira turned back her attention to Tommen again.

“I wish you well, your Grace. I know it’s not easy to be king.”

“I’ll be a good king. I want to be. Good. Just. Pious. Strong. Wise. I want to be all of this.”

Mira smiled again. For the first time in decades, they would have a king who wanted to be a good king. She hoped he would be. “I’m sure you will. Even more than your brother, your father, and all the other kings who preceded them.” She kept smiling at Tommen until he returned her smile shyly.

He looked so much like Ethan right now. “Your Grace.” She made one last curtsy and left.

However, she didn’t leave the Sept. There were still many people, so she could manage to not be seen. She hid behind the altar of the Maid, hiding in its shadow so no one would see her. She had to hear what Ser Kevan and Cersei would talk about when everyone would leave. They could talk about Lady Margaery or Sera. The floor was cleared an hour later. Were only left, except for the High Septon, brothers and sisters, the new king, his Hand, his mother and the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard. Ser Kevan left with Tommen, instructing him about the duties he had as king. At least Tommen would have someone decent to teach him how to be king, not like Joffrey according to what she heard from Lord Tyrion. Ser Jaime ordered the High Septon to give Cersei a moment alone with her son and everyone left the Sept. The great door was closed. Mira was stuck inside with Cersei and Jaime Lannister. No one saw her. She was hidden in the shadows, her black gown and hair providing an excellent cover. Only her pale skin may pose a problem, but it didn’t. They didn’t see her hidden behind the altar, but she couldn’t see them either. She listened carefully. Perhaps they would talk about the murder. If they believed Margaery or Sera was guilty, then Mira could warn her friends.

“It was Tyrion.” Cersei was speaking. “He killed him. He told me he would. \textit{A day will come when you think you are safe and happy and your joy will turn to ashes in your mouth.} That’s what he said to me. You saw it. You saw Joffrey dead right before you. You saw this little whore from Highgarden defending this monster. They plotted it together.”

“I don’t know what I saw.” Ser Jaime’s voice was very low, just like the one of the queen, but the
sept was so silent Mira could understand everything they said.

“Avenge him. Avenge our son. Kill Tyrion.” Mira held her breath. Our son? Cersei was talking to her brother. Could it be true?

“Tyrion’s my brother. Our brother. There’ll be an investigation. We’ll get to the truth of what happened.”

“I don’t want an investigation. He’ll squirm his way out of it like he always does. I want him dead. Please, Jaime. You have to. He was our son. Our baby boy.”

Cersei was crying. Mira was sure now she didn’t mishear the first time. Cersei Lannister really confirmed Ser Jaime Lannister was Joffrey’s father. If Joffrey was his son, then there were high chances Tommen and Myrcella were as well. Stannis Baratheon told the truth. She heard gasps and strange sounds, something that looked like sucking.

“You’re a hateful woman. Why have the gods made me love a hateful woman?”

“Jaime, not here, please. Please. Stop it.”

Mira heard a sound of fabric being torn apart. She moved to see what was going on without leaving the shadows. She couldn’t have a better confirmation of Stannis Baratheon’s accusations. The twin brothers were joined as husband and wife, making love right here, next to their son’s body. Mira went back behind the statue where she couldn’t see them. Should she have seen this? *They mustn’t find me.* Mira finally heard screams and grunts of pleasure. That wasn’t the first time Mira surprised two people making love. By accident, she had twice in Highgarden, though at least these people had the decency to stop when they realized she just surprised them in the act. Only, the two people here were brother and sister, and they didn’t stop. She could only find for their defense they didn’t know she was here. It was so… disgusting.

“This was folly. With Kevan and everyone else in the castle… Jaime, we must be careful.” It seemed Cersei Lannister got back what little senses she had.

“I am sick of being careful. The Targaryens wed brother to sister, why shouldn’t we do the same? Marry me, Cersei. Run away with me. Let’s go somewhere across the Narrow Sea and make another son in place of Joffrey. Let’s live happy together for the rest of our lives. We don’t have to care about the others, the Realm, the politics, or anything else. It’s only you and me.”

“That’s not funny.”

“Do you hear me chuckle?”

“You’re really an idiot!” Cersei was shouting now. “You come back after all this time with no apologies and one hand and expect everything to be the same? You left me alone. You weren’t here when you should have been. You let our only daughter being shipped off to Dorne. You let this monster put the life of our son in danger. You let him kill him, and right now he’s walking freely, plotting to kill our last son, and you refuse to protect us. Joffrey is dead. Myrcella’s been sold like livestock. And now our uncle wants to send me off to Rosby and steal our boy. Our last boy. Margaery will dig her claws in, Kevan will dig his claws in, Tyrion will too and they will fight over him like beasts until he’s ripped apart. I will burn our house to the ground before I let that happen. I will protect my son!”

There was a huge silence that followed. “You’re really mad! Every day I was a prisoner, I plotted my escape. Every day. I murdered people so I could be here with you. And when I arrive, you say I
took too long, you arrest my brother after our father just died, you make a show of a trial to have him executed, and you order a kingsguard to assassinate him. And then you accuse him of killing our son without a single proof and ask me to murder him, to kill my own brother. And I discover as well that you’ve been fucking our cousin and sellswords while I was away. And you’re the one to ask me for apologies?"

“You’re even more idiot that I thought. Did you think I would wait for you all this time? You never cared about the way Tyrion had whores. Why would you care about how I may have a few?”

“I have never known any other woman than you up to this day. And now I realize that all this time I’ve been in love with a whore.”

Another heavy silence lingered. “What did you say?”

“That’s how the people call you in the streets. The Lannister whore. The Whore Queen.”

Mira heard a slap, then another, and another, until she heard another sound that seemed to come from the impact of something harder than a hand. She took a risk to look at the scene. Cersei was on her knees, her head bent towards the floor. Ser Jaime stood tall before her, his golden hand raised.

“You can stay here if you want. He’s your son, not mine. Joffrey is my seed, nothing more.”

Ser Jaime turned to walk away. Mira went back entirely in the shadows just in time. Cersei was crying on the floor. The knight knocked at the huge doors and they opened to let him leave. The High Septon and servants came inside. When they saw the former queen weeping on the floor, they all ran at her side. Mira took advantage of the situation to escape. No one noticed her as she left since they only had eyes for the Queen Mother.

Mira went back to Sansa’s rooms. She was alone, still clad in black. Lord Tyrion probably went back to work. Not only did he have to serve as Master of Coin, he was also involved in the inquiry on King Joffrey’s death. It seemed they both took a quick meal before Mira arrived. Another handmaiden had brought the food, but she didn’t care about bringing back the dishes afterwards. Mira did the work by herself. Sansa changed entirely her staff not long after the trial was over. The discovery that some of her handmaidens were Cersei’s spies led her to remove all of them. The new ones didn’t always make a good work. When she came back to Sansa’s rooms and asked her if there was anything she could do for her, she was very surprised by her lady’s demand.

“Mira, I need to know, have you ever been in love?”

The question startled Mira. She wasn’t expecting this. “To be true, Sansa, no.” Mira sat at the table after Sansa made the sign to allow her. “I had some interest for a man or two at a moment, but nothing more.”

Mira never was in love really. She knew that one day or another, she would have to marry and to have children. Her mother taught her when she was a child that would be her duty, and she would have to accept and love her husband, and to bear his children. Mira didn’t allow herself to fall in love with a man because of this. It could make things more difficult the day she would wed. It was better to prevent any pain that would come with it. Her time spent with Lady Margaery only reinforced her beliefs. Mira wasn’t ambitious like her friend. She only refused to fall in love before she was married because she had to do her duty. Her parents weren’t in love when they were wed. They barely knew each other the day of their wedding. They built their love with years, and through this love they had Mira, her sister and her four brothers. Their marriage was happy. Mira didn’t want to risk an unhappy marriage with dreams of young and romantic love. As a highborn lady, as a Forrester, she had duties. And she saw many people in Highgarden and here in King’s Landing whose love affairs
ended poorly. Sansa’s husband himself experienced it with the woman called Shae.

“Did you ever kiss someone?”

The new question was quite dumbfounding as well. “No, Sansa. Some men tried in Highgarden, but they never succeeded. Most of the time they were young men my friends sent to me, hoping I would show I wasn’t virtuous as I looked.”

Two of Margaery’s cousins also asked her one day to join them in their kissing games. These were only games, nothing serious, but Mira refused all the same. The girls didn’t think ill, but Mira didn’t want to join them.

“Why are you asking me this?” Mira asked to her lady. Sansa looked away and took some time before she answered.

“I kissed Tyrion.” Sansa was red on all her face. Mira wondered why.

“Well, it was time.”

Sansa looked at her with a face that showed she didn’t understand. “It was time?”

“You’re married. Have you consummated the marriage?” Sansa reacted as if Mira just punched her in the belly. “I’m sorry, Sansa. I shouldn’t have asked so directly. But did you?”

Sansa shook her head in denial. “No. I just kissed him the night after the royal wedding. We were together in bed and… I don’t know why, but I just kissed him like that. And then a guard came to tell us Joffrey was dead. Tyrion left and that was all over. It happened so quickly. I don’t understand why I did this.”

Sansa looked ashamed of what she did. Mira knew Sansa’s education taught her to do everything her husband would ask of her and to remain obedient to him. Mira’s education taught her the same, but Mira knew it wasn’t necessarily the best course of action. Men didn’t always want a simple woman who would do exactly as she was told and nothing more. Wives weren’t only there to have children, sew, sing, smile, and approve everything the man they married did or said. Mira saw it in Highgarden. A wife had to advise her husband and to stop him from doing mistakes when he was about to make some. And sometimes the woman had to take the lead in the marriage when it was for the better, when she was more capable to take the right decisions. There was nothing wrong in the fact Sansa took the initiative, quite the opposite. Lord Tyrion was the one to give her total freedom about their intimate life, so Sansa had to be the one to start somewhere.

Sansa resumed to speak. “What does he think of me now? He barely speaks to me. He must think I’m no better than the whores he used to spend time with.”

Mira wanted to laugh, but she refrained herself. She couldn’t laugh at Sansa. She was her friend, but also her mistress. “Sansa, I don’t think he thinks ill of you. Quite the opposite, I think what you did is excellent.”

“Excellent? That’s not how a wife should behave!”

“I saw my father and my mother kiss each other several times. And I’m quite sure they kissed much more in their bedchamber, or else I don’t think I would be there.” Sansa was staring at her in shock. Mira did as if she saw nothing. “Is he really the one to not speak to you?”

Sansa looked dumbfounded at her. “What do you mean?”
“You’re the one who hesitates to speak to him. For the last two days, each time Lord Tyrion came for dinner, you only spoke when he asked you a question and you did nothing more than answer them. Before the royal wedding, you were the one to start the conversation each time he came back here. I think the problem is coming from you, Sansa.”

Mira knew what she was talking about. She was there most of the time Lord Tyrion and Sansa took their meals together, and Sansa was always talking first to her husband when he came back exhausted from the day. She continued with her explanation.

“What are you expecting from him? You’re the one who kissed him, not the opposite. He told you he wouldn’t do anything unless you wanted it, so it’s not a surprise if he’s the one waiting for you to talk about it. And instead you say nothing.” Sansa looked at the floor under her feet. “Do you love him?”

Her mistress took a lot of time before she answered. “He’s very kind, and I have come to enjoy his presence very much. I like him, really. And there are times when I think I want us to be… to be more than we are already. But… I just… I can’t… I’m not sure.” Sansa looked at the wall before her.

“That’s not supposed to be like this. He should be the one reaching for me.”

Mira smiled internally. “Like in the stories? The reason why stories are so pleasant is because they’re not real. They don’t happen in real life. He’s not going to reach for you, Sansa, not from what you told me. He swore to never touch you before you wanted, and you don’t seem ready for that. Perhaps you should just tell him you’re not ready.”

“I don’t want to hurt him. He must be expecting something from me, but I… I don’t feel like I can give it to him right now.”

“Then you must tell him before he starts asking himself too many questions. The more you wait, the worse it will be for both of you.”

After a moment, Sansa gave a resigned look. “You must be right. But I shouldn’t have kissed him. Not so soon. I don’t feel ready.”

“Then just tell him. He will understand. I never saw someone so patient with his wife.” Mira rose.

“No, you can leave.” Mira was about to get out of the room when Sansa stopped her one last time.

“Mira, are you sure you’ve never been in love?”

Mira left the room. She had someone else to visit now. Her steps brought her to another part of the castle, in the Maidenvault. Without surprise, the door was guarded by two Lannister guards.

“Sers, I would like to speak to Lady Margaery.”

“Who are you?” asked one of them.

“Lady Mira Forrester.” The other guard said her name before she could. Mira knew this voice. The man removed his helmet.

“Ser Rowan Kenning.” She granted him a smile and he made a light bow before her.

“My lady. It’s a pleasure to see you again. Please accept all my apologies for the accident a few weeks ago. None of us knew our commander was bribed.”
“Your apologies are accepted, ser.” He was the guard who accompanied Ser Valar Algood when he tried to arrest her, and the one who convinced his companion to retreat when Sansa stood up for her. “I just want to pay a visit to Lady Margaery. I was her handmaiden once, I thought she might like to have some company.”

“Of course, Lady Mira. Please wait a moment.”

Ser Rowan went inside. Mira was left with the other knight. “Ser,” she made a little bow.

“My lady.” He bowed as well. He didn’t seem ill disposed towards her. Ser Rowan came back.

“Lady Margaery is ready to receive you.”

Mira entered. Margaery was waiting for her, still wearing her mourning clothes. A great smile was upon her face when Mira came in and the door closed behind her. “I’m glad to see you, Mira. I don’t have a lot of people to spend time with. Even my grandmother seems to distance from me.”

“I’m glad to see you again, my lady. How are you?”

“Fine, I guess, considering I just watched my husband die in front of me during our wedding night. He was clawing at his own throat, looking everywhere for help. It was horrible. One of my husbands preferred the company of men and was stabbed through the heart. Another was happiest torturing animals and was poisoned during our wedding. I must be cursed. And now, I have two soldiers following me everywhere for my protection.”

Mira noticed Margaery was sarcastic. “Can’t you send them away?”

“Ser Kevan believes it is better for my protection, and I am no queen since Joffrey died before we consummated. I am only Lady Margaery Tyrell again. I wish I could walk freely as I did once. Well, I can, but only with two men following me very closely.” Margaery’s voice was bitter.

“Perhaps I can convince them to leave you for a short time.”

“Mira?” she asked with a doubtful look.

“Follow me. You’ll see.”

Mira went to the door. After a moment Margaery followed her. The two guards stood at each side. Mira went to Ser Rowan. “Ser, Lady Margaery wishes to take a walk in the gardens alone with me.”

“Lady Mira, we have orders to not leave Lady Margaery’s side for her safety.”

“I think she is safe enough with me. We don’t need you to follow.”

“Lady Mira, we received orders from the Hand of the King. It’s for her safety.”

Mira took a step closer and whispered so only the knight could hear her. “Ser Rowan, we’re no idiots. We know why you really received your orders. She won’t escape while I’m with her. Watch us from a balcony if you want, but give her some time alone with a friend. You won’t have the choice anyway.” Mira stepped back and spoke normally. “Lady Sansa Lannister allowed me to speak privately to Lady Margaery for a short time. I hope you don’t want to disobey the Lady of Casterly Rock.”

That was risky, but not very much. And she had to speak with Lady Margaery far from other ears. It was an urgent matter. Ser Rowan stood there for a moment, unmoving. When he finally spoke, his
words relieved Mira.

“We’ll keep an eye on you from the top of a balcony, my ladies. We will accompany you to the gardens.”

“Thank you, Ser Rowan.”

Mira walked arm in arm with Margaery to the gardens and the guards left them at the entrance, watching them from afar.

“You are resourceful like always, Mira. But it could become dangerous for you.” Margaery was smiling at her. But while her previous smiles today had some sadness in it, this one was tender, even laughing.

“Don’t worry, my lady. Nothing will happen. I know it. The risk is small this time. And this is the least I owe you after the troubles I caused.”

Lady Margaery’s smile turned sad again. They didn’t need to talk about it any further. They both knew why Margaery had to remove Mira from her service. Mira didn’t blame her former mistress. She knew Margaery had been heartbroken “I thank you anyway. It is good to get rid of those guards for a moment. How is Sansa doing?”

“She’s alright. She’s mostly bothered by the fact she has to stay in King’s Landing longer. She wants to leave for Casterly Rock.”

“And you? Are you eager to see her leave?”

“No, I’ll miss her. But I’ll be happy to come back at your side, my lady.”

“Thank you, Mira. I’ll be glad to have you back as my handmaiden.” Lady Margaery looked around them. Mira knew there was no one. They were alone. “Though I wonder if it will happen. I know very well why these soldiers follow me everywhere. The Lannisters suspect me of killing the king. I was alone with him when he died.”

“I know you didn’t do it, my lady.”

“Thank you, Mira, but I don’t think Ser Kevan thinks the same.”

Mira didn’t admit it loudly, but Lady Margaery was right. The Hand of the King really considered her as the possible assassin. Through the conversations she heard between Lord Tyrion and Sansa, and her own discussions with Sansa, Mira knew three maesters concluded the wine Joffrey drank was the cause of his death. They found a poison called the Strangler in it. As a consequence, Lady Margaery was suspected. She was the one to order the jug of wine in the chamber she shared with Joffrey for their wedding night. Mira learned from her discussions with her friends from the Reach during the days before the wedding that Margaery would have the king taste the best wine of the Arbor there was on their wedding night. All of this seemed planned in advance, so Ser Kevan suspected her. Mira was even more worried about Sera. She was the one to bring the wine to the chamber. If Margaery had the protection of House Tyrell, Sera was completely vulnerable. But Mira knew Margaery and Sera were not responsible for the poisoning.

Mira tried to reassure Lady Margaery. “Lord Tyrion and Lady Sansa don’t believe you’re guilty either. And you have the support of all your family.”

“Yes, of course, and they are right. I didn’t want Joffrey to die. Now that he’s dead I am no queen at all.”
They could speak more freely here. Mira looked around to make sure no one was around. They were alone in the gardens. Mira lowered the voice all the same when she spoke. It was time to tell Margaery the real reason of her visit.

“My lady, continue to walk no matter what I tell you and don’t show any emotion. The guards can’t hear us but they can see us.”

Margaery understood immediately what it meant. She knew Mira had come to see her for a very good reason. She kept her voice low as well. “What is it Mira?”

“Don’t show any reaction. I know who killed Joffrey.”

Margaery looked at her with questioning eyes. “Are you sure?”

“I saw the wine being poisoned. And I saw the person who did it.”

Mira told Lady Margaery everything. On the wedding night, she was walking back to her chambers when she crossed Sera’s path. Sera told her she was bringing a bottle of Arbor gold for Lady Margaery and the king. It was the finest wine the Tyrells brought to King’s Landing with them. Mira only talked shortly to Sera since her friend had to hurry to the bedchamber, so she continued her path. However, as she turned a corner, she heard the voice of someone else stopping Sera. It was Lady Olenna Tyrell’s voice. Mira found it strange that she was there and not still at the feast. She decided to watch discreetly the conversation. At a moment, Lady Olenna kissed Sera on the cheek and Mira saw her dropping something that looked like a little pearl or some other round precious stone in the jug. Sera didn’t see it, and then she went to Margaery’s and Joffrey’s room. None of the two women realized Mira was looking.

Margaery said nothing until they reached a bench. “Let’s sit here.”

Mira complied. They sat side by side on a marble bench, their back turned on the guards. They remained silent for a moment.

“Are you sure about that?” Margaery asked.

“I know what I saw, my lady. I don’t know why she did this, but she did it.”

Another silence followed. Margaery was staring at nothing right before her. “Why? I was about to marry Joffrey and to become queen. Why would she do that?”

“I don’t know.”

Margaery really looked stunned by what she just learned. Mira guessed to discover your husband was killed by a member of your very family was quite unsettling. Lord Mace’s daughter looked again at Mira. “Did you tell anyone?”

“Only you.” Margaery was still shocked. “Lady Margaery, people believe you did this, and perhaps that Sera had a hand in this. You’re both in danger.”

“I know.” Margaery looked desperate and it didn’t happen often. “But I can’t tell the truth. I cannot reveal that my grandmother assassinated Joffrey.”

Mira knew it. Margaery couldn’t do that. She wouldn’t denounce a member of House Tyrell, especially not Lady Olenna. She was her grandmother. If she revealed Lady Olenna Tyrell was the poisoner, then Lord Mace’s mother would be the one to die. And if the Tyrells refused to give her up, then it would start a war against House Lannister. But Mira had to tell the truth to Lady
Margaery. She believed Margaery didn’t know about it, and it just proved to be the case.

“I’ll need to talk about it with her,” Margaery finally said. “I have no other choice. Please, talk about it to no one.”

“Yes, my lady.”

They left the bench after some time, then got out of the gardens. Mira and Margaery went separate ways.

“Thank you, Mira,” Lady Margaery said as she left her. Mira bowed lightly in acknowledgement. For the guards Margaery was thanking her for the walk, but she knew it was for the revelation in truth.

Mira wasn’t entirely certain of what she did as she walked through the corridors of the Red Keep. She hoped the information she brought to Lady Margaery may help her to be exonerated in some way, and would save Sera too, but she was going to talk about it to Lady Olenna. Mira wasn’t certain about Margaery’s grandmother. She didn’t know why she killed Joffrey. Perhaps to protect Margaery from this monster, but she couldn’t be sure about what the Queen of Thorns would do about her if she learned Mira was the only witness of her crime. Mira had no choice if she didn’t want this to turn against her, or against Sera. Her friend, who was just betrothed to a good man, could end facing Ser Ilyn Payne’s sword. She had to betray the trust Lady Margaery had towards her again. She went to tell the truth to someone else.

Chapter End Notes

A special message for SerGoldenhand: I'm sorry it wasn't the POV you hoped for. But I promise you Oberyn Martell will continue to appear in this fic.

Please review

Next chapter: Margaery
Margaery IV

Chapter Notes

So, mainly everyone is in trouble after Joffrey was assassinated. Let's see who is the more into trouble, who may keep his head, and who may lose it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

MARGAERY IV

“I don’t think this is necessary, grandmother. She is no threat.” Margaery was nearly pleading.

“We cannot take risks. She knows. We must only make sure she doesn’t reveal it to anybody. This is a precaution. We must think about our family.”

It was three days after Mira revealed her the truth. Margaery still had a very hard time to believe her grandmother killed Joffrey. *You don’t think I’d let you marry that beast, do you?* Her words still shocked a few days later. She had gone to speak with her the evening after Mira told her everything. Her grandmother didn’t deny it. She confessed everything, saying it was for her own good she did this. Margaery wasn’t sure about what to do with this. She never expected her grandmother was capable of murdering someone. Joffrey was dangerous, it was true enough, but Margaery managed to control him quite well. Now she was no queen, suspected of killing her husband and followed everywhere she went by two red cloaks. They always stood guard before her door, and every time she left her rooms, they were on her heels. Only when Mira visited her she managed to have some time without them close, and even then they had watched her from afar. Even worse now, Sera was under arrest. She was arrested yesterday. From what little Margaery knew, her friend was in a black cell. Now, even if Sera was freed, she feared Lord Tarwick may not want to marry her. It was a catastrophe.

The situation had gotten out of hands. Margaery couldn’t defend Sera. She was the one to order the wine to her chambers for Joffrey. *You don’t think I’d let you marry that beast, do you?* Her words still shocked a few weeks before their wedding, and she even specified the day before the ceremony Margaery was to let the king taste it before she even touched it. This way Margaery had no chance of drinking the poisoned wine before Joffrey was dead. She had no idea she was giving poisoned wine to her husband. What would Sera say now? To escape, she may tell lies, perhaps even say Margaery ordered her to poison the wine under threats. Sera was her friend, but she didn’t share Mira’s force, cunning or determination. Before the possibility of death, who knew what Sera might do? Her grandmother said they should abandon Sera to her fate and let her take the blame. She was only a handmaiden after all. Margaery faced a horrible choice. Whether she condemned Sera to death, or she protected her and she may end up herself dead, and her grandmother as well. Margaery didn’t want to abandon Sera. She did stupid things sometimes, like stealing Cersei’s wine, but she wasn’t dangerous or evil. But she had to choose between Sera or her own family. That was even worse for her than when she removed Mira from her service after the affair with Lord Andros.

And now, she was waiting with her grandmother for Mira to come. Margaery sent Mira an invitation to break her fast with her today. She would be here very soon. Margaery didn’t mention in her
invitation that her grandmother would be with her. Her grandmother thought they had to make sure Mira would never tell the truth about Joffrey’s murder. The idea of her grandmother wasn’t to threaten Mira. It was mostly to make sure she wouldn’t speak by giving her favors. Her grandmother knew Mira. She suggested a long time ago that Margaery should never let this girl leave her service. She knew Mira was a Northerner with strong principles, but she also said they couldn’t be sure if Mira’s loyalty was entirely to Margaery, or also to Sansa now. They had to give her additional reasons to never divulge what she knew. And if it wasn’t enough, then Olenna Tyrell thought they would have to be more persuasive. That wasn’t a prospect Margaery relished, but the situation was desperate. She wished so much she could do something for Sera, but she saw no way out of here. However, she had high doubts Mira would accept bribes in any form.

“I know this seems cruel and unfair.” Her grandmother started to speak again. “I don’t hate the girl. I quite like her to be honest. It is always a pleasure to say everything I want when she’s present only to test her. But the survival of our family is at stake. She seems quite reasonable and intelligent. She will quickly understand it is in her best interest to work with us.”

She was talking about Mira, but there was someone else on Margaery’s mind. “What about Sera? Is there really nothing we can do for her?”

“I’m afraid it is the case.” Margaery’s mentor had a sorry look. “Sera is a kind and innocent girl. I’m really sorry she got involved in all this, especially when things just started to get better for her. Her mother was my handmaiden, and I promised to help her, but now we must choose between her and House Tyrell. I’m afraid that’s not really a choice.”

Margaery was angry at her grandmother. She didn’t like to be angry at a member of her family, but right now she was. Sera was in a black cell because of her and all the suspicions surrounding Margaery were caused by the poisoning. Margaery knew her grandmother did what she thought was right, but all the same, the Rose of Highgarden thought she could have succeeded in controlling Joffrey. That was a risk to take in order to become queen. She would need some time to forgive her grandmother. And she would mourn Sera. Her friend. She hoped that she wouldn’t have to mourn another friend too.

The door opened and one of the Lannister guards entered. “My ladies, Lady Lannister and Lady Forrester are here to see you.”

Margaery looked at her grandmother whose face showed great surprise. Lady Lannister? There was only one Lady Lannister here in King’s Landing. It seemed Mira decided to not come alone. Margaery tried to hide she was caught off guard as she allowed Sansa and Mira to walk in.

Margaery greeted them. “Mira. Sansa. We didn’t expect you both.”

“And we didn’t expect you to be with someone else,” Sansa retorted. “But it’s probably for the better.”

Mira then spoke. “I’m sorry, Lady Margaery. She knows. I told her everything after our discussion in the gardens.”

Margaery didn’t expect this. Mira said she would tell no one. It seemed her grandmother was right to have doubts. Mira wasn’t only loyal to her now. She was also loyal to Sansa. After all she was the handmaiden of the Lady of Casterly Rock for the moment.

“I thought Northerners were honorable people who kept their word. Perhaps I was wrong. And it seems my granddaughter was wrong as well about you.” Lady Olenna Tyrell was sharp as always.
"I’m sorry, Lady Olenna, but you have nothing to lecture me about.” Mira’s voice was hard. Margaery rarely saw her talk this way. Mira was always very quiet, which helped her a lot in King’s Landing. “You assassinated the husband of your granddaughter during their wedding night, causing the Lannisters to suspect her. You killed your king in cold blood. And right now I have a friend in prison accused of this murder, and I wouldn’t be surprised if you were to use her as a scapegoat. And since you’re here, I’m sure it’s for pressuring me to not tell the truth. All things considered, I think I did well to speak about it to Lady Sansa.”

Mira’s words had some effect on Margaery’s grandmother, and also on herself. She was right. Her grandmother planned to use Sera to get out of here. Sansa intervened.

“May we sit? It would be better if we are to discuss about it.” Sansa had a point. Margaery nodded in approval and Sansa sat. Mira stood up.

Margaery’s grandmother cleared her throat. “So, you know everything. You know that I poisoned Joffrey, you know how I did it, and you know I’m not about to confess it to the rest of the world.”

“So you’re ready to let Sera Durwell be killed for a crime she didn’t commit?” Sansa asked.

“I am. I regret this, but it is necessary. If it was to be known that I poisoned the king, then the alliance between our family and yours, Lady Lannister, would crumble, and there would be war. I think this is not a prospect we enjoy. Don’t tell me you disapprove what I did. You told us yourself that Joffrey was a monster. I couldn’t let him marry Margaery.”

“I cannot say that I’m sad about his death, but you put the guilt on the shoulders of an innocent girl of a minor house, one of the handmaidens of your granddaughter furthermore, and one she likes. Is that really what you want?”

Sansa addressed the last question to Maegaery. She didn’t know what to say. She didn’t want to sacrifice Sera, but what other choice did she have? Reveal the truth and have her grandmother executed, and a war probably afterwards? There was no way out of this. Margaery remained silent. Her grandmother answered in her stead.

“That’s regrettable, but this is a sacrifice we have to do. House Tyrell is more important than the life of a handmaiden. No matter how we can hate that, it’s the truth.”

Mira made a step forward at this moment. Margaery never saw her so furious. “I will not let you use Sera to get out of this alive, Lady Olenna. She is my friend, and she is innocent. I won’t let her die.” Mira then looked at Margaery. “I never resented you for sending me away. I understand why you did this. But Sera is about to be executed for a murder your family is responsible of. And I don’t believe a single moment you agree with the Queen of Thorns on this, my lady. I know you don’t.”

Margaery took a deep breath before she answered and looked at Mira straight in the eyes. “I don’t want Sera to die, but I don’t want my family to be destroyed either. I don’t do it because I want to do it, or because I believe it is the right path or the least worst. I do it because I have no other choice, Mira. I am as sad as you about this.”

Mira was looking at her with hard eyes. Margaery never saw her northern friend look at her so harshly. In fact, Mira never looked at her harshly before. “Sad or not, I won’t let you sacrifice Sera for your grandmother. If she stands trial for Joffrey’s murder, I will tell the whole truth. I will reveal everything.”

“And I will deny it,” retorted the Queen of Thorns. “People won’t believe the words of a handmaiden against mine. I am the mother of the Lord of Highgarden.”
“They will believe her.” Sansa entered the conversation again. “I will vouch for her, and Tyrion as well. And Ser Kevan knows Mira, he will not reject her testimony on the basis she is only a handmaiden. Add to this Sera Durwell will be able to confirm you spoke with her before she went to Margaery’s rooms, and you won’t be able to get out of it by swearing by the old gods and the new.”

Margaery realized they were stuck. She only had to look at her grandmother to see she thought the same. Margaery couldn’t really blame Mira. She and Sera, despite all their differences, were very close friends. Mira even defended her when Margaery suspected she helped Mira against Lord Andros, denying any involvement of Sera. Margaery knew Mira wasn’t lying. She would bring House Tyrell down if they abandoned Sera to her fate.

“If you do this, then the alliance between our two families will be destroyed. Tommen cannot remain king without our help.” Olenna Tyrell was addressing the Lady of Casterly Rock on this. Sansa’s face remained impassive before her words.

“In this case we must find a solution that allows us to free Sera Durwell without revealing the truth. And it just happens I and Mira have one.”

Margaery was quite surprised by the last statement of Sansa. Her grandmother had to be as well. Margaery looked at Mira and Sansa in turn. Finally her former handmaiden spoke. “I talked to Sera two days ago and asked her for every detail she remembered of this night when she brought the wine. For all people know, the poison could have been put in the jug at any time between the moment Sera went to the cellar to fill the jug and the moment she put it on the table in your chamber. It so happens Sera spoke for a few minutes with a boy while she was in the cellar, and there was someone else in there. Someone nobody here would miss. We only have to switch the blame on him.”

Margaery exchanged a look with her grandmother. “How do you suggest we do it?” the Queen of Thorns asked.

Mira explained all her plan. Sansa had a friend who could make sure the other man in the cellar at this time would be accused and sentenced. Sera could even serve as a witness against him, just like the boy of the cellar. Margaery was impressed. The plan seemed perfect. Sansa looked at her with a satisfied smile.

“A Lannister always pays her debts.”

Now Margaery understood. She turned to Mira. “You knew she would help us.”

Mira timidly smiled. “I wanted to help you, Lady Margaery. The best way to help is not always to do as you say. And if I trusted you, I wasn’t entirely certain about Lady Olenna. I was considering the possibility she might try to silence me. I guess my presumption wasn’t entirely false since she’s here this morning.”

Margaery wanted to laugh. She doubted Mira for a moment, and finally it turned up everything she did was to get her out of this mess. Why did I send her away? How stupid I was. Margaery was more eager than ever to get her back into her service.

“I hope it will work, or else I may end up without a head and my family at war.” Margaery’s grandmother didn’t seem entirely convinced. She was probably annoyed by Mira’s words too.

“Don’t worry, Lady Olenna,” Sansa reassured her. “Anyway, you don’t have much choice. If you remain with your original choice to use Sera as a scapegoat, you end up dead. And if you try to reveal our conversation and to use it against me or Mira, you’re dead as well since you’ll have to
reveal your role in Joffrey’s death at the same time. I don’t believe you have much choice.”

Sansa’s voice was calm, but also threatening. Margaery’s grandmother sighed. “No, we don’t. Very well. Put your plan in execution. We will be waiting for the results.”

“There is only one thing, Lady Olenna. I doubt you acted entirely alone in that. You needed someone else to provide you with the poison at least. I would like to know who gave it to you.”

The Lady Olenna of House Tyrell supported Sansa’s eyes who showed no emotion. Finally she made a half revelation. “I won’t give a name. You only need to know I have good friends.”

Sansa kept fixing Margaery’s grandmother for a long time, as if she was trying to see something else in her words. Finally she and Mira left. Margaery gave them a warm smile as they left. Sera wouldn’t die thanks to them, and her family wouldn’t be in danger. It seemed she did a very good choice when she made her alliance with Sansa. She felt she wouldn’t regret it either in the future.

Margaery broke her fast with her grandmother after that. Sansa and Mira hadn’t eaten while they were here, and neither did they. As Margaery was eating a peach, the Lady Olenna decided to start the conversation with a sharp comment as she always did.

“It seems the Northerners changed a lot since the last time I looked. Before they were so honorable they were no better than fools, and now they play the game better than us. We are at their mercy.”

“Theyr mercy? Grandmother, we’re not at their mercy. Mira is loyal to me to the end. You just witnessed it. And Sansa is on our side as well.”

“Oh, for your handmaiden I can’t argue about it, though her cunning and her involvement in politics might pose a problem to you one day, as it did recently. It’s good to have intelligent and loyal handmaidens at your side, but it becomes dangerous when they start to play a role in the politics. As for the Lady Lannister, I don’t believe we can consider her on our side.

“What are you talking about? Sansa just helped us.”

“Yes, and as she said, a Lannister always pays her debts. However, she paid her debt. Now there is nothing left. This girl is no longer the frightened child we met months ago. She has become a beautiful young woman and is married to the richest man in the Seven Kingdoms. She’s started to play the game, and she plays it very well. She could become a threat with time.”

Margaery didn’t think so. “I have a very good friendship with Sansa. We helped each other in order to put Cersei aside. She is the best ally we can hope for. And she’s not the style to betray someone.”

“Yes, yes, the best ally, but also the worst enemy we could have. We must be careful to keep her on our side. If she ever was to turn against us, I’m afraid this would get quite nasty for us. She has the power of Casterly Rock behind her, and eventually the North one day. And she has her husband. Lord Tyrion listens to her and cares about her, and he’s far from being an idiot. For the moment, until you’re wed to Tommen, she is the most powerful woman in the Seven Kingdoms. And she knows our secret. She may be able to destroy us when time comes.”

She wasn’t wrong. Sansa was very powerful now. It seemed she assimilated very well the advices Margaery once gave her. Margaery noticed how Sansa got along quite well with Lord Tyrion. Margaery was nearly jealous of her friend when she thought about her marriage with Joffrey. And yes, because of Margaery’s current position, her friend was the most powerful woman in Westeros, and the richest too. But Margaery wasn’t concerned very much with this.

“For now I and Sansa are very good friends. I don’t think she would turn against me without very
good reasons, and for now there are none. And if she is to become an enemy someday, then at this moment I will be queen. I will be able to face her.”

Her grandmother nodded in approval. “You’re right. With this plan, you will be cleansed of all the accusations against you. Our alliance with the Lannisters remains every bit as necessary to them as it is unpleasant for us. You did wonderful work on Joffrey. The next one should be easier. I expect Ser Kevan to offer us to marry you to Tommen once it is proved you had nothing to do with Joffrey’s death.”

Margaery smiled at the prospect. “Then I will be queen.” Finally.

“Oh, you could be. But I’m not sure this would be the best thing for you.”

Margaery was taken aback by her grandmother’s statement. “What do you mean? How couldn’t it be the best thing for me? I would be queen.”

“Tommen is a sweet and very kind boy who loves cats and other sweet animals. He wants to do his best, but he lacks determination, strong will and force. His granduncle will be the one to rule in his stead for many years. You may end with the most influence on him, especially after Ser Kevan dies, but I’m afraid he might not be much better than your father and your grandfather.”

“Grandmother!” Margaery liked her, but she didn’t know if she should laugh or disapprove her grandmother’s words. Olenna Tyrell didn’t let herself be interrupted.

“They brought me your grandfather’s body when he died, you know? Made me look at it. They took me to the Great Hall and there he was. The man I’d married and suffered to father my children. A great doughy lump I’d sat next to at endless dinners and tedious gatherings. There he was… lying on a table.”

The face of her grandmother turned quite sad as she spoke about it. She always said her husband and her son were fat oafs, but Margaery knew she had to love them all the same. Margaery’s father was her grandmother’s son after all, and she spent all her life with her grandfather and had three children with him. Margaery herself thought some of her friends were stupid at times, but they were her friends all the same. Sometimes their stupidity was among the things Margaery liked in them. Her grandmother resumed.

“I wasn’t originally meant to marry your grandfather Luthor. He was engaged to my sister, your great-aunt Viola. I was to be given to some Targaryen or other. Marrying a Targaryen was all the rage back then. But the moment I saw my intended, with his twitchy little ferret’s face and ludicrous silver hair, I knew he wouldn’t do. So the evening before Luthor was to propose to my sister, I got lost on my way back from my embroidery lesson and happened upon his chamber. How absentminded of me. The following morning, Luthor never made it down the stairs to propose to my sister, because he couldn’t bloody walk. And once he could, the only thing he wanted was what I’d given him the night before.” Margaery had to laugh at her grandmother’s story. “I was good. I was very, very good. You are even better. But we need to act quickly. As soon as we’re all cleared, I’ll arrange for you the best marriage you could hope, and not with Sweet Tommen.”

Margaery didn’t understand. “But marrying him would be the best thing for me. I would be queen. That’s what we wanted.”

“That’s what your father wants,” her grandmother corrected. “And that’s what you want. But do you really want to spend the rest of your days holding the hand to a man who is five years younger than you and telling him exactly what he must do everytime he must take a decision? Your grandfather was kind, but our marriage was insufferable all the same. You deserve better than this.”
“But we need to maintain our alliance with the Lannisters. If I don’t marry Tommen, then I won’t be queen, and our alliance won’t last.”

The Lady Olenna waved her hand in the air. “We need a marriage to cement our alliance. That doesn’t mean it must be a marriage with Tommen. And since the marriage between Cersei and Loras is forgotten, then the Lannisters need a marriage with one of us no matter the cost. And a crown doesn’t mean so much. Look at the current situation. Your friend Sansa is much more powerful than you and she’s not the queen. And she may remain the most powerful woman in Westeros for a very long time since you will need time to really have a powerful influence on Tommen, have him rule the country by himself and have children with him so you may teach them. There is another way to make you the greatest lady of the Seven Kingdoms, and much faster.”

Margaery didn’t understand what her grandmother was getting at. “What do you mean exactly?”

Her grandmother smiled at her. “I will propose another match to the Lannisters that will make our alliance much stronger than if you married Tommen, and that will have much more benefits for you and our house. A match they won’t be able to refuse.”

Margaery wondered what match her grandmother was thinking of.

Chapter End Notes

A lot happens very quickly in this chapter, but surely you find many things mysterious. Light will be cast in the next chapter.

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
The list of activities the Crown was engaged in was without end. Tyrion went through the ledgers during the last days to find all the income’s sources the Crown had. At least now, they were Tommen’s incomes, not Joffrey’s. The revenues came from many various taxes through all the Seven Kingdoms and from participations in many economic activities. Tyrion came to the conclusion yesterday, after a very careful inspection, that half the brothels of King’s Landing were owned by Littlefinger, while the other half were owned, partially or entirely, by the Crown. Littlefinger really controlled all the brothels in the capital, and probably most of those outside the city as well. No wonder he had such a wide spy network. It didn’t encourage Tyrion to resume his visits in brothels.

Tyrion wanted to leave this stinking city as soon as possible. He couldn’t bear it anymore. Sansa was eager to leave as well, even if life was much better since Joffrey was dead and Cersei on her way to Stokeworth. His sister left silently yesterday, accompanied by a hundred guards. She wouldn’t leave Lady Tanda’s castle anytime soon. Tyrion and Kevan finally decided to send Cersei there instead of Rosby since Lord Rosby had been her ally here in King’s Landing. Furthermore, Gyles Rosby was old and could die any day with his cough, and it would be unwise to send Cersei to a castle without heir. Castle Stokeworth would be a better place. Cersei would be close to King’s Landing, but she would never come back to the capital.

A few days ago, Jaime made a very interesting discovery that put an end to their search for Joffrey’s assassin. The small council listed the names of the people who had been close to the jug of wine that killed Joffrey very soon after the wedding. They searched the rooms of all these people and Jaime found a vial of the Strangler in the apartment of a fellow kingsguard. The vial was half empty. It didn’t take long for them to establish the guiltiness of the man. Varys also revealed a conversation Cersei had with this kingsguard not long before the royal wedding. After they asked questions to Lady Sera Durwell, the handmaiden who brought the wine to Joffrey and his bride, they had a confirmation the knight was with her in the cellar when she came to fill the jug.

Tyrion remembered very well the meeting of the small council when they confronted the kingslayer with the facts. They were all there. Kevan, Tyrion, Jaime, Mace Tyrell, Varys, Oberyn and Pycelle. Tyrion hoped the latter would die very soon. Then finally the grub came inside the room and stood before them.

“Ser Meryn Trant,” began Kevan. “You’re well aware your king died and how, are you?”

“I am, my lord,” the knight answered immediately. “It will be my pleasure to cut the head of the monster who killed our king once he’ll be found.” He had shot a murderous glare to Tyrion at this moment. Tyrion knew the knight hated him because he was humiliated at the trial by Tyrion’s
witnesses, and probably because of the threat when he beat Sansa. Tyrion had used the opportunity to crush Ser Meryn’s dreams.

“In this case, Ser Meryn, you can cut your own head right now.” The knight had looked at him, incomprehension plain on his face. Then Jaime had put the vial on the table and spoke.

“Perhaps you could explain us, Ser Meryn, how this vial ended up in your rooms? It contains the Strangler, the very poison that killed the king you swore to protect.”

Ser Meryn’s face had showed complete confusion at this moment. He stammered. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, ser. I never had this in my rooms.”

“We found it there, Ser Meryn,” Kevan said bluntly. “And we have two people who saw you in the cellar when Lady Margaery’s handmaiden came to bring wine to King Joffrey. She talked with the cellar’s boy for several minutes. You had all the time you needed to poison the wine.”

The kingsguard panicked at this moment. “This is a lie! I swore to protect the king! I would never do such a thing. It’s this whore of Highgarden! She’s the one who poisoned him.”


“Quite strange, indeed,” Varys bolstered. “Not as strange as the discussion Ser Meryn had with the queen a few days ago when he promised her he would do anything to protect our king from his bride. Do you deny the words you had with the former Queen Regent, ser?”

Meryn had looked more lost than ever. “I never… I never… These are all lies! LIES!”

“You tried to kill Lady Margaery,” Tyrion had pointed out. “Too bad you missed your target. Instead you killed your own king.”

“You tried to poison my daughter!!!” Tyrion never saw Lord Mace Tyrell angry before. Kevan had risen from his seat at this moment.

“Ser Meryn Trant, you are accused of the murder of your king, Joffrey Baratheon the First of his Name. You’re also accused of attempt of murder against your queen, Lady Margaery of House Tyrell. Bring him.”

Ser Meryn had struggled to get free from the half dozen red cloaks who brought him to the black cells. In the end, they had to knock him out. Tyrion’s head was filled with satisfaction when he saw one of the soldiers hit Meryn Trant and send him into an involuntary sleep. Another debt was paid.

Tyrion was quite happy of the outcome of Joffrey’s murder. He wasn’t about to mourn his nephew. He still remembered how he mistreated Sansa and shot with a crossbow on people asking for bread. Tommen would be a much better king and Kevan would be here to advise him and teach him how to rule. Joffrey and Cersei were gone, a pompous child beater would end up his head on a spike, and Tyrion would leave the capital very soon with Sansa. They only had to attend Tommen’s coronation before they left.

However, Tyrion had to admit he found it quite strange Ser Meryn Trant tried to kill Margaery Tyrell this way. It was his style to obey whatever vicious order Cersei or Joffrey gave him, but to poison the queen? Unless Cersei gave him specific orders about it, but even Cersei didn’t seem a likely suspect for the murder. His sister could act blindly and viciously, but she wasn’t stupid enough to murder Margaery in such an obvious way. She would have tried something more subtle. Cersei denied she ordered Ser Meryn to kill Margaery, but she confessed she ordered him to protect Joffrey at all cost.
She even asked for Ser Meryn to be executed immediately for killing her son. Ser Meryn trying to kill Margaery this way seemed quite unlikely in Tyrion’s eyes, but they had strong evidence against him and Tyrion wasn’t about to defend the kingsguard who used to beat his wife. That would be a good riddance, whether Ser Meryn was guilty or not of this crime. Anyway, Tyrion told his doubts to Kevan who promised to keep an eye open for other possibilities.

Sansa wasn’t dissatisfied when Tyrion told her Ser Meryn would end dead because of Joffrey’s murder. She hated Ser Meryn at least as much as Tyrion did. Lady Mira Forrester also looked happier than the previous days. That was no surprise since Sera Durwell was her friend and she was released after Ser Meryn was accused. As for Sansa, her behavior towards him had gone back to normal. There had been a few days after the royal wedding during which Sansa nearly turned back to the way she acted in the first weeks of their marriage. Tyrion hadn’t understood. For a time he wondered if he did something wrong to her. He began to think she might have started to think ill of him for some reason or another. It started after the royal wedding. In fact, she started to act strangely with him right after they kissed that night. Tyrion had come to accept he didn’t dream. Sansa really kissed him. But after this, she had been uncommunicative with him.

Finally, a few days ago, perhaps the day before they discovered Ser Meryn’s involvement, Sansa had talked to him. Tyrion had been very close to laugh at her after she explained him everything. She was afraid Tyrion might have a bad opinion about her after she kissed him so suddenly. There was absolutely nothing in Sansa’s behavior that was to blame. Sansa simply felt uncomfortable because she thought she didn’t act properly and she didn’t think she was ready to bring their marriage to another step. Tyrion didn’t have anything to reproach her about this. Sansa had been forced to marry him and he didn’t want to put any pressure on her. He would only share her bed (as a husband) once she would want and feel ready for it. As for not acting properly, Tyrion thought he had an idea why Sansa thought so. Her mother was a very pious and dutiful woman and she transmitted it to her daughter. Also, Sansa loved songs and stories. In these, knights and princes were always the ones to go to the lady, not the opposite. Tyrion had no prejudice about the way love relationships should start or work. As long as his wife loved him, he didn’t care. He wondered if Sansa loved him. There was no way to know for sure now. She didn’t hate him at least. Tyrion hoped she would love him one day, but he would give her all the time she needed. She felt quite reassured after their discussion and their life came back to normal. It was nearly as if the kiss never happened, though Tyrion wasn’t about to forget it.

The door of his solar opened and Podrick came in, followed immediately by Oberyn Martell. The Dornishman pushed Podrick aside unceremoniously. He went directly to Tyrion’s desk and sat without permission in a chair before it, a look between seriousness and anger. The Red Viper without a single doubt.

“It’s alright, Podrick. You can leave us. Prince Oberyn and I had to meet anyway.”

Podrick seemed hesitant to leave, but Tyrion gave him a look to make him understand he had to. To be true, Tyrion didn’t like to be alone with the Red Viper, but Bronn wasn’t present and Podrick wouldn’t be able to do anything against Prince Oberyn, especially without any weapon, so his presence would only make the Dornishman believe Tyrion didn’t trust him. It was better to be alone with him. Podrick left and closed the door.

Tyrion turned his attention to his uninvited guest. “What can I do for you, Prince Oberyn?” Tyrion had good suspicions of what it could be.

“Justice. For my sister.” Tyrion’s suspicions were confirmed. “You told me no one could rape or murder without being punished as long as you were Lord. I want to see it in practice.”
Tyrion pressed his lips together. It was a dangerous ground. “Prince Oberyn, this is not as easy as you may think.”

“I saved your life at this trial. I could have taken the offer of your sister to condemn you for Gregor Clegane’s head. I thought you would have enough gratitude to grant me the same thing.”

“I won’t forget what you did for me, Prince Oberyn. A Lannister always pays his debts. But you must understand I cannot only order the death of one of my bannermen like this, nor assassinate him. My father kept him at his service for many years. I promise you will have the head of Gregor Clegane, but not right now.”

“When will that be?”

Tyrion couldn’t answer this. As Lord of the Westerlands, he had to give justice to his people, so it wouldn’t be difficult to find enough charges to sentence Gregor Clegane to die, but he couldn’t give a specific time to the prince of Dorne.

“Soon.” Tyrion simply answered.

The Red Viper wasn’t happy about it. It was quite obvious. “If you don’t kill Gregor Clegane now, then I will do it myself.” A silence followed. “Will you stop me?”

“I don’t want the alliance between Dorne and the Crown to suffer. I wouldn’t mind if you killed Gregor Clegane. No one will mourn him in the Westerlands or anywhere, perhaps only his men, and I can take care of them very easily once he’s dead. However, if you die fighting him, and this is a likely outcome to a fight between you two, then I fear your brother may not be very happy. I cannot put at risk our alliance. I think you know just like me how fragile it is already.”

Prince Oberyn peered at him. “You promise to give me Gregor Clegane’s head soon?”

“I promise. You will have the head of the man who killed your nephew, your niece and your sister. And if you don’t have it, then you have the right to kill me.”

Prince Oberyn’s serious glare turned into a laughing expression. “You know I won’t kill you. I may be the Red Viper and a mad man according to many people, but I know my brother wouldn’t approve if I killed the Lord of Casterly Rock. No. If you don’t have Ser Gregor killed soon, I’ll kill him myself. And if your men try to stop me, then I’ll kill them too.”

The Red Viper left with a wide grin upon his face. That wasn’t good. It was the third time since the trial ended that Prince Oberyn and Tyrion had a discussion about this issue. Cersei promised him Ser Gregor’s head if he condemned Tyrion, but Oberyn Martell finally decided to spare him. Tyrion still didn’t know why, but since the trial was over the prince always demanded the head of the man who killed his sister and her two children. Tyrion had revealed during their first discussion after the trial that the Mountain killed Elia’s children on his father’s order, but also had to confess there had been no order to kill Elia Martell. Gregor Clegane did it with his own freewill. Tyrion didn’t blame Oberyn for his lust of revenge against the Mountain, but he couldn’t take the risk to have him killed by the mad dog. Tyrion decided to have Gregor Clegane executed for the crimes he committed on his own lands. He had done so many horrible things that it would be very easy to find him guilty for even a single crime worth death, nor would it be difficult to link his men with those crimes. However, Tyrion would bring evidence before he executed Gregor Clegane. That would be a message at the same time, to show Tyrion wouldn’t tolerate mad dogs in his army or among his bannermen. He already had a good idea who he might give Clegane’s lands to.

However, Prince Oberyn had come back to ask him Ser Gregor’s head a second time. Tyrion didn’t
give his word to kill Gregor Clegane during their first meeting. He planned to kill him, but he didn’t want to tell Prince Oberyn. He only said accidents could happen, even to mountains. However, he told the Red Viper during the royal wedding that rape and murder wouldn’t stay unpunished under his rule. That’s what brought the prince a second time. Tyrion had to promise him he would have Ser Gregor Clegane dead and would send his head to Dorne once it would be done. But it seemed the Red Viper wanted the Mountain dead right now, and to kill him himself. Tyrion forbade it during their second meeting, and he just did the same for their third. He wondered if Prince Oberyn would put his threat to execution and try to kill Clegane by himself. Tyrion hoped he wouldn’t. He feared the Red Viper wouldn’t survive the encounter. If Oberyn Martell died, Tyrion didn’t want to imagine what might happen to Myrcella. Perhaps he should consider having the Mountain killed secretly, though Tyrion didn’t appreciate assassination.

He went back to work. He had the impression only ten minutes had passed when Podrick came back to remind him of the small council meeting. It was near the end of the afternoon. When Tyrion arrived, only Kevan, Tommen and Varys were already there. Kevan decided to have their new king assist all the meetings of the small council. This one would be his first. He wouldn’t take any decision for now, but this way he would learn what it was to rule. Tyrion decided to give Tommen his first example of financial matters.

“Uncle, before we begin, I would like to say this would be a good idea to ask the Vale of Arryn to start again paying its taxes and to give us its arrears. Ever since the war began, we received nothing. If Baelish is really our ally, then it would be time he proves it. Our chests would need to be refilled.”

“I agree with you, Tyrion, but it will be better to wait for the siege of Riverrun to end before we order it. For now, the king should only ask.”

Kevan turned his eyes to Tommen after he answered. The king simply confirmed. “We will wait for the siege of Riverrun to end before we order the Vale to pay its taxes.”

He was far better than Joffrey. A few minutes later, they were all here. Tommen was presiding at the head of the table. Kevan, Tyrion, Jaime and Oberyn sat at his right, Varys, Pycelle and Lord Tyrell at his left. On a sign of head from Kevan, Tommen opened his first small council meeting.

“My lords, I thank you all for your presence. I will let Ser Kevan preside this small council meeting.”

“As you wish, your Grace,” Kevan answered. “The sieges at Riverrun and Storm’s End are still going on. There is no change for now. Raventree is also besieged by the Brackens and nothing new has come from there either. But it is only a question of time before the three castles surrender. They don’t have enough garrisons to defeat their besiegers, and they will starve at a moment. But peace won’t be established as long as one castle will resist. There is also the question of the attack against Dragonstone. Lord Tyrell, how much time before the Redwyne fleet arrives?”

“They will be here in approximately two months,” Lord Tyrell stated.

“Very well. Once Dragonstone is taken and Stannis captured or killed, the fleet will have to turn west and attack the Iron Islands. What is the situation of the fights in the North, Lord Varys?”

Varys answered in his sweet voice as always. “For now, the siege of Moat Cailin continues and Roose Bolton’s army is still mostly held south of the Neck by the Ironmen holding the fortress. His son, Ramsay, gathered a host he’s leading to the north of Moat Cailin. The Ironmen are still resisting, for now, but when the two armies will meet, I’m afraid the besieged men won’t be able to hold very long. They are already considerably weakened by diseases, starvation, lack of water, even if we didn’t consider the harassment they have to face from the crannogmen.”
“What are crannogmen?” Mace Tyrell asked. Tyrion wasn’t surprised the Fat Flower didn’t know about them. Varys explained indifferently.

“Men living in the Neck among the swamps. Sworn to the Warden of the North, though they didn’t fight in the war. As far as we know, they didn’t concern themselves with the War of the Five Kings and are no threat. They only fought the men of the Iron Islands so far.”

“Varys is right,” Tyrion added. “The crannogmen are no threat. They will fight against whoever takes Moat Cailin from the Warden of the North, nothing more.”

Tyrion knew more about the crannogmen than he admitted, but he knew better than to talk about it. House Reed ruled the Neck from Greywater Watch, a castle built upon a crannog that moved from place to place. It made it difficult to find for enemies. All fools who would try to attack the crannogmen would get lost in the swamps, and killed by the reptiles, snakes and insects before they could find their castle. Howland Reed was the current head of this house as far as Tyrion knew. He was a great friend of Lord Eddard Stark, Sansa’s father, and fought side by side with him during Robert’s Rebellion. He and Ned Stark were the only ones to survive the fight at the Tower of the Joy. A useless fight considering Lyanna Stark was found dead after the fight. So much blood for nothing. Well, perhaps not completely nothing.

“What are the fortresses Balon Greyjoy still holds in the North?” Kevan asked.

“Moat Cailin, Torrhen’s Square, and Deepwood Motte. Once the Neck is secured by Roose Bolton and Moat Cailin has fallen, the two other strongholds won’t remain in Ironborn hands for long.” Varys couldn’t have summarized the situation better. Balon Greyjoy wouldn’t keep what few lands he conquered during the War of the Five Kings for long. His rebellion would most likely end by the Iron Islands crushed again. Kevan’s next words only reinforced Tyrion’s beliefs.

“As soon as Dragonstone will have fallen, the Redwyne fleet will come back to the Sunset Sea and attack the Iron Islands with the fleet based in Lannisport. We will put an end once and for all to the rebellions of the Iron Islands.”

Tyrion hoped it would be the case. He smelled the men burning in Lannisport. His uncle should have sent the Redwyne fleet against them right now. They were a much greater threat than Stannis stuck alone on his rocky island with less than five thousand men.

The Lord of Highgarden decided to make demands as he always did. “My Lord Hand, I know King Joffrey just died, but our alliance stipulated that my daughter, Margaery, would marry the king. I was hoping our new king would agree to marry my daughter.”

Mace Tyrell didn’t choose his time to make such demands. “For now, we must focus on the king’s coronation, Lord Tyrell. It will take place in a week. I’m sure the king will consider the marriage proposal with great interest after that. I promise you our alliance will be maintained. Your daughter will be married very soon.”

Kevan’s words seemed enough for the Fat Flower. Tyrion’s uncle looked at Tommen and the boy finally said the good words. “It will be a pleasure for me to consider the hand of your daughter, my lord.”

“Furthermore,” Kevan added, “I would like you to be judge again for Ser Meryn Trant’s trial in a fortnight, Lord Tyrell. It would please the king as well if Prince Oberyn accepted to act as judge too.”

The two men accepted, Mace Tyrell with great enthusiasm, Oberyn with indifference. The prince of
Dorne was obviously bored by all this. The discussion went to the construction of the royal fleet. Tyrion objected they still didn’t have enough money and that it would only get worse with winter coming. He told them they would have to dismiss some gold cloaks. There were four thousand and five hundred of them right now, and they would only be able to afford the new fleet if they reduced their numbers. Kevan decided they would progressively reduce the number of gold cloaks to two thousand men and would begin the construction of the fleet. Finally, Cersei never wanted to reduce their numbers and they were of no use after the Battle of Blackwater. Tyrion’s successor would have an easier job.

Varys brought them some news from Slavor’s Bay as well. For now, Daenerys Targaryen was still holding Meereen, though the Wise Masters of Yunkai took back their city and reintroduced slavery. Slavery was also reintroduced in Astapor by a butcher named Cleon, only the slaves were now the former Good Masters. It seemed for now the Dragon Queen wouldn’t sail to Westeros. Tyrion wished he could see one of her three dragons. The meeting ended with this. Tyrion was about to leave with his ledger when his uncle called him.

“Tyrion, please stay. We have to talk. Jaime, accompany his Grace to his chambers.”

Tyrion was left with his uncle who turned on his seat to face him. Kevan cleared his throat.

“Tyrion, you’re going to leave for Casterly Rock soon after Tommen’s coronation.”

“This time I hope it will be for real. I was supposed to leave a few days after Joffrey’s wedding,” Tyrion said sarcastically.

“Joffrey’s death changed the situation. We couldn’t foresee that. This time you’ll leave for real. You’re not needed here for Ser Meryn’s trial.”

“Then let’s hope we won’t have another murder on our hands. You don’t want us here for Tommen’s wedding?”

“Your presence won’t be necessary for it either. Anyway, it is quite possible Tommen won’t marry before a few years.”

His uncle’s words surprised Tyrion. “What do you mean, Uncle? I know we couldn’t engage Tommen and Margaery so soon after Joffrey’s death, but we need the Tyrell army and their resources to win this war. And the Tyrells will follow us only if Margaery is queen. They won’t wait a few years.”

Kevan joined his hands on his knees. “Mace Tyrell doesn’t seem to be aware of that already, but I had a discussion with Olenna Tyrell yesterday. She proposed me another way to unite our two houses. After thinking about it, I believe this would be a better option for House Lannister.”

Tyrion knew Olenna Tyrell was the real power in the Tyrell family, much more than her son. That was the reason he discussed with her to reduce the cost of the royal wedding and not with the Fat Flower. He wondered how painful a discussion with her had been for Kevan.

“I didn’t think the Tyrells would give up their chance to have Margaery as queen. I agree we must secure the Reach on our side, but a union between Tommen and Margaery seems to be necessary for that,” Tyrion argued.

“It doesn’t seem to be the opinion of Lady Olenna. She proposed us to wed her granddaughter to someone else. That would allow Tommen to remain available for some alliance that would present more advantages. And her proposition would link House Tyrell and House Lannister in a much
stronger way than a marriage between Tommen and Margaery.”

“Very well, what was her proposition? I don’t see what match could be of more benefits to the Tyrells for they would be ready to give up their chance to have a Tyrell queen. Especially for the Queen of Thorns to believe it would be better for House Tyrell.”

“She proposed me to marry Lady Margaery to my nephew.”

Tyrion had to chuckle on this. The Queen of Thorns didn’t know what she was asking. “Jaime is a kingsguard. He will never forsake his oath, Uncle. Father tried not long after he came back to make him leave and he refused. He refused to be the heir of Casterly Rock several times, and I don’t believe he will accept it anymore now.”

Kevan was looking at him straight in the eyes. “It’s not Jaime she was talking about.”

Tyrion felt his smile fall as he slowly understood what Kevan meant. His uncle was looking at him with a very serious expression. He wasn’t joking. In fact, Kevan Lannister barely laughed more than Tywin Lannister, though at least he smiled more.

“You can’t mean it,” Tyrion said.

“I can, and I do.” Tyrion had the impression to be brought many months ago to a conversation he had with his father. Only this time, he had it with his uncle, and not about the same woman.

“I am already married.”

“You are, and your marriage is still unconsummated,” Kevan pointed out.

“I already told you. I will not disown Sansa. She is my wife.”

“Tyrion.” His uncle looked at him a different expression, something between understanding and sadness. “I understand this may seem inappropriate, especially after we just recognized the girl Lady of Casterly Rock. But you must think about House Lannister as well. A marriage between Lady Margaery and Tommen would make the Tyrells the main pillar of Tommen’s reign. Tommen is a soft and kind boy, but Margaery will have a great influence on him, just like she had with Joffrey. With time, the Tyrells will be the ones to hold the Iron Throne in practice. Margaery’s children will get the Iron Throne and the Stormlands. The Tyrells will be too powerful and we won’t be able to keep our hands on Tommen. The Tyrells will replace us as the most powerful family of all the Seven Kingdoms.”

“You forget we still have the Westerlands, and the North through Sansa. And once Riverrun will surrender, Genna and Emmon Frey will have the Riverlands. We will have three kingdoms just like them.”

“The Riverlands are the poorest region of the Seven Kingdoms, and the North doesn’t offer many resources, except very strong warriors, and it is very far. And these two kingdoms will require years if not more to secure, even with Sansa Stark. The Tyrells will have kingdoms who have been touched by war much less than ours and with much more resources. They will have the upper hand, no matter what we do. By marrying you to Margaery Tyrell, we secure a very strong alliance with the Tyrells and the Reach, and stop them from getting their hands on Tommen and the Stormlands.”

Kevan stopped for a moment. Tyrion sent him gazes to show he wouldn’t flinch. “Think about it, Tyrion. You need an heir. Margaery Tyrell is very beautiful. She is older than Lady Sansa, but still very young. And Olenna Tyrell assured me her granddaughter wasn’t opposed to the marriage and would do her duty as wife without complaints. You wouldn’t have to wait as you have to with your
Tyrion reflected about Kevan’s words. Margaery Tyrell, the Rose of Highgarden. That wasn’t a bad match at all, his uncle was right. It was in fact the best match someone could imagine for him. The girl was considered by many as the most beautiful woman in all the Seven Kingdoms, and Tyrion himself had to concede it wasn’t far from the truth. She would be quite welcomed in the Westerlands, just like she was here in King’s Landing. No one would complain about her being the Lady of Casterly Rock and she was very good to bring everyone on her side. She was intelligent too and knew how to maneuver among court intrigues. She could be of great help for Tyrion. She was still quite young, perfectly able to bear children, but also an experienced woman. Tyrion spent enough time with women to know it. The Tyrell girl was no maiden at all, even if nothing had happened with Renly or Joffrey. Tyrion had nothing against it. Many men would take offense if their wife had been deflowered before their wedding, but Tyrion didn’t share this opinion. There was no risk he would hurt her and he didn’t expect their private life would be boring.

As Tyrion was beginning to find the offer quite attractive, he remembered his time with Sansa. Images and words flowed through his mind. Their wedding. The moment he wrapped the red cloak around her shoulders. Their walk in the gardens. Their discussions during dinners. Her testimonies and the defense she organized for him during the trial. Her looks of worries when he was injured or in the box of the accused. Her lovely voice when she sang the Mother’s Hymn. How beautiful she was for the royal wedding. Her red hair. Her deep blue eyes. Her pale and soft skin. Her delicate hands. Her lips. Her smiles. Her kiss. He remembered the kiss they shared this night, before Joffrey’s death interrupted it. She kissed him willingly, and she had seemed to like it. They were sleeping in the same bed ever since he got out of prison, always maintaining a physical contact. Sometimes they were just holding hands, other times Sansa laid her head on his chest. When she did, he would put his arm around her shoulders, sometimes moving his hand on her back, on her neck, or in her hair. She never flinched from him. Quite the opposite, Tyrion had the impression it made her calmer. When he would look at her face as she had fallen asleep, he would find her at peace, smiling faintly. There were only a few days after Joffrey’s death when Sansa distanced herself from him that she would sleep far away from him, but after their conversation everything came back to normal. She only needed time. Tyrion hoped that one day he and Sansa would be closer and really be husband and wife, and right now it seemed very likely. He only had to wait for Sansa to be ready.

I swore to protect her. I said vows before dozens of people. I put the cloak on her shoulders. She saved me at the trial. Tyrion couldn’t reject Sansa. A long time ago, he abandoned a woman he loved. He wouldn’t do it again. Sansa was his wife. He looked straight into his uncle’s eyes.

“Uncle, you asked me a few weeks ago to set aside Sansa for the sake of House Lannister. I’m sure you remember what I answered back then.”

“I remember very well. But now we’re talking about a marriage and an alliance with…”

“Can you remind me why my father refused to marry someone else after my mother died? Even if it would have been for the benefit of the family?” Tyrion cut his uncle. After a moment, the Hand of the King repeated the same answer he gave weeks ago.

“Because he loved her.”

“Then you know why I refuse to disavow my wife. Sansa is the Lady of Casterly Rock, and she will remain the Lady of Casterly Rock until she dies. You can tell the Queen of Thorns she should have proposed this match before your brother decided to arrange a marriage between me and Sansa.”
Kevan sighed. “I know to recognize a lost cause when I face one. Very well, Tyrion. I cannot force you to marry Lady Margaery Tyrell anyway. But this is a great opportunity we miss.”

“I don’t care. Don’t forget to give my message to Lady Olenna.” Tyrion left his chair and walked to the door, but was stopped by his uncle’s voice.

“You once told me you weren’t your father, Tyrion. It’s true, you’re not Tywin. But now I realize that of all his children, you’re the one who looks the most like him.”

Tyrion resumed his walk and left the small council room. He was deep into his thoughts after what Kevan told him, but his mind was also entirely focused on Sansa. He nearly felt ashamed that he considered even a moment putting her aside for someone else. He was close to lust for the Rose of Highgarden at this time. He hoped this thought wouldn’t haunt his sleep, especially when Sansa would be only a few inches from him.

When he entered their rooms, Sansa was standing on the balcony, looking outside as the sun set on the horizon. Even with her back turned on him, Tyrion could admire the beauty the sunlight created when it hit her auburn hair. She was breathtaking as always. He felt stupid to have desired Margaery Tyrell, even for a single minute.

“My lady,” he greeted her. Sansa didn’t turn to face him. Tyrion found it strange. “Sansa, do you hear me?”

“Yes, I hear you.” There was something dark in her voice. Tyrion didn’t like it.

“Is there something wrong?”

Sansa took some time before she answered. “Margaery came to visit me two hours ago. She told me her grandmother proposed to marry her to someone else than Tommen, and that you uncle was quite favorable to the idea.”

Tyrion closed his eyes. He didn’t expect he would have to tell Sansa. After all it was only a proposal and he refused it anyway. There was no need to tell her. “It seems you learned it before me. My uncle just told me now about it, at the end of the small council meeting.”

“So, do I have to leave?” Tyrion was taken aback by Sansa’s question. He expected even less that she would ask it with such a voice. She looked about to cry.

“To leave?”

“Yes, I guess I have nothing to do here if I’m not your wife any longer.”

Tyrion could barely believe what he heard. Sansa thought he was going to abandon her? “Wait a minute, Sansa. I just told Kevan to go to hell with the Tyrell’s proposal.”

Sansa then turned to face him. Her face showed total surprise. “What? But I thought… I thought you would…”

“That I would do what? Put an end to our marriage and marry Margaery Tyrell instead of you? I refused to annul our marriage the last time. Do you really think I would accept now? Unless you want me to annul it now…”

“No, I don’t want it. I mean, I don’t want you to get an annulment, but I thought that… after I… I mean after I refused to… well you know, what happened a few days ago.”
Tyrion had to smile at this. Sansa still couldn’t talk about a simple kiss without searching her words or blushing. “Sansa, I told you I would wait. It doesn’t bother me, not really. I don’t want to marry someone else.”

Sansa was staring at him in confusion, but she gained back her composure with time. “I’m sorry. I thought you would prefer to marry Margaery. She told me once you were good-looking. Especially with your scar.”

Tyrion was quite dumbfounded by this revelation. “The Rose of Highgarden has very strange tastes.” They both chuckled. Tyrion approached of Sansa and looked up in her eyes. “Sansa, as long as you want to remain with me, I will be your husband, no matter what happens.”

“Thank you, Tyrion,” she finally said after some hesitation. They smiled at each other.

The dinner arrived not long later and they had a pleasant conversation as always. Sansa had started to learn the names of all the families of the Westerlands and their seats for when they would leave for Casterly Rock, but she had a few questions to ask Tyrion about some of them. She also mentioned to Tyrion the requests some lady or another made to her during the day, but they weren’t very important. One of the most important was from Lady Elena Broom who asked Sansa if she could come back to Casterly Rock with them so she could visit her nephew, Ser Benedict Broom, the master-at-arms at the seat of House Lannister. Tyrion decided he could rest for this evening and spent his time with Sansa, essentially talking and sharing jokes with her until time came to sleep.

When they got into bed, Sansa laid her head on his chest. It was the first time she did it since the kiss. She had never gone farther than laying her forehead against his arm since this night. Tyrion allowed himself to bury his face into her hair, smelling the sweet natural fragrance escaping from this auburn net. Sansa didn’t seem to be bothered by it. He caressed her neck and her arms where her nightgown let her skin bare. She didn’t show any sign of revulsion as he did so. She was soon asleep, and Tyrion fell asleep not long after her, the woman he loved curled over him.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
Sansa XIV

Chapter Notes

Many things happened to Sansa in the last chapters, but we didn't really see her thoughts since Joffrey's death. Now we will. And another concern will appear now.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

SANSA XIV

Mira adjusted the girdle around her hips so it would not be too tight. Her handmaiden was helping Sansa to pull on her purple gown displaying flower symbols. Sansa didn’t want to wear black for Joffrey’s death. She was quite glad he was dead and had no intention of mourning him or even for people to believe she mourned him. He received what he deserved. She thought about her father, and about Bran and Rickon, and about Robb and her mother. Joffrey wasn’t the one to have her elder brother and her mother killed, but he had been so happy when he learned their deaths that for Sansa it didn’t matter. He was a monster and he received the punishment he deserved. However, Sansa couldn’t wear the red gown Tyrion offered her the day of the royal wedding. She would have liked to wear it for Tommen’s coronation, but most of the people would wear regular clothing, and a few would be clad in mourning attire. Sansa chose regular clothing, just like Tyrion did.

Everything had come back to normal since the last week. There had been a few days after the wedding when Sansa was afraid Tyrion might think ill of her, but finally her fears proved to be unfounded. Tyrion didn’t find anything bad about the fact she kissed him suddenly while they were in bed, and he didn’t worry if she needed more time before she felt ready for their marriage to be consummated. He was very patient with her, more patient than anyone else had ever been with her. She nearly found him too much patient sometimes. Sansa still had difficulties to understand how a son of Tywin Lannister could be so… honorable. If only Tywin Lannister had died before the war began. Jaime Lannister would have refused to leave the kingsguard and Tyrion would have been the Lord of Casterly when all this madness started. Perhaps there would have been no war. At least, Tyrion wouldn’t have slaughtered her family. Would she be married with him if it had been the case? Sansa doubted it. Tyrion would have found a wife not long after he became Lord of the Westerlands, and she wouldn’t be this wife. The thought saddened her. Her family had to die so she could meet Tyrion.

She pushed these thoughts aside. It was useless to think about it. She couldn’t change what already happened, but she could try to make the future better. And with Tyrion, she could make it better. She doubted about their marriage for some time. She thought she may not be the wife Tyrion wanted. She knew Tyrion wanted someone who would love him. That was the thing he wanted the most. He wanted to be loved. Sansa wished she could give him what he wanted, but right now she couldn’t. She liked Tyrion. She liked to spend time with him, to share jokes, to speak, even to sleep with him… but she didn’t feel she loved him, not yet. She felt guilty about that, but there was still so much uncertainty in her heart. She just couldn’t give herself to him without any doubt yet. She feared sometimes he may be brought to cast her aside for this reason, but also for other motivations. After all, Sansa was still officially the daughter of a traitor. Tyrion was already a dwarf and mocked for this, so to be married to the daughter of the traitor Ned Stark? We’re perfect for each other. To
remind his jape brought a smile upon her face. But her mind returned to darker thoughts almost immediately. Sansa was only fifteen and she had nothing to offer Tyrion, except her links with traitors. Margaery on the other side…

Sansa had been in such anger when Margaery came to tell her about Olenna Tyrell’s scheme. The Queen of Thorns wanted to convince Ser Kevan to marry Margaery to Tyrion instead of Tommen. Olenna Tyrell thought that her granddaughter would have a much better position as Lady of the Westerlands than as queen. Sansa had to admit it could make sense. After all, the Lannisters were the richest people in Westeros, and Sansa saw while she was kept as hostage that a crown or a name didn’t give you much power. The Tyrells probably came to the conclusion it would more to their benefit to have Margaery’s children as future Lords of the Westerlands than as future kings. Sansa thought they may even hope that if Tyrion set her aside, they could marry her to Loras Tyrell. The thought made her sick.

Margaery had come to tell her about this last week. She wanted Sansa to know she wasn’t the one at the origin of this. Margaery genuinely wanted to be queen and she hoped Kevan Lannister would refuse her grandmother’s proposal, but she came to see Sansa so she may know about it if things didn’t go as she hoped. For a few hours, Sansa’s doubts caused her to panic. She feared Tyrion would prefer Margaery to her. The daughter of Mace Tyrell was more suitable as wife of a great lord than her. She was publicly tainted by her father’s treason. Margaery was not linked to any treason, except for her short marriage with Renly Baratheon that didn’t really matter for most of the world. Renly didn’t have the time to fight Joffrey like her father and her brother did. But finally, her fears proved to be futile since Tyrion refused to hear anything about annulling their marriage. Sansa was relieved when he told her. She didn’t want to try another marriage. She had found safety and comfort in this one, and she didn’t want to risk losing it.

Sansa should have known Tyrion wouldn’t reject her because she acted improperly or because of her family’s actions. After all, Tyrion’s first wife had been the daughter of a wheelwright, or at least he thought so when he married her. He didn’t have any prejudice against a woman because of the way people looked at her. He didn’t cast aside Shae, who was a whore, when they married, no more than he disavowed her when his uncle suggested he could marry someone else. Thinking about Shae brought anger and sadness at the same time to her mind. Sadness for losing someone she thought to be a friend, and anger for her betrayal against her and Tyrion. However, she was also sad because of something else. While they were married, Tyrion secretly loved another woman. She knew nothing happened between him and Shae after the wedding, but still, it hurt her that the man she married loved someone else than her. She wondered if her mother felt that way when her father came back from the war with Jon, discovering he loved another woman and had a child with her. How would she react if Tyrion came to her one day with a bastard child of his own blood? The idea of Tyrion with someone else, or only loving someone else, filled her with some sort of despair. She wanted to be his wife. She didn’t want him to look at another woman the way he looked at her with a mix of compassion and admiration.

Sansa tried to banish her thoughts about Shae from her head. Tyrion was no longer with Shae. She was far away from him, and he would never see her again. He refused to reject her for another woman at least twice. It meant she did have value in his eyes. She was a person for him, someone he cared about. Sansa was touched by it. However, she also feared he may only refuse to disavow her out of pity. She was afraid he still saw her only as a child. It wasn’t what she wanted. Perhaps he still loved Shae and that was why he accepted that she took all her time before going further in their relationship. The thought scared her. She didn’t want him to stay with her only out of pity. She wanted him to want her as his wife. But at the same time, she couldn’t yet resign to surrender her maidenhead to him. She wondered why she was so hesitant about it. All her childhood she was prepared for the moment she would have to carry out her duty as a wife, and yet now she couldn’t do this duty with a man she trusted above everyone else. Why? Joffrey’s threats came back to her mind,
and the riot too. Her body shook violently for half a second.

“Sansa, are you alright?” Mira’s voice took her out of her thoughts. She realized her breathing was quicker than it should be.

“Yes, Mira. I’m alright. Just carry on.”

Sansa relaxed. Tyrion wouldn’t set her aside. She was safe now and in good hands. She was married with a kind man, the sort of man her father wanted her to marry, even though he never realized Tyrion was this sort of man. The dream of her father where Tyrion stood behind him continued to follow her in her nights, reminding her of this. The dream about her wedding with Ser Loras still haunted her too, but there was something Sansa felt she missed. She couldn’t find out what it was. She had time before her, and Shae was far away. There was no woman in Tyrion’s life except her, and only her. And so my watch begins. That memory brought a smile upon her face. However, in the back of her mind, doubts lingered. What if Tyrion really had someone else in his life?

“How is your friend Sera?” Sansa asked to Mira, trying to completely set aside her dark thoughts.

“Far better than before, though she still has a hard time to deal with Lord Tarwick’s denial.”

Sansa could feel the regrets in Mira’s voice. After Ser Meryn Trant was accused of Joffrey’s murder, her friend Sera Durwell was released from the black cells. Sadly, the damage was done. The simple fact Sera Durwell was suspected for a moment to have participated in the king’s death was enough for her betrothed, Lord Garibald Tarwick, to undo all the arrangements concerning their upcoming marriage. Mira told her how Sera had been utterly destroyed when Lord Tarwick abandoned her. Sansa didn’t want to imagine how she would feel if Tyrion abandoned her. Sansa sighed internally. Her attempt to think about something else had failed.

“Don’t you think Margaery could do something about it?” Sansa suggested.

“I don’t think so. She may try to convince him, but she doesn’t have the same influence she had before. It’s not even certain yet she will marry Tommen.”

Sansa knew it only too well. They tried to marry her to Tyrion instead. She would have to talk to Margaery about it again. Mira completed the adjustments of her gown, then brushed her hair in a way they fell behind her head in waves. Tyrion arrived not long after and they went to the ceremony for Tommen’s coronation. Mira left them when they entered the Great Hall, finding a place in the back of the room. Tyrion and Sansa were on the first rank.

Tommen walked along a red carpet from the huge doors of the Hall to the Iron Throne. He wore a red cloak that enfolded his whole body from the neck to his ankles. Everyone followed him with their eyes in silence. Sansa could see uncertainty, but also excitement on his face. If only he had been the firstborn instead of Joffrey. Her father would still be alive, and her whole family as well. The sweet boy climbed the dais and knelt on a red cushioned footstool as the High Septon held the crown above his head, pronouncing the blessings from the Seven.

“In the light of the Seven, I now proclaim Tommen of the House Baratheon, First of His Name, King of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, and Lord of the Seven Kingdoms.” The High Septon placed the crown on Tommen’s head. “Long may he reign!”

“Long may he reign!” shouted all the highborn people who were present. Tyrion and Sansa joined them and cheered with everyone as Tommen rose from the footstool. With Cersei gone, there was no one to regret Joffrey. Tommen tried to keep a serious face, as it was suitable for a king, but he allowed a smile to appear from time to time. Afterwards everyone lined to congratulate Tommen.
She and Tyrion were among the first and she exchanged a few words with the new king before leaving. He really looked happy. Tyrion remained behind, saying he needed a few words with his uncle. Ser Kevan stood right next to Tommen on the dais. He was the Protector of the Realm until Tommen was old enough.

Sansa left the dais and had to speak with many ladies and lords of the Westerlands again. There was a time she would have enjoyed all the attention she got and thought these people really loved her, but now she knew they mostly tried to gain her favor for this thing or another. Most of them liked her title more than anything else. She really started to be annoyed by all this. She used her courtesies as always to get rid of them and went to Margaery who stood in the gallery aside the Great Hall, clad in black. She was among the few obliged to wear this color as if they mourned Joffrey.

“Margaery,” Sansa greeted her.

“Lady Lannister,” Margaery replied with a smile.

Sansa stood beside her, watching the court before them. “Before it was you who told me to call you by your name. Do I have to do the same?”

Both chuckled. “Since I am no queen and that you are a great lady, I must call you by your title, unless you allow me not to.”

“Permission granted. Call me Sansa.”

Margaery smiled at her in thanks. They both looked at Tommen receiving respects from everyone. Sansa could see Tyrion engaged in a discussion with his uncle while Tommen played to be the king. He played it much better than Joffrey and it suited him much better.

“He sits the throne like he was born to it,” said Margaery.

“Yes,” Sansa approved. “Even if he wasn’t born for it. Long may he reign.”

“Long may he reign,” her friend repeated.

Sansa knew Tommen wasn’t supposed to be king. By the laws of the Seven Kingdoms, Stannis Baratheon should be sitting on this ugly iron chair. Sansa was still under quite a shock after the revelation Mira told her more than a week ago. Her handmaiden saw Ser Jaime and his sister fornicating before the dead body of Joffrey. She heard them talking of their sons and their daughter. Sansa wasn’t surprised that Joffrey was a bastard born of incest, but it had quite an effect on her to learn Myrcella and Tommen were Jaime Lannister’s children as well. She remembered Myrcella, a kind and good girl. And Tommen, who was so sweet and unable to hurt anyone. How could this be possible they were the result of an incest? She could believe it for Joffrey, but for his brother and his sister? Sansa looked at Tommen, trying to see a boy born of incest before her, and she couldn’t. And yet he was. Mira wouldn’t lie about this. She didn’t tell Tyrion. Anyway, what good would it make for her to reveal it? Another war? Or perhaps she would be executed for high treason if she began to speak against the king. Whatever great lady she was, she was still submitted to the king. Looking at Tommen, she couldn’t see any of the madness or cruelty that characterized Joffrey. She wouldn’t speak about it. Tommen and Myrcella were good children anyway. She didn’t want them to die, and she wouldn’t try to bring Stannis Baratheon on the Iron Throne knowing that he burnt people refusing his new religion.

Her eyes moved to look at Jaime Lannister standing on the dais, protecting the king. Protecting his son. Sansa felt some disgust for the man, knowing he laid down with his own sister. He helped her to save Tyrion, and according to what Brienne told her, the knight wasn’t without honor as she once
thought. But still, bedding his own sister! She wondered why Tywin Lannister hated so much Tyrion for spending time with whores while his two older children were laying down together. She didn’t tell Tyrion either about the fact Cersei asked her brother to kill him. Anyway, Cersei was far away now and Jaime Lannister refused to carry out her request, so she had nothing to fear from the Kingslayer.

“Has your family asked about marrying you to Tommen?” Sansa asked her friend.

“My father asked, I think, but for now we have no answer. The Hand of the King believes Tommen needs time to mourn Joffrey.”

Sansa looked at Ser Kevan. He wasn’t speaking with her husband anymore. Tyrion was no longer on the dais. “He needs time, yes. Perhaps he’s really sad about Joffrey’s death.”

Margaery nodded slightly at her side. “As I must be.”

They both knew Margaery was only sad Joffrey died before she could be queen. Sansa saw Mira with an arm around Sera’s shoulders in the crowd. “I guess your handmaiden will have a lot of time before she’s wed too.”

Margaery didn’t answer before long, sighing when she finally did. “I did everything I could. I tried everything to convince Lord Tarwick to maintain the engagement, but he didn’t want to listen. If I was the queen, he might have accepted, but if I was the queen Sera would never have ended in a cell and nothing of all this would have happened.”

Sansa saw pain and regret on Margaery’s face. She had more compassion than her grandmother. “It seems your grandmother is good at destroying marriages. She destroyed two, including yours, and attempted to ruin a third within two weeks.” Sansa’s voice wasn’t without accusation. She still didn’t forgive the Tyrells to have tried to tear into pieces her marriage with Tyrion.

“I’m sorry about this, Sansa. That wasn’t my idea.”

“But it wouldn’t have bothered you. You’re the one who told me Tyrion wouldn’t be a bad husband one day.”

“It was mostly to reassure you.” Margaery smiled in her direction, but Sansa could only return half of it. “But I thought what I told you. He’s probably the best Lannister there is. Without his small height, he would be very handsome. You’re right, he wouldn’t have made a bad husband. He would have been far better than Joffrey.” No one could argue with this. “But I think I prefer to be queen. This way I have an ally at Winterfell and Casterly Rock. And anyway, my grandmother left not long after your husband came to see her and told her himself what he thought of her marriage proposal with very crude words. I wished I had been there to see this conversation.”

Margaery smiled again in her direction and Sansa could return most of it. Perhaps a duel of words between the Imp and the Queen of Thorns would have been entertaining. Her friend didn’t stop to talk. “That’s strange when we think about it. When you were betrothed to him, I was the one to speak highly of him, but now you’re the one to speak highly of him to everyone. And no one dares to contradict you. I wish however you could give me details about how experienced he is.”

Sansa couldn’t stop herself from flushing this time. Margaery laughed at her expression, but lowly to not attract attention. Sansa tried to recompose herself. “Even when we’ll do it, I doubt I’ll give you details.”

“Sansa, you wound me. I thought we could trust each other. That we were friends.” Margaery said it
with a false indignant voice.

“We are, of course. Though I think it will be difficult for me to consider your grandmother a friend after what she did.”

Margaery smiled sadly at her. “I know. But I would have a friendly advice to give you Sansa, before you leave for the Westerlands. If I were you, I would consummate my marriage as quickly as possible. I’m surely not the first person to tell you that, but I’m telling you this because I think it would be the best for you. You must give children to Tyrion soon, or else people will start to whisper against you. And with everything that happened with your family, it would be for the better if you silenced any other possible accusations that may be thrown against you.”

Margaery’s eyes only showed sincerity, and Sansa knew she wasn’t playing. “I’ll think about it.”

“And once your marriage is consummated, then there will be no way for another old lady to propose another young woman to your husband.”

Both chuckled at this. Sansa left Margaery and went to see Tyrion. She spotted him discussing with Oberyn Martell and Ellaria Sand. Sansa caught a frightened sight on the woman’s face. The Dornish prince left, his paramour glancing at Tyrion with a face between plea for help and threat. Sansa came at Tyrion’s side.

“Is there something wrong?” she asked.

Tyrion seemed surprised by her presence. “Oh, sorry, I didn’t see you coming. No, everything is alright.”

She could tell he was lying. “Do you really think I believe you?”

“I’ll tell you everything after the coronation feast,” he finally said. Sansa didn’t press the matter.

The rest of the ceremony included a feast in the gardens. Sansa spoke with many people, including Sera Durwell, offering her some comforting words for her broken betrothal. The girl of the Reach looked in a better mood than when Sansa saw her in the Great Hall. There were also the knights, lords and ladies who came to talk with her, many trying to bring her attention on some problems they had and some help they would need. Some Tyrell and Baratheon bannermen were among these people. Sansa found it strange they asked something from the Lady of the Westerlands. However, no one from Dorne asked anything from her.

She and Tyrion left at the end of the ceremony, excusing themselves to Tommen. As they came back to their chambers, Sansa noticed Tyrion was really preoccupied by something, and she didn’t think it was financial matters. There was something on his mind. She sat with him and put her hand on his.

“What troubles you?”

After a moment, he decided to speak. “It’s Oberyn Martell. You surprised the end of our conversation. He told me he would kill Gregor Clegane tomorrow, no matter what I did to stop him. If my men are to intervene, he will kill them before he kills the Mountain.”

Sansa was agape before this new. “But why? Why does he want so much to kill this man?”

Sansa knew Ser Gregor Clegane was a monster. She still remembered the discussion she had with Littlefinger about how he disfigured the Hound when they were still children. And she heard many rumors about the atrocities he committed during the war.
“Gregor Clegane is the man who murdered Rhaenys and Aegon Targaryen, the children of Rhaegar Targaryen and Elia Martell, at the end of Robert’s Rebellion. The oldest of the children hadn’t reached her third name day. Elia Martell was the sister of Oberyn. Clegane killed her as well,” Tyrion explained.

Sansa was horrified. She knew about the death of the Targaryen children at the end of the last rebellion, but she didn’t know it was the work of a single man. She thought they were killed in the chaos that followed the Sack of King’s Landing. She knew the Mountain was in the capital right now. Cersei had called him back from Harrenhal to be her champion if Tyrion demanded a trial by combat. It was a chance it never happened.

“And now he wants to get his revenge,” Tyrion continued. “He didn’t come here for Joffrey’s wedding. He came to kill the man who raped his sister and killed her with her children. I tried to convince him to not try this, but he wants to kill him now. And knowing the Mountain, I’m afraid it may end up quite bad for the Red Viper.”

Sansa saw what Tyrion meant. She knew the relations between the Lannisters and the Martells were very bad. Their alliance was quite weak, and anything could destroy it forever. If Oberyn Martell was killed by some Lannister bannerman, then this could start a war between the Lannisters and the Martells. Sansa thought about Myrcella in Dorne. What would happen to her? She remembered how she smiled at Tyrion when he arrived in King’s Landing and how Tyrion seemed to like her. She understood he worried about this.

“Is there some way to prevent it? To send Gregor Clegane away, or to force the prince to leave the capital?” she asked.

“We cannot force Prince Oberyn to leave. He is a member of the small council. As for Gregor Clegane, I don’t really like the idea of sending him away in the nature. Everywhere he goes he only spreads destruction, and I think he already caused enough sufferings to the Seven Kingdoms. I was planning to have him put on trial once I would be back to Casterly Rock. There are rumors about him disfiguring his brother, but also killing his father, his sister and his two wives. There are people who disappear mysteriously in his lands to never be seen again, and I know he raped and killed innocent people for no reason even in times of peace. That wouldn’t have been difficult to sentence him to die. I promised Prince Oberyn that I would have him executed, but he’s too impatient. He’s going to try to kill him tomorrow, no matter what I say.”

Sansa thought about the half-burned face of the Hound. She thought about how the Mountain tried to kill Ser Loras at the tournament, and how he killed Ser Hugh of the Vale. She thought about everything Tyrion just told her about this monster. She understood quite well why the Hound hated knights, especially if the rumors about his brother killing his father and sister were true.

“Perhaps you should have him killed.” Sansa never thought she would say something like that one day, but she did. She had no desire to see Gregor Clegane live, and she wouldn’t feel any remorse by ordering someone to kill him. Tyrion stared at her in surprise.

“I suppose I could. Though it wouldn’t look very good if I ordered one of my bannermen’s assassination, monstrous he may be. But I can’t allow Oberyn Martell to die all the same. And I cannot stop him either. He told me nothing would stop him, and I’m afraid it’s true.”

“What will happen if Prince Oberyn succeeds in killing Gregor Clegane?” Sansa asked hesitantly.

“Well, I wouldn’t blame him too much. I would get rid of a mad dog, and it would improve our relations with Dorne I think. The problem is we can’t be sure he will manage to kill him. Clegane is mad, but he knows how to fight all the same. And he fights pretty well and moves quite quickly
despite his huge size. If only I could be sure Gregor Clegane would be killed…”

Tyrion’s face slowly changed, as if he realized something. He rose from his chair.

“I need to speak to a few people.”

He left the room without any other explanation. Sansa wondered what idea Tyrion had. Perhaps they could make sure Gregor Clegane would be killed by Oberyn Martell, but Sansa didn’t really know how to do it. But Tyrion seemed to know. She wondered how.

Chapter End Notes

A duel seems imminent. What would be the outcome?

Please review

Next chapter: Bronn
Bronn II

Chapter Notes

The Mountain against the Viper.

I decided to write this chapter from Bronn's perspective since he plays a major role during the events surrounding the duel. Also, I felt guilty to not have written a longer chapter for him at the beginning of the fic, so I decided to give him more space.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

BRONN II

Bronn gave his last instructions to his men. Some of them were Lannister guards, but others were gold cloaks he knew from his time as Commander of the City Watch. These gold cloaks were chosen among the most loyal men he had in this time. He chose them very carefully. The task they were about to perform required boldness, courage and obedience. They were a collection of people with more or less honor who would get the job done. Bronn couldn’t allow himself to fail. His future was at stake. He gave enough reasons to his men to execute the plan without mistake.

Soon they were gone after receiving their final instructions. Bronn walked out from his personal room and paid a visit to the filthy old stoat. He entered in his chamber without knocking, and not for the first time. And like the first time, he had company. Like the first time, the old crawling man tried to cower away, but there was no way to leave the room. The girl went as far away as she could from Bronn.

“What… What are you doing here?” Pycelle asked.

“Stay calm, old man. Only here to make sure you did as I told you. You remember? What I told you yesterday? Or do you begin to forget about everything? Perhaps your brain begins to limp too.”

“I… I did exactly as you told me. You won’t have to complain”

“You’d better be sure. There is much at stake for me, and so for you. If this fails, I won’t have a single hesitation to make another cut on you, and this time it won’t be the beard. And you won’t end in a place so friendly as the black cells.”

Bronn emphasized his words by putting a knife on his throat while grinning. “I am your loyal servant,” the Grand Maester whimpered.

Bronn noticed a strange smell. He looked at the sheets under the old man and saw a puddle of urine he just made. Bronn pushed him away in disgust and went to the young girl in the corner, tossing a silver stag in her direction. He then turned to the Grand Maester again.

“Don’t forget to pay her. And pay her well.” He then grinned towards the girl. “I’ll come to see you tonight. That will be much more pleasant for you than with this old slug.”

Bronn left without another word and went to the battlements. He followed them until he reached the
place where it was. All his men were already in position. Good. He hoped the men to who he gave other tasks were doing their work right now. In the end of the day, he would be a sellsword no more. He overlooked the yard. For now, there was no one in the square space under him, but he knew people would come very soon. Normally, men sentenced to death would be executed in this area early in the morning. Today, with some hope, only one man would die, and his death would mean lands and a castle for Bronn. He didn’t spit on this work to do, but that wouldn’t be easy. He was very careful. A single stumble and they could fail. The error wasn’t something he could allow this time.

Finally he came. He only wore breeches and boots, nothing else. His chest was displayed to the world, his enormous muscles contracting and inflating at every movement he made. Bronn really never saw a man bigger than this, but he also never saw a man crazier than this beast. He was alone, an eight-foot tall man only accompanied by his short squire. He was drinking from a huge flask the boy held for him. Bronn knew what it contained. The mad dog drank large quantities of milk of the poppy all the time because of extreme headaches he suffered constantly. However, this milk of the poppy was different. The old man made sure of that. At least he should have.

He drank deeply, then tossed it back to his squire, and went to the middle of the yard and looked around. He seemed lost. He expected poor men to slaughter for fun, and instead he found nothing. The mad dog looked all around many times, as if he was trying to understand something. Bronn doubted he could understand anything. The huge man turned to his squire.

“Where are they? Where are they? Are you going to tell me where they are, or do I have to get the answer out of your guts?”

The squire seemed lost as well. “I don’t understand, ser. They are always here each morning…”

“And today they are not.” Gregor Clegane drew his six-foot greatsword with a single hand and cut his squire in two. The two parts fell on the ground, each one with one arm, one leg and half a head, blood spurting from everywhere. The enormous man took the flask and emptied the rest of it. When it was empty, he threw it violently against the wall of stone, breaking it.

“WHERE ARE THEY?” The mad monster growled loudly. He was more mad than ever and unable to control himself. “WHERE ARE THEY? GIVE ME SOMEONE TO KILL BEFORE I KILL EVERYONE.”

It was at this moment that Bronn gave his signal and whistled. All his men, red cloaks and gold cloaks, went out of their hideouts. Some pointed spears, other pointed swords in the Mountain’s direction, but most carried loaded crossbows, especially those on the battlements. Bronn had them place other loaded crossbows at their feet just in case. It would take a lot to kill the Mountain.

Before the huge man could react to this, Tyrion and Oberyn Martell entered the courtyard with an escort of red cloaks and Dornish soldiers. The paramour of the prince was with them as well. Oberyn Martell was lightly armored, but he was still more armored than Gregor Clegane who wore nothing more than breeches. But he still had his sword. Tyrion stopped at good distance from the Mountain, a very cautious decision, with guards all around him and the prince of Dorne at his side. The mad dog looked at him, turning his back on Bronn who stood on the battlements with most of his men. The huge creature was surrounded.

“Ser Gregor,” started the Halfman. “I’m glad my sister ordered you to come. I have a question to ask you. Remember I am your liege lord and you owe me the truth. Did you kill the princess Elia Martell during the Sacking of King’s Landing twenty years ago? I’m sure you must remember. After all, my father ordered you to kill her children.”
“What are you talking about?” The mad dog seemed lost. The extra dose of milk of the poppy was effective.

“I’m going to ask you one last time. Did you kill Elia Martell twenty years ago here in this very city?” the Imp repeated.

The giant growled. “Yes, I killed her. Does it matter?”

Bronn saw the prince of Dorne with a deadly glare on his face, but it was Tyrion who spoke next. “Ser Gregor Clegane, you murdered a highborn lady without receiving an order from your liege lord. I, Tyrion, son Tywin, of House Lannister, Lord of Casterly Rock, Shield of Lannisport, Lord of the Westerlands and Warden of the West, hereby declare you guilty of murder. I strip you of all your titles, lands and castles, and sentence you to die.” Tyrion turned to the Red Viper. “He’s yours.”

The dwarf retreated just like everyone else, except Oberyn Martell and his woman. They kissed passionately and Bronn saw them exchanging a few words in low voices, though he couldn’t understand them. The Red Viper seized a spear that a squire handed him and approached the dog, the tip of his spear pointed towards the sky. Gregor Clegane didn’t really seem to care about what just happened. He was still holding his sword in his hand, ready to kill.

“Have they told you who I am?” asked the Red Viper.

“Some dead man,” roared the other, taking a step before and slashing his sword in Oberyn’s direction. He missed, the Dornishman ducking.

“I am the brother of Elia Martell. Do you know why I have come all the way to this stinking shit-pile of a city? For you.”

Oberyn Martell attacked. Clegane stopped the first stroke, but he couldn’t stop the second one. A scratch appeared on his chest. The giant screamed. Both fighters backed away. The Mountain passed a hand on the cut he received, then roared and charged the prince who simply ducked away, making another cut on the thighs in the process. Breeches were no protection and the big man screamed in pain again.

The prince used the respite it gave him. “I’m going to hear you confess before you die. You raped my sister. You murdered her. You killed her children. Say it now and we can make this quick.”

“Did you come to talk or to fight?” the Mountain shouted. He made a ponderous charge.

The sword and the spear danced, hitting each other. Clegane’s attack were quick and heavy, despite his size and the two injuries he already received, but the Red Viper was quicker and managed to avert each strike or to block it. Furthermore, the spear was longer than the six-foot greatsword. It was difficult for the Mountain to reach the Dornishman. Oberyn Martell managed to get behind the Mountain and to hit him with the blunt point of his spear on the head. The Mountain tried to hack the prince in two while turning on his heels, but he missed again.

The dance continued for a long time. Clegane received new cuts, but it didn’t seem to slow him down. He looked angrier each time in fact. Bronn began to wonder if Pycelle added enough milk of the poppy. Twice the Mountain managed to touch the prince and hit him, but each time the viper escaped by jumping in the air and with acrobatics. He was always on his feet again. His spear was broken in two once, but again Clegane couldn’t use his advantage and the prince escaped with jumps and wheels. The Mountain was unable to really reach the prince and he received a second spear instantly from his squire.
Each time, the Mountain charged with more ferocity, yelling and roaring like a beast, and each time he missed. However, each time, Bronn could see the Mountain attacked with even less thinking than the time before. He turned crazier each time the spear hit him and made another slight wound. Bronn could see he was beginning to pant. The Red Viper was exhausting him by forcing him to move around like a demon. Oberyn Martell didn’t seem to be frightened by the huge monster.

Bronn would have thought the Red Viper was a bloody fool to not fear the Mountain. Clegane was freakish big and freakish strong, and quicker than you’d expect for a man of that size. And yet the Red Viper seemed able to handle and dominate him, dancing around him, tiring him. He may get so tired that he would drop his sword. Bronn would do the same than the Dornishman if he had been in his place, but a single misstep and he was dead. For the moment however, the Dornish prince had the advantage. Bronn even had the impression the Mountain moved slowly than before after some time. The fight was also one of words.

“Say it. You raped her! You murdered her! You killed her children!” Oberyn kept saying these words again and again, each time louder and with more rage. The Mountain too was shouting, but not the same words at all.

“Be quiet! Shut your bloody mouth! Enough! Shut up!”

After a few minutes of fight, Clegane’s body was covered with little cuts everywhere, but he fought with more rage all the same, charging the prince, trying to hack him, roaring all the time. Bronn was glad to not be the one fighting him. The prince enjoyed it, but Bronn saw that both rage and joy filled him as the fight went on. He wondered which one of the two combatants was the craziest.

Other people started to arrive on the battlements and watched. They were fascinated by the fight taking place, and Bronn had to admit he was too. Who would win? The Red Viper or the Mountain? He heard people starting to gamble about the outcome. Gregor Clegane was bleeding from everywhere on his body, but kept fighting. Then, as the Red Viper managed to get behind the giant again, he cut deeply through his right knee, forcing him to kneel. Oberyn Martell went to a good distance of Clegane, then charged while screaming: “YOU KILLED HER CHILDREN!” The spear sank deeply into the tummy. The Mountain was on the ground in a cross position, his great sword abandoned a few inches from his right hand, the spear planted into his belly.

“What’s going on here?” Bronn turned to his left to see Kevan Lannister coming with two guards in his direction while looking at the courtyard. “What’s the meaning of all this?” He seemed to ask this question to Bronn.

B orn shrugged. “You should ask your nephew. He’s the one who organized this. I only follow his orders.”

The Imp’s uncle was staring in utter surprise at the scene right before him. Bronn turned back his attention to it. The Red Viper was now circling around the Mountain, looking intently at the huge body on the ground.

“Wait. Are you dying? No, no, no. You can’t die yet. You haven’t confessed.” With a quick move, the prince removed the spear from the body. “Say it. Say her name. Elia Martell. You raped her. You killed her children. Elia Martell. Who gave you the order? STAND ASIDE!” Tyrion had given the order to the men in the courtyard to finish the Mountain, but the prince didn’t look to be done with it. Gold and red cloaks stopped in their movement. Bronn didn’t like it. “WHO GAVE YOU THE ORDER? SAY HER NAME! YOU RAPED HER! YOU MURDERED HER! YOU KILLED HER CHILDREN! SAY IT. SAY HER NAME. SAY IT!”

Oberyn Martell tumbled. The Mountain wasn’t dead yet. With a single move of the arm, he made the
viper fall, then grabbed him and lifted him in the air with a single arm as if he was nothing more than a doll. A stroke at the face sent teeth and blood all over the ground as the Mountain brought his opponent under him. Bronn knew it was time to act. He seized his own crossbow and shot at the Mountain. The bolt penetrated his back and the giant seemed about to fall over the floor, but he didn’t.

“Elia Martell,” Gregor Clegane growled loudly. “I killed her children. Then I raped her. Then I smashed her head in like this.” Blood, brain and flesh flew all around the Mountain. A woman screamed. Men, both red cloaks and gold cloaks, were running towards the Mountain with drawn swords. They pierced him, hacked him, cut him into pieces. Tyrion had given the order to separate the two men, but too late. Some soldiers didn’t react quickly enough, and the few who acted immediately were there too late anyway. When they removed the huge body of Gregor Clegane, Bronn wanted to give back his breakfast, and it didn’t often happen to him. The head was half destroyed. Only the Mountain could do something so horrible.

Everyone in the courtyard and on the battlements was silent, staring in shock at the gruesome scene before them. Bronn saw many horrible things during his life, but that could be the worst he ever saw up to now. The Mountain really was a mad dog. And here he was, next to the bloody mess he made only with his hands. Tyrion had approached the body of the Red Viper and stared with a grim expression at the remnants of this man. Bronn saw Kevan Lannister enter the yard and look at the two bodies, visibly disgusted by the sight of it, but probably still the one who stayed alert the most. He made a sign to a Lannister guard with his arm. Bronn didn’t understand what he told him. He repeated the movement a second time, showing some impatience, and the red cloak went to Ser Gregor’s body and cut his head from the rest of it. Bronn guessed the Mountain was dead for good this time. He doubted the mad dog could survive without a head, even if he didn’t use much of it. The Hand of the King went to speak to Tyrion, then left. The Imp was still staring in shock at the smashed head of Oberyn Martell.

Bonn finally came down in the courtyard and walked to Tyron. “Didn’t go as planned.”

“No, not at all,” answered the dwarf. “We’re going to have some problems with Dorne.”

“Aye.” Bronn was quite disgusted by the sight before him. It was even worse to look at the shattered head with blood and brain parts coming out of it when you were close of it. The viper’s paramour was crying hysterically behind.

“Make sure every man of the Mountain is dead by the end of the day. None of them must survive or escape. And make sure no one else dies. There’s already too many victims.” The Imp left him with that and a grim face. “Bring the Silent Sisters. They must take care of Oberyn’s body. Do what you want with Clegane’s,” he shouted at the other guards.

Bonn spent the rest of the day making sure all the Mountain’s men were dead. The men Bronn charged of eliminating them mostly succeeded. Many of the Mountain’s men were murdered in their bed, not yet awaken at this hour. Others were found in brothels, brought out of these places and had the throat slit. Some were in inns too, and easily dealt with as well. Three managed to escape and Bronn chased them in Flea Bottom until the end of the day. He found two of them with the help of the gold cloaks and a few Lannister men. The third couldn’t be found. When Bronn came back to the Red Keep in the evening, he was exhausted. He wanted nothing more than to fall into his bed and sleep. He wasn’t even strong enough to visit the brothel for the girl he talked to in the morning. But first, he had to make his report to his lord.

The dwarf was in his solar, writing letters. There were many ledgers all around him as usual. He raised his head when Bronn entered. “So, the job is done?” he asked, obviously in bad mood.
“Aye, mostly. All his men are dead, except one we couldn’t find. I gave his description and his last known movements to the City Watch. He’ll probably end up as another assassin in Flea Bottom the gold cloaks will never be able to find.”

“Was there any casualty?”

“Apart from the prince this morning, two gold cloaks died in the operation. No loss among your own men. Considering we killed nearly all Clegane’s men, our overall losses are quite acceptable.”

“Yes, if we exclude Prince Oberyn. That wasn’t an acceptable loss.”

Bronn sat in a chair, tired of the day. “Look, there was nothing I could do. It’s not my fault if the Red Viper wanted so much the Mountain to confess his crimes. He should have been satisfied with the answers you gave him, but instead he tried to get whole confessions from a mad dog.”

“I know, I know, my friend,” Tyrion reassured him. “No need to tell me. You followed my orders and did your best. We couldn’t save Prince Oberyn from himself. Even if you had given the order to all your men on the battlements to shoot with their crossbows on the Mountain, that might not have been enough, and most probably a bolt would have hit Oberyn. There was nothing we could do. You did your part well. I’m rid of Gregor Clegane and the vermin that followed him. We shouldn’t concern ourselves with the lone man who escaped. He won’t be able to cause much trouble.”

“I fulfilled my part of the bargain. I think I should get my payment.”

Tyrion sighed heavily. “Have you ever known me for not paying my debts?” The dwarf took a piece of parchment somewhere on his desk and handed it to Bronn. It was a document with the seal of the Lord of Casterly Rock. Bronn unrolled it.

I, Tyrion of the House Lannister, Lord of Casterly Rock, Shield of Lannisport, Lord of the Westerlands and Warden of the West, hereby strip Ser Gregor Clegane of his lands, titles and castles for his many crimes against the Realm. I attain him and all his kin of any right on their previous possessions.

I hereby grant all the lands, castles and holdings Gregor Clegane once had to Ser Bronn of the Blackwater. All these possessions are to be held by Ser Bronn, his sons and grandsons from this day until the end of time, under the authority of House Lannister of Casterly Rock.

“You should be happy, my friend,” Tyrion said. “You’re a landed knight now.”

“I think you owe me a lordship as well,” Bronn pointed out.

“We already agreed you would have Clegane’s lands instead of the lordship. Perhaps you don’t want to remember, but I do remember. These lands will be much more useful for you than some fancy title, especially when you already have one.”

Bronn couldn’t deny any of it. I tried. “What about my wife? You promised me one as well.”

“I didn’t forget. I’ll find you one as soon as I’ll get back to the Westerlands. She will be a highborn lady, don’t worry.”

“And beautiful, too,” Bronn insisted.

“She will be beautiful. You can also pick a woman on your new lands if you want. She would be less demanding than a highborn lady. Just try to take one who actually wants to marry you, or at least who’s not bothered by that.”
“I’ll think about that.” Bronn adjusted his position in his seat. That was over. He had lands now, and sooon he would have a wife. His life as a sellsword was over. “When do I leave?”

“As soon as you can. No one knows about Clegane’s death yet outside the city. I suggest you ride quickly for his keep and take it. I’ll give you one hundred of my men. Put to the sword any of his men who might pose a problem, and try to make sure no people disappear as it happened under the Mountain.”

“Alright. I’ll ride on the morrow.” He would need a good night of sleep first however. He was exhausted. “And you, what problems will you have to deal with once I’ll be gone?”

Tyrion sighed. “First, I’ll have to deal with Dorne. I doubt Doran Martell will be happy to learn his brother is dead. Kevan isn’t either. I just had a pretty unpleasant discussion with him.”

“I guess he wants you out of the city.”

“Worse. He wants me to act as judge for Ser Meryn’s trial since one of the three previous judges died. That means I won’t leave for Casterly Rock immediately.” He wasn’t happy, it was obvious. Bronn knew Tyrion wanted to get out of this stinking place as soon as possible. The Stark girl, his wife, wanted too. And Bronn wanted too.

“What about the prince’s woman? Remind me her name. She’s a Sand.”

“Ellaria Sand,” the dwarf answered gloomily. “She’s utterly destroyed. I would be too if I saw the person I love being butchered in such a horrible way. I tried to see her to offer my condolences, perhaps give her some form of consolation, but she refused to see me. Sansa tried as well without success.”

“The Dornish will come after you, I fear. I start to regret working for you for so long.”

“You have nothing to regret. You are a landed knight now, so you won’t be close to me as often as before. And Doran Martell wouldn’t be interested in you if he looked for revenge.” The Imp’s voice turned a little less bitter. “At least, I took my precautions. When I went to visit Prince Oberyn yesterday to arrange everything, I had him write a letter to his brother where he explained he was going to kill the Mountain in individual combat. That was a protection I demanded for allowing him to kill the Mountain himself. The Red Viper explains everything in the letter. With some hope, the letter, the Mountain’s head and the return of Prince Oberyn’s bones to Dorne will be enough to placate his brother. Prince Doran is a cautious man. I think Myrcella will be safe.”

Bronn could hear some doubts in his friend’s voice. “Don’t you think you should ask at the same time to return your niece to the capital?” the former sellsword suggested.

Tyrion seemed to think about it for a moment. “No,” he finally declared. “It’s better to make sure we maintain good relations with Dorne, and we need to keep Myrcella’s betrothal intact if we want it to last. Anyway she has Ser Arys Oakheart with her, and he’s a good kingsguard, like Balon Swann. She will be safe. The Martells don’t kill innocent children. Prince Oberyn was wild, but I think he told me the truth about this.”

Concerns were obvious in the dwarf’s voice all the same. He was afraid for his niece. Bronn remembered Princess Myrcella. A good and kind little girl, unlike Bronn’s dead sister. He hoped nothing would happen to her. “How does your wife feel about this? Leaving later than you planned?”

A sigh welcomed Bronn’s question. “She’s beginning to wonder if we will ever leave this place.
And I share her doubts. If it goes on, we will spend our lives in King’s Landing. She badly wants to leave, and me too.”

Bronn nodded. He wouldn’t blame the girl after seeing her being beaten by Ser Meryn. “At least, she’ll have the chance to see Trant beheaded.”

“I don’t think Sansa enjoys beheadings very much.”

He got a point. Bronn was surprised how things changed. A few months ago, he would have been discussing with his friend about Shae and how to protect her. And another few months before that, they would have discussed about how good were the girls they tried. However, not long before the Battle of Blackwater, the little man stopped talking about his time with Shae. That was when Bronn realized he had fallen in love with the foreign girl. Even worse, Shae had fallen in love with him too. If only they hadn’t. They would have avoided many problems. Tyrion might still be bedding Shae while wed to Sansa Stark. He would have two women and two kingdoms of his own. Instead, he had one kingdom, only one woman he refused to bed, and another kingdom he would only get the day he finally decided to fuck his wife. Bronn didn’t understand why he still refused to bed her. After all, it was quite obvious the girl liked him. He had no longer any reason to hesitate. Bronn would have thanked the gods to have never fallen in love if he believed in them.

“Well,” Bronn finally said after a moment. “You’ll give your wife my regards. I’ll go somewhere else for the night. Care to accompany me? One last ride before we go separate ways?”

The Imp looked at him with an exasperated gaze. “I’m a married man. I don’t partake anymore if you’re going where I think you go.”

Bronn sighed. “You really became the most boring man in the world after you married this girl.”

“You too you’ll be married soon. Perhaps your behavior will change then.”

Bronn scoffed and grinned. “Never in the world. I’ll go and celebrate alone. There’s a girl waiting for me.”

Bronn left. He was tired, but that would be his last night in the capital, so best enjoy it. He just became a knight with lands and a keep. The Imp’s decree was with him. Who would he be if he didn’t celebrate this? He left the Red Keep, walking down Aegon’s Hill and went to Littlefinger’s brothel on Visenya’s Hill. The young girl he saw with the old man this morning was happy to oblige. Bronn knew he was surely a welcome change in comparison to the torture she had to suffer with Pycelle. Or at least, she acted as if he was a welcome change. Bronn hadn’t seen her before. She was probably new here. The poor. It seems every new girl here has to go through a night with Pycelle first. She lacked experience, but she wasn’t bad. Sometimes Bronn welcomed it when he found himself with a girl who just arrived. She gave a different experience than those who had experience.

When they were done, Bronn paid her twice the price he paid normally. He just got lands, so he felt he could be generous. Bronn then left her. As he walked through the corridors of the brothel, among customers and women, Bronn felt wistful in some way. That would be the last time he would see this place before a very long time.

“Ser Bronn.” He turned in the direction the voice came from. A smile formed on his face.

“Oh, if that’s not the little Daisy.” The little brown haired and eyed girl was walking towards him, all smiling. She wore clothes, which was unusual here at this hour. “You seem a little bit too much dressed.”
“You want to remove them? It wouldn’t bother me.” She was chuckling as she spoke. She was quite innocent for a whore, even more when Bronn considered the way she was beaten on Joffrey’s order. At least she was still alive. The redhead wasn’t so lucky.

Bonn had to nod negatively. “I’m sorry, girl. I already received my service for tonight. I’m going back to the Red Keep.”

“Are you sure you couldn’t have any use of a second course?” She was quite pretty, and sounded so naïve and seductive at the same time. Bronn had to grin.

“I’m afraid I’m not in the mood for a second course. After all, if you fuck too much, you’ll lose any taste for it. We must dose it, and I received my dose for this night. I’m really sorry beauty.”

She looked sad like a child. Bonn even had the impression it affected him. She was good at it. Or was she really playing? He had some doubts on her. He knew at least that her fear when he brought her to testify had been real. To return to the place where you were nearly beaten to death was terrifying, no matter who you were.

“You’ll return tomorrow?” She was playing the hopeful one now.

“Sorry, girl. I won’t. I was just granted some keep with lands and I leave tomorrow to seize it. I won’t come back before long.”

She was agape before him. “You’re leaving?”

“Aye.” She really seemed sad before his answer. He put his hand on her shoulder. “Hey, don’t be sad. There are a lot of other clients here, you won’t miss any.”

She looked at him with big sad eyes. He wasn’t sure if she was faking or not. “I… I just thought I owed you some thanks. After all, you promised me nothing would happen to me after the trial, and nothing happened just like you said.”

Bonn remembered how frightened she had been this day when he came to bring her at the trial. It had been dangerous for her, but they needed her testimony. And she proved to be quite useful. Bonn didn’t only have to pay her very much, but also to promise her his protection. He lied when he told her he would protect her against Joffrey and Cersei, but finally Varys ensured her safety after the trial. Bonn found the eunuch had quite a strange soft spot for whores considering his physical condition. Bonn wasn’t without pity for these women. Bonn sold his sword, they sold their bodies, but they were all bought like Bonn in some way. In some way it was more him who owed this girl something. He couldn’t be sure, but if she really wanted to thank him… And even if she didn’t, well… Bonn peered her from head to feet.

“I have an idea. Come with me at the Red Keep.”

She looked at him in utter confusion. “The Red Keep?”

“Aye. You’ll spend the night with me. For now I don’t feel like having fun, but it might come when I’m back into my bed. You’ll have the opportunity to thank me then.”

“I’m not sure.” She was obviously afraid. “Girls like me aren’t allowed in this place. The last time…”

Bonn took her chin gently. “Hey, look at me. It’s no longer dangerous there. The boy is dead, Tywin Lannister is dead, and the Queen Regent is gone. There’s no one left who has girls like you whipped. And you’ll be with me. I’ll protect you if anything happens.”
He could see uncertainty in her eyes. That wasn’t faked for sure. “I don’t know if I can. I’m not supposed to leave while I work this night.”

“Oh, you’ll be working. I’ll pay the one in charge for that. And I’ll pay you handsomely as well. Didn’t you want to thank me? Here’s your chance.”

She seemed uncertain for some time, but finally she smiled and positively nodded her head. “Alright. I follow you.”

“Aye. Follow me.”

She looked excited as they left the brothel, but turned a little bit afraid again when they came close to the Red Keep. Finally, she regained her excitement once they were inside his room. They had no problem to reach it. No one stopped them or even looked at them. Daisy was dressed like most handmaidens in the castle, and there were so many who came and left that everyone possibly thought her to be one of them. She started to disrobe as soon as he closed the door.

“Hey, hey, no.” He stopped her. “I said only if I was in the mood. For now I’m not. I need to relax.”

He dropped himself heavily in a chair and poured some wine. He looked at the girl. She had put back her clothes on her little body. “Want some?”

“What?”

“Some wine?”

Her face showed confusion again. “I’m not sure…”

“I’m offering it to you. Are you going to refuse? It’s free.” Bronn filled a second cup and pointed it to the girl. “Take it. You’ll see. It’s good.”

She approached slowly and drank slowly as well. Bronn drank as well. “That’s good. Very good.”

Bonn smiled. “Aye. Arbor gold. The Imp likes it a lot. He got me used to it. I’ll miss this good stuff once I’ll be in my lands.”

“Where are you going?”

“The Westerlands. The Imp gave me some lands with a keep there.”

She approached at sat in another chair. “Is it true he had a whore in his service? Shae. That was her name, wasn’t it? Is it true he loved her and she loved him too?”

Bonn nodded. “Aye. Sadly for both of them. Sometimes I wonder how it happened. Well, I wouldn’t say it was so surprising he fell in love with her, after all she was quite enticing. Dark hair, dark eyes, quite tall, tanned skin, an exotic accent. And quite experienced too. That she fell in love with him is strange however. There aren’t many women who fall in love with a dwarf.” Though when he thought about it, Bronn didn’t expect to have some sort of friendship with Tyrion Lannister when he met him in the Vale, and strangely they had become some kind of friends.

“Ros used to tell me he was very good. That I would be surprised with him. She said he was good with his tongue and his fingers, and with his cock as well, that he was very experienced. Do you think you could suggest me to him?”

Bonn grinned to the floor. She arrived too late. “I’m afraid his wife wouldn’t like it. He’s done with brothels and girls like you. I’m afraid Lady Sansa Lannister is the only one who will see what’s
under his breeches from now on.” *If he ever decides to fuck her one day.*

Daisy looked sad about it. “Are you sure he couldn’t make an exception? He gave a golden necklace to Ros for the time he spent with her.” *That didn’t make much good to her.* “She said he always treated his women very kindly.” *In the case of his wife, he’s so kind that he refuses to touch her.* “Is there really nothing you could do?”

Barron sighed. He had to get this idea out of her head and quickly. “I could suggest you to him, but he will refuse, and probably tell me to go and fuck myself.” Barron emptied his cup. “Forget about the Imp. He’s no longer available. Now, time to sleep. I need to rest. And you keep your clothes for now. I’ll tell you when I want them to leave you.”

Barron, on the other side, didn’t hold back and took out his chain mail, his boots and everything on his chest. He only kept his breeches. Daisy came to sit behind him once he was bare chest on it. “You look exhausted. Do you want me to rub your shoulders?”

“Aye, do it. But first bring me another cup of wine.” The girl went to the table and poured a cup she gave him, then went behind him again to rub his shoulders and his back. “Nothing better than a woman to get aches and tiredness out of your body.”

Her hands felt good on his skin. His body relaxed. Daisy continued to rub his back from his hips to his armpits, then his shoulders, then his back again. Comfort flooded his body, feelings of well-being invading him. He puffed heavily in relief. She was arousing. Barron’s cock stirred in his breeches.

“All right. I’m in the mood now.” He laid down on the mattress and looked at Daisy removing her clothes. He had already seen her naked body in the past, as her customer or as another woman’s customer, but it was always pleasant to see a naked woman, no matter how often you saw her this way. She untied his breeches and made love to him atop of him. Barron had fucked her before, but she seemed better than the previous times. She probably had more experience than before. She cried in pleasure as Barron grunted in pleasure as well. It wasn’t the only time they did it. Barron had her for the night, his last night in King’s Landing, and he wanted to enjoy it as much as he could before he would spend weeks on bad roads. He fell asleep, then awoke to fuck her again a few times, and each time he liked it. She really got better compared to the last time he saw her, though he wasn’t sure when was the last time he used her services. When morning came, Barron did it one last time. She was under him, panting and smiling. She had smiled during the whole night, from the moment she undressed.

“How did you like my thanks?” she asked him in a low and seductive voice in his ear.

“Very much. I wish I received such thanks more often.” She laughed. Barron rolled over her, putting an end to their joining. He began to put on his clothes. “You’re good. Even better than the last time I had you.”

“I have people to teach me.”

“Then your teachers are excellent. Thank them for me.”

Her face turned sour. “I won’t ever see you again.”

Barron sighed. “Not before a long time. I don’t know when I’ll come back to King’s Landing.” Daisy looked at the mattress under her. She really looked sad about his departure. Truth or act? There was no way for him to find out, but he had to admit the girl was far from evil. Just like his dwarf friend, Barron didn’t like to see whores being mistreated, except when they were bitches. This girl wasn’t. In the end, they were all people who had nothing and were reduced to work for highborn people and
clean their boots in order to survive. You could clean the boots while insulting them, like Bronn did, but you were still cleaning them all the same. Bronn looked at the girl more closely as she averted her eyes from him. She had a lovely body, all forms a woman could have, beautiful long hair. And she fucked very well.

“I’ll miss you. You’re a good man.” Bronn hoped the girl didn’t really think what she said. He was no better than the other people. Only, they had to pay him very handsomely if they wanted him to commit monstrous things. An idea came to him.

“You don’t have to miss me. Not if you’re with me.”

She looked back at him, confusion plain of her face again. “What do you mean?”

“If you’re with me, then you won’t miss me, though you may come to miss the times I wasn’t with you. But you could come with me.”

Surprise stuck to her face. “Come with you?”

“Aye. I would like to have a bedwarmer with me on the road.” Bronn continued to put on his clothes as he explained. “That will be a few weeks before we reach the keep, so I’ll need someone to keep me company. You’ll only have to warm me and my bed at nights, and you’ll spend the rest of the day washing clothes, carrying wood, and riding with us. And once we’ve arrived to my castle, you can share my bed. I hate to be alone in it every night. You would have a much better life in the Westerlands than here where you must pleasure old and ugly men.”

She stared at him with wonderment. “I can really come with you?”

“Aye, but I must warn you. I’m going to marry at some moment. I don’t think it will happen very soon, but it will happen. When it does, I’ll have to send you away. But I’ll make sure you can go wherever you want and start a new life. One of my friends had a girl like you in his service. He was forced to send her away when he got married, but now she lives in a luxurious house in Pentos. She has gold, jewels, servants, everything she wants. I can’t promise you the same things, but you’ll be a lot better than you are actually. So, what do you say?”

She looked stunned for a time, but then she rose from the bed with a huge smile. “I’m coming.”

“Alright. Now dress up. We leave very soon.”

An hour later, Ser Bronn of the Blackwater rode off King’s Landing for his new lands with a bedwarmer and a hundred men bearing the colors of the Lannisters.

Chapter End Notes

I don’t know how this will end for Bronn in the show, but I hope he will see Tyrion again in Season 7, and that he’ll go back working for him. Tyrion has a tendancy to really pay ALL his debts, while Cersei only pays those she wants to pay. I would switch sides as soon as possible if I were Bronn. Their discussions were gold in the four first seasons.

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
Sansa XV

Chapter Notes

Before you read this chapter, I apologize to everyone for killing Oberyn in the last update. I liked this character and I didn't want him to die, but this is Game of Thrones and people die. And to make this fic realistic is one of my main objectives. A story where only the bad guys die wouldn't be likely. Furthermore, considering Oberyn's behavior, we can't be surprised he was eventually killed.

This chapter closes the King's Landing arc of the story. It is a short chapter, but this is the end of the first part of the fic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

SANSA XV

Sansa was lying on the cushioned bench, her head resting on a pillow. The carriage bumped and shook repetitively, so she wasn’t able to sleep. Anyway, she didn’t really want to sleep. They were still in the morning and she wanted to rest after the eventful weeks she endured. She deserved some respite after everything she went through. Tyrion’s arrest. The abduction’s attempt. The trial. The attempt of murder against Tyrion. Her recognition as Lady of Casterly Rock and Winterfell. The royal wedding. Joffrey’s murder. The affair with Olenna Tyrell. Tommen’s coronation. Prince Oberyn’s death. Ser Meryn’s trial. So many things happened. She needed to do nothing, even only for a single morning.

She and Tyrion were supposed to leave two weeks ago. However, after Oberyn Martell died in Gregor Clegane’s hands, Ser Kevan decided to make of Tyrion the third judge in Meryn Trant’s trial. Tyrion said it was probably his uncle’s way to punish him for the prince’s death, though Sansa knew he said it on a half-sarcastic tone. Finally the trial only lasted a day. With Joffrey dead, Cersei out of the city, and Ser Boros Blount too afraid to testify for his fellow kingsguard, Ser Meryn had no one to speak for him. In fact, Ser Balon Swann, Sera Durwell, the cellar’s boy, Sansa and Margaery all testified against Ser Meryn. The kingsguard had no witness for his defense. The three judges unanimously declared him guilty. Ser Meryn finally chose to take the black to avoid Ser Ilyn Payne’s sword. He received the mercy he refused to her father when he forced him to kneel to be executed. The knight deserved no mercy.

The trial took place a few days ago. However, what had bothered Tyrion the most these last days had been Oberyn Martell’s death. Sansa heard how horrible the death of the prince was in the hands of Gregor Clegane. The duel between the Red Viper and the Mountain competed for many days with Joffrey’s murder as the main topic of discussion in the Red Keep. Different versions were quickly spread through the castle about how Gregor Clegane butchered the Prince of Dorne, but Sansa had the right version from Tyrion after she insisted to know it. The fight had been ugly. At least Gregor Clegane was dead. Another evil man was gone.

However, Tyrion was worried about Myrcella. Sansa was too. She didn’t want Tommen’s sister to die. She had always been kind with Sansa. Tyrion said that with the Mountain’s head, Oberyn’s bones and the letter he wrote before the fight, nothing would happen to Myrcella when Doran
Martell would receive all of this, but Sansa could see he feared for his niece. Their niece in fact now. Sansa also thought Tyrion felt guilty for the way Oberyn Martell died. From what he told her, the prince mostly wanted to avenge his sister who was raped and killed by the Hound’s brother after he killed her two children. Sansa could understand how a man could wish the death of someone after he did this. She remembered the look of hatred Sandor Clegane had when he fought his brother at her father’s tourney. The monster probably killed his father and his sister as the rumors said. Apparently Sandor Clegane was sent away from the Westerlands so he and Gregor Clegane may not kill each other. Sansa still couldn’t believe the Lannisters could breed and protect such monsters. Joffrey. Cersei. The Mountain. She even thought Tyrion was a monster for a time, though she knew now he wasn’t. Oberyn Martell’s death was another consequence of the atrocities Tyrion’s family committed in the past, and Sansa could see he wasn’t proud of it. He really wasn’t born in the right family. Only his uncle Kevan seemed to be a decent man, and Ser Jaime if they forgot his incestuous relationship with his twin sister.

Sansa tried to forget about all this. She wanted a few hours of peace. Tyrion was on the bench facing hers, reading. Sansa could feel his gaze on her from time to time, but he looked shortly and always returned to his reading. They remained silent and Sansa liked it. The last hours before their departure had been very busy and Sansa had to say goodbye to many people. Leaving Margaery and Mira had been the most difficult part of the farewells. Both were her closest friends aside Tyrion. It made her heart sink to be separated from them, but she had to do it. Her place was now at Casterly Rock. They both hugged her before she left. Sansa also said farewells to Tommen who looked sad to see her leave. Ser Kevan was reverent in his farewells, wishing her good luck at Casterly Rock. Finally they left with two thousand men of the Lannister forces. Brienne accompanied them as well. She swore to serve and protect Sansa, so she would follow her to Casterly Rock.

Sansa remembered a strange scene she surprised not long before they left. She saw Ser Jaime and Brienne together in a corridor, talking in low voices. They were quite close to each other, Sansa even believed they were close enough to kiss. When they went separate ways, Sansa noticed a strange expression on Brienne’s face, as if she was repressing tears. As for Ser Jaime, there was longing on his face. Brienne didn’t leave Sansa’s side afterwards. Right now Sansa knew she was riding next to their carriage even if she couldn’t see the lady of Tarth.

Sansa’s mind went to more positive thoughts. Finally she had left King’s Landing. She had feared she would never leave this damn place. And she left it as Tyrion’s wife, the Lady of Casterly Rock and the Lady of Winterfell. After so much time, her life started to get better. She was a little bit afraid of what was waiting for her in Casterly Rock. She would be surrounded by people she never met before. Tyrion had talked to her a lot about his family, but he seemed to like to speak essentially about his dead uncles Gerion and Tygett. They were always very kind with him. He didn’t seem to know very well the rest of his family, though Sansa believed she understood why he didn’t. House Lannister really was a huge family with many branches. The Starks were limited to her father, her mother and their children, along with her uncle Benjen who had no children. She had another uncle, Brandon, who died during the rebellion. Tyrion on the other side had three uncles and an aunt on his father’s side who each had at least one child. These children of uncles and aunts had children as well for some of them, and there were other cousins from the branch of House Lannister Tyrion’s mother came from. There was a lesser branch who ruled Lannisport, the city in the shadow of Casterly Rock. There were also cadet branches like the Lannetts and the Lannys. Sansa would have to learn more about House Lannister before they reached Casterly Rock, and also more about the Westerlands. But she was confident. With Tyrion’s help, she didn’t doubt she could succeed. Her hand went to the necklace. She smiled with her eyes closed.

In the days that followed, Sansa didn’t lack anything to fill her days. Tyrion spent a lot of time during the day telling her about House Lannister, Casterly Rock and the Westerlands. She had to learn the names of every noble family sworn to House Lannister with the name of their seat, their approximate
location, their sigil and their moto. Tyrion also wanted her to know a few things about the history of these families. He also suggested her a few books he had brought with him. There were carts behind them only loaded with books. They were about politics, history, economics, military strategy, geography, but also about science, medicine, myths, and of course dragons. Tyrion pointed specific sections of some of them Sansa should read and she slowly came to know the Westerlands better and better. A subject Sansa didn’t manage to understand was the one of finances and economics. She was never good at it. Arya was always better than her with sums, figures and numbers. But she learned all the same. Tyrion was putting some pressure on her, not too much, but he pressed her all the same. She had to know enough about the West once she would be at Casterly Rock. Tyrion said she might not be entirely well received by everyone considering her northern origins. He didn’t tell her that on an accusing tone. He was mostly sorry for that, but it was the reality. Sansa would have to prove to everyone she was worthy of being the Lady of the Westerlands. At least, she had a chance to prove she was worthy, not like in King’s Landing where she was always considered the daughter, then the sister of traitors.

Sometimes Tyrion would ride with his men and the other lords. As for Sansa, she spent some time each day with the ladies accompanying them. Many western noblemen and noblewomen were accompanying them on their trip to Casterly Rock. She had to maintain good relations with the ladies like Tyrion did with the lords and the knights. It was also important for their soldiers to see them regularly, even if that was only for a moment each day. Sansa would invite a lady or another to sew with her in the carriage while Tyrion was talking or riding with his men, or would take a glass of wine with one or a few of them during a halt. She had no trouble with this. She mastered courtesies better than anyone else now. In that at least, she had nothing to learn. She and Tyrion had time together as well. In fact, they had a lot of time together. At least one meal each day was only the two of them without anyone else present, and they still spent most of the time together in the carriage. Tyrion was helping her a lot in learning about the Westerlands. And they also slept in the same bed each night when their convoy would stop. Tyrion also received various messages from his bannermen while they were on the road and talked to her about them, initiating her to the actual politics of the Westerlands. A month after they left King’s Landing, they received news from Gregor Clegane’s keep that Bronn had taken it without resistance and hanged the Mountain’s men still there. Tyrion’s friend was now in firm control of these lands.

One week after they left King’s Landing, Sansa was leaning on a map with Tyrion at her side. She was trying again to remember the seats in the Westerlands, the family that held them, their sigil, their words, the actual lord or lady and an element of their history. Sansa felt like a student with Tyrion pointing some castle or another. At least his japes made it somewhat funny.

“The Golden Tooth,” she said as Tyrion pointed the entrance of the Westerlands from the east. “House Lefford. A golden pyramid on a blue sky with a yellow sun. Wealthy and standing strong is their words. Alysanne Lefford is the actual Lady of the Golden Tooth after the death of Lord Leo Lefford at the Battle of Stone Mill. Remained loyal to the Targaryens during the First Blackfyre Rebellion. Lord Lefford died fighting during that rebellion.”

Tyrion smiled. “You won’t have any problem if you meet Lady Alysanne. This one now.”

The castle he pointed was one Sansa could not remember. It was in the north of the Westerlands, close to the Crag, seat of House Westerling, but Sansa couldn’t remember it. Contrarily to the Golden Tooth, the name of the castle wasn’t indicated on the map. Sansa struggled to remember, but she couldn’t. She gave up after a moment.

“I don’t know.”

Tyrion grinned. “I admit this is not an easy one. Let me give you a clue. It’s the name of a song.”
Now Sansa remembered. “Castamere.” But she couldn’t remember anything else about the family to who belonged the castle, not even their name. Tyrion seemed to know and began to tell her.

“House Spicer. Three pepperpots on a saffron bend across a field of green and silver stripes. No words for now. Rolph Spicer is the lord. He is the brother of Lady Sybell Spicer, the Lady of the Crag. The Spicers received Castamere and its lands recently from my father.”

Now Sansa remembered. When Robb invaded the Westerlands, House Westerling was the only family to join him. She remembered the Westerlings were an impoverished house with only fifty men and barely fifteen knights. The actual Lady of House Westerling, Sybell Spicer, was the granddaughter of a spice trader, hence their name, and of a woman from Essos. Perhaps they thought they could use the war to their benefit. They spied on Robb from the inside of his troops and received Castamere as a reward after the Red Wedding. Sansa hoped she would never have to face these people.

“Can’t you remove them?” she asked before she could stop herself.

Tyrion grinned. “That wouldn’t bother me. I don’t really like to have turncloaks as bannermen. They don’t make very loyal vassals. But my father just gave them the lands. That wouldn’t be appropriate for me to strip them from it so early. And anyway, I’m not about to invite them at the Rock and Rolph Spicer will need a lot of time before he can get any gold or silver out of the mines.”

“Why?”

“The castle has been abandoned for nearly forty years after my father put it to the torch, and the mines are sealed. So between the time Spicer will need to open them, then the resources he will need to rebuild the castle, it will be some time before he can really claim to be a worthy lord. And I have my own plan to make sure the Spicers remain in line.”

“Why was it burnt? What happened for that?”

“Well, you know the song *The Rains of Castamere.*”

“Yes, of course. They played it all the time in King’s Landing.” *But now the rains weep o’er his hall, with no one there to hear.* Sansa could recite the words of the song by heart. “But what is so special with that? I only know it’s about the fall of a house, nothing more.”

Tyrion sighed. “It’s a very long story. House Reyne once was one of the richest houses in the Westerlands, not much behind the Lannisters. Some say they were richer than the Tyrells. The seat of Castamere had several mines of gold and silver.”

“House Reyne?”

“Yes. *Rains* of Castamere. A good play on words.” Tyrion smiled thinly. “House Reyne was very rich. It is said the Lady of Castamere wore gowns and jewels more expansive than the Lady of Casterly Rock. Some people of this family married into House Lannister. One of them was Ellyn Reyne. She was married to Tion Lannister, at this time the heir of Casterly Rock and the son of my great grandfather, Gerold Lannister. However, Tion died before he could become the Lord of Casterly Rock or have any child with Ellyn, so my grandfather Tytos became the new heir. There was a great rivalry that started between Ellyn Reyne and my grandmother, Jeyne Marbrand. Before Tion Lannister died, my great grandfather had already lost his wife, so Ellyn had acted as Lady of Casterly Rock and brought many Reynes in the castle, supporting her house in the process. Finally, Jeyne Marbrand convinced my great grandfather to send Ellyn Reyne away and married her to Lord Walderan Tarbeck. There’s a maester of Casterly Rock who wrote about the rivalry between the two
women. He called it the War of the Wombs.”

Tyrion chuckled a little. Sansa let him continue. “Most of the Reynes left Casterly Rock afterwards. However, when my grandfather Tytos finally became Lord of the Westerlands, the new Lady Ellyn Tarbeck started to borrow money from him and restored Tarbeck Hall. My grandfather apparently was a kind man, and very generous. People called him the Laughing Lion. I would have liked to know him.” There was some regret in Tyrion’s voice for a moment. “Sadly, he was also very trustful. Far too much trustful. He lent money to his bannermen and to merchants without caring to get it back. People started to laugh at him and never repaid their debts, including the Lady of House Tarbeck. When my father was old enough, he started to involve himself in the affairs of the Westerlands and tried to restore the fear and the power of House Lannister. He ordered all people who borrowed money to my grandfather to repay it immediately or to send hostages to Casterly Rock. Lord Tarbeck apparently laughed at this order and my father had him imprisoned. However, Ellyn Tarbeck seized three Lannisters and my grandfather decided to finally free Lord Tarbeck and to forget the debts the Tarbecks had towards House Lannister. But my father wasn’t about to let it go.”

“What did he do?” Sansa asked.

“Less than a year later, he sent messages to the Tarbecks and the Reynes. Because of Ellyn’s marriage, the two houses were allies. He ordered them to come to Casterly Rock and answer for their crimes. And they had the same reaction than when Cersei sent a similar raven to your brother.”

Sansa remembered this time. She was the one who wrote the letter to her brother. “They rebelled?”

“They rebelled,” Tyrion confirmed. “My father didn’t let them time to act however. He took the initiative immediately. He expected this reaction. He wanted to deal with these two houses for good. So he rode against Tarbeck Hall. Lord Tarbeck was defeated with his army and captured. My father had him executed immediately with two of his sons and all his men. Ellyn Tarbeck called for help from her own house and hid inside Tarbeck Hall, but my father had siege engines built very quickly and made the castle collapsing on her and her remaining children. Then he defeated the Reyne army that came to rescue. The Reynes hid in the mines under their castle. They probably thought they would be safe here, but my father decided otherwise. He blocked all entrances to the mines with stone, earth and soil, and then he diverted a nearby stream and had the mines flooded. Three hundred men, women and children died trapped into the mines.”

Tyrion had turned gloomier as he told her about the events. “Tarbeck Hall and Castamere were put to the torch, and their ruins left as reminders of what happens to those who rebelled against House Lannister. Until my father decided right before he died to give Castamere to turncloaks.” Tyrion sighed. “Your family wasn’t the only one to suffer from my father’s ruthlessness.”

Sansa could only agree with that. She shivered internally at the recital she just heard. People butchered. Castles burnt to the ground. Entire families slaughtered and destroyed. It looked so much like the fate of her own family. Tyrion had left the table where he sat with her and was looking outside the carriage. Sansa could feel he was ashamed to be a Lannister right now. Sansa didn’t feel ashamed to be a Lannister on her side, perhaps because she didn’t feel like a Lannister. In her mind, she was Tyrion’s wife, not really the wife of a Lannister. She was a Lannister outside, but a Stark inside. She had something around her neck all the time to remember that. She wanted to comfort Tyrion, but she didn’t really know how to do it. She didn’t know what to say. It was impossible to sever family links. Sansa could tell him again and again he wasn’t like the rest of his family, but Tyrion would always feel like a Lannister, just like she would always feel like a Stark. They stood in silence for a long moment.
It was nearly the end of the day. They stopped by the side of the road and took their dinner in silence. Tyrion didn’t seem like he wanted to speak, and Sansa decided to not disturb him. They went to bed afterwards. There were two compartments in their carriage. The biggest one included benches and a table, the smaller one mainly contained the bed. They changed for their night clothes in different compartments, then went to sleep. After a time, Sansa thought Tyrion was sleeping. She remembered something Ser Kevan told her one day. He needs you. Not only as a wife to stand beside him during official events or to have children. He needs you in his life. He needs someone to share his life with. Someone who will look after him. Someone who cares about him, who wants him to be happy. She looked at Tyrion beside her. She couldn’t make him forget the atrocities his family committed, no more than she could forget what happened to her own family, but they could help each other to bear their burdens. Sansa knew Tyrion didn’t sleep well, but she knew there was one thing she could do to help him sleep better, and it just happened it helped her to sleep better as well. She moved her head and rest it on his chest. As she fell asleep too, she felt an arm wrapping around her shoulders and smiled as she drifted away.

Chapter End Notes

After 56 chapters, two trials and many deaths, Tyrion and Sansa finally leave King's Landing for Casterly Rock.

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion (the arc of Casterly Rock begins)
Tyrion XIII

Chapter Notes

The arc of Casterly Rock begins here. A new important character makes her first real appearance.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

TYRION XIII

They had taken two months to travel the distance between King’s Landing and Casterly Rock. Their large retinue constituted of many lords and ladies, the huge carriage in which they moved and the bad weather of autumn slowed down their movements. Tyrion was eager to get to the Rock. It had been so long since he last saw it, the place where he was born, where he grew up. His home. He wanted Sansa to see it. She would be happier there than in the capital. He would make sure of that. Tyrion wouldn’t allow anyone to make Sansa feel she wasn’t welcomed at the seat of House Lannister. Everyone would have to accept her as their lady, no matter what they thought of her. They could be unhappy about the fact the new Lady of Casterly Rock was a Stark. They could fear she would know nothing of the ways of the south. They could see her as the daughter of a traitor, as the sister of the man who looted the Westerlands. They could think she was unworthy of the place she occupied now. They could see her as an up-jumped ward who happened to be married to the right person at the right moment. But they would give her the respect she deserved. She was worthy of her titles, more than anyone else, and no one would be able to say the opposite.

As their trip through the Westerlands went on, more and more nobles left them to go back to their lands. Tyrion wasn’t unhappy about this. He needed to spend less time with his men and therefore spent more time with his wife. He made sure she was prepared for the time they would arrive at Casterly Rock. And this time had come. One of his men had come to him at the end of the morning to announce they would reach the castle before nightfall. A delegation of knights led by his cousin Lucion came to meet them and escort them to Casterly Rock. Lucion was the son of Damion Lannister who was castellan of Casterly Rock until Tyrion came back. Damion wasn’t the worst choice as castellan, but not the better either. However, there hadn’t been many choices when the time had come to choose a castellan. Kevan was in King’s Landing, Stafford Lannister was dead, Daven led the Lannister army at the siege of Riverrun, and Tyrion would never grant the office of castellan to his uncle Emmon Frey. The husband of his aunt Genna was an incapable man, and even worse he was a Frey. Tyrion wouldn’t let a Frey have any position in Casterly Rock before long, if he ever allowed it. Anyway, Tyrion knew very well the true castellan was his aunt Genna. He was eager and afraid at the same time to see her again.

Lucion bent the knee before him without hesitation, but when it came to pay his respects to Sansa, he hesitated. He only hesitated for the fraction of a second, but he hesitated all the same. He finally behaved courteous enough and kissed Sansa’s hand as it was expected from him, but didn’t speak with Sansa more than it was required from him. It would take some time for his family to really acknowledge Sansa as their lady. For most of his kin, she was still the sister of Robb Stark. Sansa didn’t show any reaction to his cousin’s reluctance. Perhaps she didn’t notice it, but Tyrion doubted it. Sansa was very observant. They quickly resumed to move after the short interruption caused by
Lucion’s coming.

They were at the end of the afternoon now and Tyrion could see the sun was about to set at the horizon. With some luck, he could show to Sansa how a sunset was beautiful on the Sunset Sea if they arrived to Casterly Rock soon enough. In the meantime, he kept looking at Sansa while she was doing another needlework. Her hair was shining in the falling sunlight of the day, making it redder than ever. After a moment, Sansa seemed to notice his gaze upon her and lifted her eyes from her work, looking at him with a smile on the corners of her lips. She looked at him with false exasperation.

“Are you going to look at me this way until we arrive?” she asked playfully.

“If it bothers you, I can still look at something else, but it won’t be beautiful like you.”

He was rewarded for his answer with blood flowing to his wife’s cheeks. She averted her eyes from his. Tyrion liked it when he got reactions like this one from her. It made her even lovelier than she usually was. She turned back her attention to her work, but Tyrion could see she was flushing more and more. That wasn’t the first time he spent a long time looking at her, occasionally intensively, but the previous times he had done it while she was asleep or unaware of him looking at her. She had surprised him staring at her like this a few times, but Tyrion had always looked away when she had. Only this time he decided to not look away. He wanted to see her in this position as long as he could, just like he did last night.

Sansa had fallen asleep on her tummy last night, her face turned to face his, a thin smile upon her lips and her left arm resting on his chest. Tyrion had become quite fascinated by the position she slept each night, her body always maintaining a physical contact with his own, sometimes coming closer to him in her sleep. Tyrion never slept very much, and not because he had a bad sleep. At least not in the beginning. Tyrion was stripped from the right to wield a sword or a bow since the moment he was born. He could learn to ride at least, but only with a special saddle and mostly with horses trained specially to ride with him. As a result, Tyrion used his time to learn. He sharpened his mind instead of sharpening his sword, making his mind his greatest weapon. He started to spend whole nights reading, finding it much more enjoyable and useful than sleeping. However, somewhere in his sixteenth year, he started to have a troubled sleep as well and read all nights to escape nightmares. However, even for him, to always read could become boring. So he started to search for other enjoyments. He started drinking. Wine helped him to stay awake. And a few months later, he started to visit brothels. Women, wine and books helped him to forget temporarily about his miserable and useless life. Then he met Shae who became his reason to live after the Battle of Blackwater, before Sansa became his new purpose.

He slept much better since he shared the same bed than Sansa. He could spend entire nights sleeping peacefully with her at his side. However, he always woke up before her. There were times when he would stay for minutes, even hours looking at her while she slept, even more since they left the capital. Back there, he was overloaded by his duties, but now he had more time. He would get out of their bed, making sure to not awake her, and sit in the armchair next to their bed. He would start to read, but often glanced at her, observing her sleeping peacefully. Last night, he hadn’t been able to read at all. He just sat there, looking at her in the moonlight. Even after all this time, Tyrion still couldn’t believe she was his wife. She was so perfect in every aspect. He couldn’t have asked for a better woman to spend his life with.

What struck Tyrion so he couldn’t get his eyes out of her was the realization of how she had changed. He remembered how she was when he came to Winterfell more than two years ago. She was only a little girl, a child who probably counted only twelve name days. She was already tall at this time and very beautiful, though beautiful as a child, not as a woman. Always smiling to
everyone, performing all the courtesies expected from a lady, already behaving like a noblewoman at her age. A lovely little girl. Tyrion had noticed her at Winterfell, but nothing more. If anything he had felt pity for her. She seemed so sweet, so innocent, and she would marry Joffrey who already showed signs of madness. Tyrion didn’t expect a happy future for her even then, but there was nothing he could do. He didn’t even speak to her while in Winterfell, having most of his interactions with her half-brother Jon and her little sister. He also spoke shortly to her brother Bran who turned cripple not long after. His brother’s doing. Tyrion didn’t think he would ever have the courage to tell her the truth about the cause of her brother’s crippling.

The first time he spoke to her was when he arrived in King’s Landing to act as Hand. He was struck by her change. Gone was the sweet smiling girl he glimpsed in the North, happy to become queen and to marry a prince. The only things he saw on her face and in her eyes were sadness and despair. Tyrion had tried to be kind with her. Her father had just died, she was far away from her family, and a hostage more than anything else now. The answer she gave had startled him. My father was a traitor. My mother and brother are traitors, too. I am loyal to my beloved Joffrey. Her mouth said something, but her eyes said otherwise, and Tyrion noticed how afraid she was of Joffrey, and how she had seemed to not know what to do with the condolences he offered her. He didn’t know at this moment how mistreated and terrified she was by Joffrey. It was later that he learned how Joffrey promised her to spare her father, then had him executed right in front of her, and that he ordered the kingsguards to beat her whenever she did or said something that displeased Joffrey. Tyrion had kept an eye on her ever since, putting Shae at her service. And when Joffrey had her stripped of her clothes and beaten in front of the whole court, that had been too much for Tyrion. Joffrey could have died this day if he hadn’t been Tyrion’s nephew. After this, Joffrey didn’t dare to mistreat Sansa again, at least physically. He still tortured her mentally, and for that there was nothing Tyrion was able to do. He made a deal with her mother, hoping he could send her away from Joffrey and save Jaime at the same time. In the end, her betrothal with Joffrey was called off and Tyrion’s father forced him to marry her instead.

And now here she was, his wife, sleeping in front of him. Tyrion marvelled at how she evolved since these days she left Winterfell, or even since he saw her for first time in the capital. She looked so peaceful and happy. She smiled, but not with the smile of someone excited. It wasn’t the smile of a little girl, but the smile of a woman who just felt good. She had become a woman during the time she spent away from Winterfell. She showed assurance, maturity, cleverness, awareness and empathy that many women older than her never displayed. She was more mature than Cersei at the same age, and even more than Cersei right now. King’s Landing took her childhood away, and she accepted to leave it behind her the best way someone could abandon it. However, it wasn’t only mentally she had grown. Her body matured as well. In the moonlight, Tyrion was able to see how she was taller than before, how her beauty had gone from childish to womanly, how her forms had developed. Normally, when Tyrion looked at a woman this way, his cock would start to stir in his breeches. Sometimes it had happened when he was in Sansa’s presence, but not this time. He just marvelled how beautiful and perfect she had become. He never thought a single moment when he visited the North that one day he would marry her. How would he have reacted if his father had told him at this moment that he would marry her? She’s a child, probably. What would Jon Snow, Arya or Bran would have said? Or her father? Her brother Robb? And the greatest question of all, what would her mother have done? Perhaps he would really be dead. Catelyn Stark would never have let her daughter marry the Imp, and Tyrion wouldn’t blame her. He wondered if she learned he married her first daughter before she died. What had been her reaction?

Tyron just couldn’t explain or express how lucky and happy he was to have found himself married to Sansa. She had everything he ever looked for in a woman. And there was more than this. There were times Tyrion thought she loved him, just like he loved her. Tyrion had come to accept it. He loved Sansa. She was about twenty years younger than him, she was beautiful while he was a malformed
dwarf, his family destroyed hers, but he loved her, even if he was probably the last man who should
love her or who deserved her love. He didn’t know when he came to love her, but it happened. He
didn’t want to love her when they were wed. He only wanted to protect her back then. Shae was the
woman he loved at this moment. But now Shae was receding in his mind and his heart, his feelings
for her turning more and more into a simple memory each day as Sansa took all the places the
mysterious foreign beauty once occupied. He loved her. He didn’t even care if she loved him or not.
Well, yes he cared about that. He wanted her to love him, but he would love her no matter if she
loved him or not. She was his wife, the woman he would protect at all cost and spend the rest of his
life with.

Tyrion was brought back to reality by a knock on the carriage door. Sansa looked up from her work.
Tyrion realized they had stopped. He rose from the cushioned bench and opened. Podrick stood
before him.

“My lord, we are in sight,” he simply said.

It took a moment for Tyrion to realize what his quire meant, but then he remembered. “Good.” He
looked towards the Sunset Sea. The sun was much close to disappear. He would have to wait for
another day to show a sunset to Sansa. He turned back on the inside. “Sansa, there’s something I
want to show you. Come.” He extended his hand for her, and after a moment she took it and went
outside with him. The entire convoy had stopped. Tyrion had given the order to stop it at a precise
place on the Goldroad. He led Sansa to the top of a hill. When they reached it, he looked at her to see
her reaction. She stood open-mouthed, her jaw dropping. That was the first time Tyrion saw her in
this state, but she probably never saw something like this before.

“Wellcome home,” Tyrion simply told her as he turned his head to look at Casterly Rock.

The home of his ancestors stood tall before them, looking like a lion resting in the sunset, about
2,000 feet high at its peak, more than a mile of length, carved into a great stone hill next to the Sunset
Sea. It was about three times higher than the Wall itself. Gates, walls, watchtowers and forts along
with its natural defenses made the Rock impregnable. Casterly Rock looked impressive and huge
from the outside, but it was nothing compared to the inside. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of
mineshafts, some still exploited, most of them emptied through millennia, filled the inside of the
Rock. The emptied mineshafts were now tunnels, dungeons, storerooms, vaults, barracks, halls,
stables, stairways, courtyards, balconies, and gardens. There were watery caverns in its depths, as
well as cells and cages where they once held lions. Casterly Rock also had its own port with docks,
wharves and shipyards. Tyrion looked back at Sansa. She didn’t move, still staring agape before her.
She never saw something so huge. She had grown up in Winterfell, the greatest castle of the North,
and the Red Keep was smaller than Winterfell. Casterly Rock was much bigger than Winterfell.
Tyrion wondered if she would faint once she would learn how the exterior gave no idea about the
size of the interior.

Sansa seemed to regain her senses. “You… you didn’t tell me how… how huge it was.”

Tyrion shrugged. “I kept an element of surprise. Look at the south of it.” Tyrion pointed the place.
“Lannisport. The greatest city of the Westerlands. It’s smaller than King’s Landing, but much
better organized. It doesn’t stink.”

Sansa looked for a short time at the city in the shadow of the Rock, then turned her eyes back to the
Rock again. She didn’t seem to believe what she saw. Tyrion allowed her to look at it for a long
time, but finally he had to bring her back to the carriage. He preferred to reach Casterly Rock before
nightfall.

Their escort moved forward on the Goldroad until they reached the Lion’s Mouth. The Goldroad
started at the Lion Gate in King’s Landing and ended here at the main entry of the castle of House Lannister. It was his castle now. Tyrion stayed with Sansa inside the carriage. She maintained her composure, but Tyrion could see she was nervous. He tried to comfort her and put his hand on her shoulder.

“Don’t worry. My family is not only constituted of monsters like my father and my sister. Most of them are good people. They’re not going to savage you. Just let me do the talk and come forward when I’ll tell you. You have nothing to fear.”

He smiled to his wife in a reassuring way and he saw gratitude in her blue eyes. He thought he also saw something else he once saw in the eyes of another girl, a long time ago. Tyrion chased this idea from his mind. They went through the Lion’s Mouth. Tyrion had to admit he wasn’t sure like he wanted Sansa to believe he was. He knew very well that even if he was now the Lord of Casterly Rock by all laws and all rights, he was still a dwarf and a second son. Jaime was always supposed to inherit Casterly Rock. Tyrion received it only because Jaime didn’t want it. He came back after his father died mysteriously. He had banished his own sister, the Queen Regent, from the Westerlands. But the worst could be the wife he brought with him. No matter how Tyrion thought highly of Sansa, she was the daughter of Eddard Stark, the former Hand of the King who tried to overthrow the king, the grandson of Tywin Lannister. She was also the sister of a rebel who ransacked the Westerlands during the war and killed, directly or indirectly, many Lannisters. Even worse, she was the one who humiliated Cersei publicly and revealed to everyone her private relations with another Lannister. Though she didn’t reveal the worst private relationship, then things would have been much worse. And here he was, married to this young woman whose family had been an enemy they fought and he was about to present her to everyone as the new Lady of House Lannister. How would his family welcome him? And even more uncertain, how would they welcome Sansa? He would have to play the diplomat in this situation if someone let slipped a misplaced comment or anything unfitting. He had no fear concerning Sansa, she knew how to behave in the worst of the situations. But he feared the reaction of some of his kin. He wondered if the fact Sansa didn’t wear the colours of House Lannister was a good or a bad thing. The only Lannister sign on her was the necklace he gave her for her name day. If his family knew what the necklace really was… He didn’t have time to have the dressmakers of King’s Landing make her any gown displaying her new title. All the same, he would let no one insult Sansa.

The carriage stopped. Tyrion waited a short moment to allow enough time for Podrick to place the stool before the door. He then turned one last time to Sansa with a reassuring smile that she returned nervously. She hid well her nervousness, but Tyrion spent enough time with her to see through her armor of courtesies. She wore it again now. He hated this armor, but for the time being she could need it. Tyrion pushed the door and went out to face his family. All his family who lived at the Rock right now was present, along with the most important members of his household (the whole household of Casterly Rock was so huge that they couldn’t all stand in the courtyard together at the same time). Once he was out, Tyrion gave a hand to Sansa still in the carriage, inviting her to come out too. She took his hand and followed him, going down the stool with all the dignity a lady could have. She hid her uncertainty quite well.

All the people in the courtyard knelt, their eyes cast down before their liege lord. Only the people of the Westerlands needed to kneel before Tyrion. Everyone else in the Seven Kingdoms only needed to bow the head. Tyrion walked to the first rank of people where his cousin Damion, acting castellan, and his closest family members stood. Sansa remained behind, waiting near the carriage. He stopped before the castellan.

“Ser Damion?” He asked as if he wasn’t sure who his cousin was, and as if he expected his cousin to tell him something. Damion didn’t have to lift his head very much because of Tyrion’s size.
“My lord. Welcome to Casterly Rock,” he said on a deferential tone, rising on his knees. It was funny for Tyrion to see people who talked to him so casually before now showed him great respect because he became their lord overnight.

“I hope you took good care of the Rock during my absence.”

“Don’t worry, Tyrion. The Rock was taken care of, but not by him.” Tyrion would recognize this voice anywhere. If there was someone who wouldn’t treat him any differently than when he was simply the dwarf son of the Old Lion, it was the sister of his father. Lady Genna Frey had stopped to kneel and looked up on him. She didn’t look at him like his father did with contemptuous stares. Genna quite liked all her nephews and nieces, but she was also the only one who emitted an authority that looked close to Tywin’s.

Tyrion smiled at his aunt. “Glad to see you, Genna.” His aunt gave a slight bow and looked at him intently, as if she tried to pierce him with her eyes. Tyrion tried to do as if he didn’t notice it. “Alright everyone. No need to keep your head down and your knees in the mud like that forever. Your necks and legs must begin to hurt.”

People raised their head in usual positions. That was strange how people thought very important such little details in the way to behave in their lord’s presence. Tyrion went to welcome each member of House Lannister who was present. Most of them simply bowed while saying my lord in respect. Some gave their condolences for his father’s death, some also swore fealty to him (like Ser Emmon Frey). There were also some he was really glad to see again. Joy, his uncle Gerion’s bastard daughter, was overjoyed to see him again. She was a twelve-years-old child, sweet but lonely. She spent some time with Tyrion whenever he was in Casterly Rock, and since they were both outcasts, she was probably the one among his cousins that Tyrion loved the most. There was also Maester Creylen who proved quite enthusiastic about his rising as Lord of Casterly Rock, and Tyrion knew he was probably sincere.

Once he was done with all of them came the most difficult part. Tyrion turned to Sansa, inviting her to move forward. “My dear family, my dear friends, I present you my wife, Lady Sansa, the Lady of Casterly Rock.”

Sansa came to his side as his relatives and everyone else bowed before Sansa, some without haste. Sansa spoke a few words. “I’m glad to meet you all. I know I am a stranger for you right now, but I hope I’ll get to know all of you better and that you’ll come to trust me.”

“Trust her? Why not try to trust a direwolf while we’re at it?” The comment came from Tyrion’s cousin, Myrielle Lannister, Stafford’s daughter. She tried to whisper it to her sister Cerenna, but not low enough. Tyrion heard her very well. Sansa didn’t show any sign that she heard this. She wore her armor. Tyrion decided he couldn’t let that go.

“Myrielle, I’ll do as if I heard nothing, and I’m sure the others will do just like me, but I suggest you never make such comments again.” Tyrion’s cousin turned white, and no else dared to say a word. “Damion, the journey has been wearisome. Could you show our rooms to my lady?”

“Yes, of course my lord. My lady, please follow me.” Damion proved quite eager to follow the order.

“I’ll join you soon,” he whispered to Sansa before he turned to his squire. “Podrick, Brienne, please escort Lady Sansa with Ser Damion.” He then spoke to the whole courtyard. “You can disband everyone. The greetings are over.”

People started to move all around, going back to their duties whatever they were, if they had duties.
Tyrion knew with who he would have a discussion now. His aunt sent her husband, her sons and her grandsons away, then walked in Tyrion’s direction, everyone stepping aside before her. It was obvious who really ruled Casterly Rock while he was in King’s Landing, and everyone knew it.

Lady Genna Frey was one of the biggest woman Tyrion had ever seen. She was married to Ser Emmon Frey, one of the many sons of Walder Frey, and had four sons with him and two grandsons. She was only three years younger than Tyrion’s father, which made her sixty-four. Her Frey husband looked like a toothpick next to her. She looked at Tyrion intently, studying him.

“So, that’s all. Have you nothing for your aunt? Not even a hug or a kiss after so much time?”

“Well, excuse me dear aunt, but I would need you to kneel for that. I’m not Jaime,” Tyrion offered as an excuse.

“No you’re not, and that’s all too good.” Genna bent her knees and strongly hugged her nephew with her large arms. Tyrion was barely able to return it. “We need to talk,” she said as she rose again.

“I just arrived,” Tyrion complained.

“We need to talk.” Her aunt didn’t let him any choice. Her voice was full of authority like his father’s. Tyrion followed inside and they walked together through the corridors of Casterly Rock, among curtains, statues, shields and ornaments all made with gold, silver and the finest existing silks. He might be the lord now, but for Genna he would always be her nephew.

“So, it’s true. Tywin is dead?” she asked when they were far away from prying eyes.

“Yes, he is,” Tyrion confirmed.

“I’m sorry for your loss.” Her aunt’s voice had some sadness, strong as it was.

“Considering I loved my father as much as he loved me, I think you need condolences much more than me.”

“Indeed.” Genna didn’t scold him. “How did he die? In the last raven he sent, Kevan said he died in his sleep.”

“According to Cersei, I poisoned him, but she proved to be wrong. My father died of a heart attack in his bed.”

“Just like his own father before him. Tywin must rage in the afterlife if there is any. He wanted to be as different from our father he could be, and yet he died the same way than Lord Tytos. At least he died peacefully. So many people don’t have this chance.”

*He died peacefully.* Tyrion had to retain a scoff. Tywin Lannister didn’t die in peace. He died planning on forcing his son upon a fourteen-years-old girl. *And this girl is now your lady, dear Genna.* He kept his thoughts for himself.

“I’m sorry for your loss, Genna.” After a moment, Tyrion asked a question that bothered his mind. “Did you love him?”

Genna Lannister (she was a Lannister to the end, no matter who she married) looked at him strangely. “I was seven when Walder Frey persuaded my lord father to give my hand to Emm. His second son, not even his heir. Father was himself a thirdborn, and younger children crave the approval of their elders. Frey sensed that weakness in him, and Father agreed for no better reason than to please him. My betrothal was announced at a feast with half the west in attendance. Ellyn
Tarbeck laughed and the Red Lion went angry from the hall. The rest sat on their tongues. Only Tywin dared speak against the match. A boy of ten. Father turned as white as mare’s milk, and Walder Frey was quivering. How could I not love him, after that? Every little girl needs a big brother to protect her.”

Tyrion nodded in understanding. His father had been a cold and cruel man, but there had been reasons to his coldness and cruelty, even if they didn’t justify everything he did. Tyrion thought about his first wife, and how Sansa looked at him after she learned about the Red Wedding. All the same, the man had been his father, the man who thought him many things and let him live. I brought you up as my son. Because you’re a Lannister.

“What about the rest of our kin in King’s Landing,” his aunt asked, making them both leave their thoughts.

“Well,” Tyrion summarized, “Joffrey was poisoned by one of his kingsguards during his wedding night, Myrcella is surrounded by snakes in Dorne, Cersei was exiled from the Westerlands and King’s Landing after she tried twice to have me killed, Lancel was banished among a community of brothers on Quiet Isle after everyone discovered he fucked my sister, and Jaime is now Lord Commander of the Kingsguard with a missing hand. The only good news are that Tommen is now king, Kevan is his Hand, and I am married now.”

“Many things happened as I can see. You should have been here weeks ago.”

“You should complain to Joffrey and Oberyn Martell. They’re the ones who decided to die without warning.”

“I wasn’t complaining, Tyrion. Only stating a fact. You should have come here long before. The lords of the Westerlands must feel your presence so they may come to respect and fear you, just like they respected and feared your father. By the way, I hope you didn’t forget his bones.”

“Never. Father would be capable of coming back to life if I forgot them.” Tyrion nearly believed it when he said that. He pursued on a softer tone. “His bones are in one of the carriages that came with us. They will rest in peace in the Hall of Heroes. I’ll see to that.”

Tyrion doubted his father would ever rest in peace, now that House Lannister was led by his dwarf son and a northern woman. Tyrion didn’t assist to his funerals in King’s Landing. They took place not long after Kevan arrived, and Tyrion was in a cell at this moment. He wondered how his father looked dead. He would never see him again. The last time Tyrion spoke to his father, they clashed about his unconsummated marriage. What a last conversation between father and son it was, though Tyrion’s discussions with his father were never warm. At least he stood before his father before he died, instead of crawling and obeying him.

Tyrion tried to turn the conversation into another direction. “There’s been no problems in the Westerlands after Father died?”

“None that were caused by his death. We have the usual problems that come after a foreign army invaded our lands, but nothing serious. What I fear are the possible consequences of the great blows we took recently. If our position was catastrophic after your brother was captured and his army defeated, imagine now. Tywin and Joffrey dead within two months. Cersei shamed and exiled. The same for Lancel. You must reinforce your position as Lord of the Westerlands and quickly. You must make sure your bannermen stay loyal and respect you before they think they can do as they like with you in power.”

“Don’t worry. I know how to keep people in line. I have some experience with that now.”
His aunt said nothing for a moment. “I heard you ruled quite well in King’s Landing. I told Tywin one day that he underestimated you, but he didn’t listen. He only listened to Kevan. Perhaps because he always said what your father already thought. Anyway, I’m relieved you’re the lord now that Tywin is dead. Jaime and Cersei wouldn’t have been able to maintain what Tywin built.”

Tyrion didn’t expect such words from his aunt. “I suppose I can take it as a compliment.”

“You can. Take it like you want. However, there is another matter that requires attention from you. Your marriage is not going to make things easier for you.”

Tyrion sighed. “Kevan told you everything?”

“He did.”

Tyrion wasn’t in the mood to talk about it. “I already talked about it with Kevan and I don’t want to discuss about it anymore, Genna. So I’ll make things clear.” Tyrion stopped to look directly in his aunt’s eyes. “Sansa is my wife. She is the Lady of Casterly Rock, and the Lady of the Westerlands, as much as the Lady of Winterfell. I don’t care her family members were traitors, that her brother fought our armies or that she comes from the North. I won’t tolerate any disrespect against her. I’m not going to put her aside for another bride, and I won’t force her to consummate our marriage. And I forbid everyone to make her life more difficult than it is already, and those who try will regret that my father is dead more than they can believe.”

His aunt Genna had stopped as well and listened to his speech without showing a single emotion. She looked at him for a moment, studying him again. Finally she smiled at him and Tyrion thought he perceived a very slight laughter out of her lips.

“Don’t worry. I have nothing against your wife, and I know better than to do anything against her. I don’t hold any grudge against her because my son died in battle. She’s not the one who fought or started this war. Only you need an heir to strengthen your position. You can’t remain without sons, especially now that your brother is a kingsguard and that all your male cousins on your father’s side with the name of the Lannisters are exiled or dead.”

“I won’t talk about it either,” Tyrion stated firmly.

“Alright. Alright.” She gave a sigh. “I just want what is good for House Lannister, Tyrion. This girl is the Lady of Casterly Rock. All I want is her to fulfill her duties and serve our house. I would need to speak with her.”

“We just arrived.” Tyrion was weary. Couldn’t he and Sansa just rest for the evening?

“I wasn’t talking about meeting her right now. Send her to my chambers tomorrow in the morning. We’ll break our fast between Lannister ladies. All I want is to help her for the good of our family. She should also take the midday meal with all your female cousins. She has to meet them as quickly as possible. She will have a lot of work to do to gain everyone’s trust.”

Tyrion couldn’t deny it. It would take some time for Sansa to be fully accepted only in Casterly Rock, and even more in all the Westerlands. The misdemeanor of Myrielle just a moment ago didn’t show at all the extent of what awaited her. It would be better for her to start right away. Tyrion regretted he couldn’t let her have some time for herself. “Very well. I’ll tell her to meet you on the morning.”

“Good. Now I’ll leave you before you think I’m insufferable.”

Genna followed another gallery to her own quarters. Tyron followed the richly decorated gallery that
led to the suites of the Lord and the Lady of Casterly Rock. His personal rooms stood at the end of a corridor behind heavy doors made of gold, displaying the lion sigil of his house. Two guards stood at each side and opened the doors for him as soon as he reached them. The rooms he and Sansa would share now were wide and included an antechamber, a bathroom, a library (a small one when compared to the huge one elsewhere in the Rock), a solar (though the Lord of Casterly Rock had another one at the top of the Rock), a dressing room and a living room. But the biggest room was the bedroom with a large window overlooking the Sunset Sea, a balcony and a bed large enough for six people to sleep more than comfortably in. The wealth of House Lannister was displayed in every room and every corridor of Casterly Rock, and these ones didn’t make any exception. Gold and silver could be seen everywhere in each room, from the doors to the bedhead, from the curtains of the window to the glass and the tables. Tyrion entered the bedroom and sat in a chair, exhausted by the day and the journey from King’s Landing. He wondered where Sansa was. She should be here.

Tyrion heard sounds coming from the bathroom. The bedchamber had a direct connection with it and Tyrion noticed the door was ajar. Tyrion went to it and looked through the opening. Sansa was in the bathtub, resting her head against the edge. Her back was turned on Tyrion, but he could see very well her ivory skin with water dripping on it. He looked at her for a moment, then thought better and went away. He didn’t want to take away her time of rest by looking at her in such a situation. He already looked at her long enough since last night. They spent two months on dusty and muddy roads, so it was no surprise Sansa had wanted to get rid of all her dirt. To give her the more privacy she could have, he went to the little library. To access it, he had to pass through a door that led to the solar, then to take another door to the shelves. It was the farthest he could go without leaving their common rooms. He started to read a book he never read before. *The Optimum Quantity of Money and Other Essays* by Maester Freedman, a former maester of Casterly Rock in service during the Targaryen Conquest. Tyrion would have to administer very large amounts of gold now that he was at Casterly Rock. The Master of Coin was playing with coppers when compared to the Lord of the Westerlands, so Tyrion would be better to familiarize again with Lannister wealth and quickly. He was to manage money instead of spending it. His father was never generous with his children, except when it came to money.

After some time, he left the library and went back to the bedroom. Sansa had left the bath and was sleeping, a blue silken nightgown hugging perfectly her body. Tyrion smiled at the sight. He hadn’t been able to have new gowns prepared for Sansa in King’s Landing, but he had sent her measurements to the dressmakers of Casterly Rock by raven so they may begin to fashion gowns for her. This was one of them. She was beautiful in it.

Tyrion looked away and went to the bathroom to wash himself too. He didn’t take long and tried to make the less noise he could, trying to not awake Sansa. He put on his nightclothes and went to the bed. He needed to sleep after the tiresome trip. As soon as he settled down under the sheets, Sansa came from the other side of the bed to rest her head on him.

“Sorry, my lady. I didn’t want to wake you up.”

“You didn’t awake me. I wasn’t sleeping.”

Her voice was low and dreamy. She looked half-asleep. Tyrion wrapped an arm around her neck and shoulders as he often did lately. He moved his hand along her back, the silk of her gown soft under his palm, but not as soft as her skin.

“I’m glad to be here,” she said after a long moment.

“I’m glad you’re here me too,” Tyrion answered. He thought he heard Sansa smile, if it was possible to hear someone smile. They said nothing afterwards and soon Tyrion fell asleep. He had no
difficulty to sleep for the whole night.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter and the two that are coming right after are the chapters of introduction to Casterly Rock. I liked a lot to write them and to imagine how was Casterly Rock and the rest of Tyrion's family. Characters who are barely mentionned up to now in the books will become recurring characters if not major characters.

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
Sansa lazily opened her eyes. The night had been beautiful and sweet after two months of travel. She felt something on her head. She slowly lifted her eyes to see Tyrion’s head resting on the top of her own, just like her head rested on his chest. She remained in this position, her eyes closed, enjoying the moment. Light was coming from the large window next to their bed. It was morning, but Sansa didn’t want to get up. It was very comfortable. She had the impression to live in a dream in this very moment.

When she saw Casterly Rock for the first time yesterday, standing tall beside the Sunset Sea, Sansa hadn’t been able to believe it. She never saw something so high and huge. It looked like one of these fantastic castles she used to read about in the stories she read at Winterfell. And the inside… Sansa never saw so much wealth in one place. Gold, precious stones, silver, costly silk and tissues, everything looked as if it was made only for the pleasure to spend money. When she thought she had been eager to leave Winterfell to see King’s Landing she felt stupid. The little girl she was should have dreamed of seeing Casterly Rock instead of the stinking city. And the rooms she shared with Tyrion… Sansa never imagined two people could have so much place. She didn’t realize until now that the Lannisters really were the richest people in the Seven Kingdoms.

Sansa was impressed and bewildered by the splendor of Casterly Rock, but she still remembered where she was. She was in the lion’s den, surrounded by Lannisters. For now she didn’t know what to make of them, but judging by the comment one of Tyrion’s cousin made yesterday, everyone wasn’t glad to see her. That was no surprise. But for the time being, she just wanted to stay here in her husband’s arms. She felt good in these moments. Safe. Loved. She buried her face into his shift, wanting to forget about everything else. After a moment, she felt his hand slipping on her back. Her face emerged and looked at him. Green eyes met her blue eyes. They smiled at each other.

“You slept well?” he asked her.

“Yes. You too, I guess. Or else you would be away reading or working as always when I wake up.” They both giggled and Sansa rested her head again against him. “Don’t leave me,” she whispered.

“Never.”

He kissed her brow. The kiss was long, like the one they shared in King’s Landing, only this time he was the one to kiss her, though not on her lips. Sansa remembered how it had felt so good. This one felt good as well, though not in the same way. After he broke the contact of his lips on her face, his face moved to her hair. She felt his hot breath through her locks. Both his hands ran all over her, caressing her back, her hips, her belly, her hands, her arms, her shoulders, her neck, her throat, her
cheeks, her chin. Sometimes his fingers would run through her hair, and other times he would move hair to allow his hand to run on a part of her body it was covering. A few times his hand went to her collarbone, then lower, but never too far. Sansa didn’t know if she was glad or dissatisfied that he didn’t go farther. His touch was enticing. When a hand passed on the silk of her new gown, she could nearly feel his flesh against hers through the fabric. It was even better when there was nothing between his hand and her body. Her breathing was quickening. She felt an urge to make little sounds with her mouth. A swirling sensation developed in her body, heat spreading through all of it. She wanted more of it. Each movement of his hands left her with the desire to get more. Without really realizing it, Sansa found herself with a hand in the hair of her husband, the other beginning to wander on his chest. Her whole body was shivering. There was also a strange warmth that started between her legs, something she never felt before. She noticed something hard against her belly.

However, Tyrion began to slow down the movements with his hands and to take his face out of her hair. The feeling that filled her body began to recede, but slowly, progressively. Tyrion touched her skin less and less to only touch the places where silk separated his fingers from her body. In the end, he was simply running a hand through her hair, not touching her anymore. Sansa relaxed, her breathing steadying and going slower. But she continued to feel well. Everything seemed so perfect in this instant. She didn’t know how much time they stayed that way. But no matter how long they stayed, for Sansa it wasn’t long enough.

Tyrion finally moved out of bed, and Sansa let herself fall on the mattress. Probably for the first time in her life, she grunted in displeasure before she could stop herself. She saw Tyrion looking at her with a grin.

“We cannot stay in bed all day, Sansa.” He leaned and gave her a kiss on her forehead again. For a moment, Sansa wished he had given it below. “Though I have to admit I wouldn’t hate it,” he added as he backed away.

Sansa felt red rising to her cheeks. She couldn’t help but smile at the comment. Tyrion had spent nearly all the last day of their journey observing her sewing. She had felt his gaze upon her, and she had liked it. He didn’t look at her with an arrogant smile or an evil grin like Joffrey or Littlefinger. He simply looked at her. There was no lust, no arrogance, no cruelty, nothing false in it. She felt more admired than anything else in fact when Tyrion looked at her. He didn’t look as if he wanted something from her. He just looked. Just like he did right now, but it didn’t last long. Very soon, he was in one of the many other rooms, probably dressing for the day. Sansa didn’t know why, but she regretted it. When they lived in King’s Landing, Tyrion would change his clothes in the dark when he came back lately to their chambers. He didn’t know that, but Sansa watched him do it several times. She remembered the outlines of his body from his back. She didn’t know how he looked on the front. Now she wouldn’t see it again. They had enough rooms to pull on and out each part of their clothing in a different room without seeing each other.

She remained in her bed for some time, laying there, not wanting to leave it. After a moment, she finally decided to get up and walked to the balcony. She looked at the Sunset Sea right before her. It was an impressive view from where she was. She could see ships leaving from Lannisport on her left. Too bad she couldn’t see the sun, hidden by the massive form of Casterly Rock. Her view was on the west, not the east. Sansa breathed deeply. The air was salty because of the sea. It was fresh, not like the natural scent of Winterfell, but fresh all the same, not at all stinking like King’s Landing. The breeze of the morning quietly caressed the zones of her body her new gown let bare. One of her new handmaidens had suggested her this gown to sleep, and Sansa didn’t regret it. The fabric was softer than anything she ever felt on her skin. It was so lightweight that Sansa had the impression she wore nothing when she slipped in it, despite the fact it covered almost all of her shoulders, all her back, her chest, her belly and her legs to the ankles. She closed her eyes and listened to the sound of the waves crashing against something far below her. It really was a beautiful place. Sansa kept her
eyes closed, listening to the sounds around her. It was such a peaceful place. How could the Lannisters make war when they lived here? Who would like to leave this place for the battlefields? She heard Tyrion approaching behind her and stopping at her side. She let him come, keeping her eyes closed.

“A beautiful view, isn’t it?”

Sansa opened her eyes to her husband’s interrogation. “Yes, it is,” she said while looking at the sea. The water was shining in the morning light.

“It’s even more beautiful at the end of the day, when the sun set. I’ll show you this evening.” A moment passed, and when Tyrion spoke next, his voice was more serious. “Sansa, I didn’t tell you yesterday because you were asleep, but my aunt, Lady Genna Frey, would like to break her fast with you.”

Sansa looked back at Tyrion. Genna Frey? Frey? Tyrion seemed to understand while she looked distressed. “She’s not a real Frey. She’s the sister of my father. She was born a Lannister, but married a son of Walder Frey. Believe me, she is more a Lannister than anyone else here.”

Sansa wasn’t sure if she could be reassured by this. She remembered the few times Tyrion talked to her about his aunt. A big woman with a grave voice for a woman. Sansa had seen her yesterday when she arrived. Tyrion had discussed with her after she left with Ser Damion and Podrick. There was something about her that unsettled Sansa. She had the features of the Lannisters, blond hair and green eyes, but that wasn’t what troubled Sansa. Her gaze remembered her of Tywin Lannister, even more than Ser Kevan’s face.

“Are you sure it’s a good idea?”

Tyrion put a reassuring smile. “You don’t have to worry with her. Genna is intimidating at first sight, but she’s not dangerous. Unless someone threatens the family.” He tried to make it a joke and laughed lightly, but this time Sansa didn’t really find it funny. Tyrion straightened himself. “She has nothing against you, Sansa. One of her sons, Lyonel, died at the Whispering Wood, but she holds no grudge against you for that, no more than Kevan hated you for what happened to Martyn and Willem. She told me that herself yesterday. She only wants what is good for House Lannister. All she wants is to know you better. She has a lot of influence here in Casterly Rock. In fact, she ruled it more than Damion did in my absence. And she has no bad feelings against you. She’s the better person to start with if you want people to accept you. She mostly wants to know who you are, nothing more.”

Sansa calmed down a little. She knew she had to make sure she was accepted by the people of Casterly Rock. If what Tyrion said was true, then she needed to be accepted by this woman if she hoped to be recognized by everyone else here.

“Am I late?” She feared they spent too much time to sleep.

Tyrion tossed the question away. “Don’t worry. I’ll send someone to tell her we both needed some good rest after our long journey. She might make a few comments about it, but nothing more. In the end, she won’t care. As I told you, she’s intimidating but not dangerous.”

“What should I wear?” She felt like a child not knowing what to do. She was completely in the unknown, despite Tyrion’s efforts on the road to make her understand the life in the Westerlands.

“Put what you want, as long as it befits a lady. She won’t care whether you wear red or any other colour. Genna doesn’t really worry about people’s appearance. It’s who they are she cares about. Try
to be true with her. Your armor of courtesies won’t be of any use with her. If you hide behind them,
she won’t think anything great of you. She doesn’t want a Lady of Casterly Rock who’s afraid.”

In fact, Sansa was a little afraid. Tyrion could try to be reassuring, and she knew he meant well, but
she was nervous all the same. She went to the dressing room and put on her purple gown with
flowers. The servants had brought all the clothes she and Tyrion brought with them from King’s
Landing, but there were also many other gowns, robes, doublets and other garments for all weather,
occasions and tastes. Tyrion told her on the road he informed the dressmakers of Casterly Rock
about her measurements, so they had already made new clothes for her, but Sansa could see there
was still a lot of place left for yet unmade garments. She had her hair brushed by one of her new
handmaidens.

Tyrion accompanied her to his aunt’s chambers. Sansa feared she would get lost in this labyrinth of
galleries without him. She would need time before she could find her own way in this giant castle.
Tyrion continued to advise her on how to deal with his aunt, Sansa trying to choose the best strategy.
He also told her about her schedule for the day. Sansa wouldn’t have a lot of respite for her first day
in Casterly Rock. After her breakfast with Genna Frey, she would have to meet the chief dressmaker
of Casterly Rock so he may adjust her new wardrobe. Tyrion told her she could order everything she
wanted without problems. Money was no object. She could also familiarized herself with her new
handmaidens. Then she would have to attend a midday meal with all the other ladies of House
Lannister, from Genna to Janei, the three-years-old daughter of Ser Kevan. Finally Tyrion had
arranged a meeting between her and Creylen, the maester of Casterly Rock. According to Tyrion,
she needed lessons with him. Sansa wanted to protest but Tyrion pointed out she needed to
understand financial matters better than she did actually. He highlighted some of her failures during
their journey to understand some very basic principles with sums and figures. Sansa knew she was
never good at it, but she didn’t want to follow lessons from a maester again like a little girl. She was
a woman now, and a great lady. Finally she had to give up before Tyrion’s refusal to reconsider. At
least she would have nothing to do for the evening. Tyrion promised her he would make her visit
Casterly Rock tomorrow, though they would need more than a single day for Sansa to see
everything.

They stopped close to an emblazoned door with a golden lion on it, guarded by two men. “It’s here. I
have to leave you. I have other duties to attend. I’ll see you for dinner.”

Tyrion started to walk away. “What do you have to do?” she asked.

“Many things.” Tyrion had an enigmatic smile. “Don’t worry. My aunt may roar, but she won’t
bite.” He left for good.

Sansa stood there for a moment, gathering her courage. She composed herself, then walked to the
door and told the guards to let her enter. One of the guards opened the door and announced her.

“The Lady Sansa.” The man then left and Sansa was alone with Tyrion’s aunt.

Lady Genna Frey was the biggest woman Sansa had ever met. She had seen her yesterday when
they arrived, but she was among so many other people that Sansa didn’t have time to observe her
closely. Now she had to admit she was surprised by the woman before her. She was by far the
biggest person Sansa ever saw in her life, except the Mountain. But while Gregor Clegane was brute
force and muscles, the woman standing before her was mainly flesh and fat. It troubled Sansa. All
members of House Lannister she met up to now were tall and slender, images of handsomeness and
beauty for their age. All of them except Tyrion, but he was a dwarf and Sansa’s mind had come to
not really associate him with the Lannisters. Lord Tywin’s sister was all the opposite, but she had the
green eyes and the golden hair of her family. She looked at her with curious eyes, examining Sansa.
Sansa decided to start with the usual courtesies.

“Lady Genna.”

“You can call me Genna, my child. We’re of the same family after all. Please sit. We’re already late for breakfast and I hate to be late for any meal.”

Genna Frey was direct with her. Sansa went to the table where Lady Genna just sat and took a place right before her. There were bread, various fruits, lemon water and many cheeses on the plates before them. Lady Genna filled her own plate with a lot of food from everything on the table while Sansa proved to be more modest.

“I’m sorry to be late,” Sansa said, trying to start the conversation.

“No need to be sorry. I would be exhausted me too after two months of travel and two years in a stinking city surrounded by enemies.” Sansa was surprised by her frankness. It reminded her of Lady Olenna Tyrell in some way. “How has been the road by the way? You didn’t meet any problem?”

“None,” Sansa shortly replied.

“Very well. Let me be direct, Sansa. Most of the people are not happy about your presence here, and even less happy to see you as Lady of Casterly Rock.”

“And how do you feel about my presence?” Sansa looked straight into the green eyes before her.

Genna Frey just swallowed a strawberry. She wiped her mouth and her hands with a big napkin. “For now, I think my nephew could have made a better choice of Lady of Casterly Rock, but it’s quite obvious he’ll die before he sets you aside, and I know better than to argue with him about this. My brother Kevan tried, and he was rebuffed according to his messages.”

“Indeed, he was. Twice.”

“Indeed,” repeated the big woman. “Don’t get me wrong, dear. I have nothing against you. How old are you?”

“I’m fifteen.”

“How old were you when you were betrothed to Joffrey?”

“Thirteen.”

“Do you know how old I was when I was betrothed to my husband Emmon?” Before Sansa’s absence of answer, Genna told her. “I was seven. And my husband was twice my age. Do you think I’m happy to be associated with a family who broke the guest rights and are despised through all Westeros?”

Genna Frey stared at her with an inquisitive look. Try to be true with her. Your armor of courtesies won’t be of any use with her. Sansa felt bold enough to give an answer that was true, though not bold enough to answer directly. “I can’t speak for you, but I wouldn’t if I were at your place.”

Tyrion’s aunt smiled for an instant before sighing. “When my betrothal to Emmon Frey was announced, there was only one person who spoke against it. Do you know who?” Sansa had no idea. “My brother Tywin. He was ten at this moment. Imagine a boy of ten telling his lord father that the marriage he arranged for his little princess wasn’t a good match.” Genna chuckled, but Sansa didn’t share it. Not that she didn’t find it funny, but she couldn’t really imagine Tyrion’s father as a
child. “But that doesn’t mean I approve everything my big brother did, or much enjoyed the company of the man he became. I’m really sorry for what happened at the Twins. I didn’t know your family, but no one should die this way.”

Sansa didn’t really know what to answer to that. She didn’t see anything in this woman to believe she lied. She had to admit Genna Frey didn’t look like a Frey at all. She spoke of them with disdain and didn’t look at all happy to be part of this house. Sansa found it strange this lady still lived in Casterly Rock. Normally, a noblewoman would leave her home when she wed to live with her new husband in his home. That hadn’t been the case for Genna Lannister. Finally, she could only give a few words.

“I thank you.”

Sansa drank some lemon water. Lady Genna was taking some bread and spreading butter on it. “Tell me, Sansa,” after she took a first bite in the bread, “what are your feelings about my nephew?”

It was a chance Sansa had swallowed all the water, or else she could have choked on it. That wasn’t the type of question she was expecting. She straightened herself. “I trust him.”

Genna Frey looked a bit surprised. “That’s all. You trust him, nothing more.”

Sansa didn’t wish to discuss her feelings for Tyrion with someone she didn’t know. It would have been difficult already to talk about it with someone of her family, so with a Lannister? “He’s my husband. Shouldn’t I trust him?”

Sansa looked defiantly at the other woman, only to see her smile sadly and shake her head. “You don’t trust me. I understand. I come from two families, one by birth and the other by marriage, and each one played an important role in the destruction of your own family.”

Sansa felt anger rising in her, but an old reflex she developed long ago brought her to not show it. “They were traitors.” She remembered too late Tyrion’s advice. Your armor of courtesies won’t be of any use with her. Genna’s mouth twisted.

“I’m not here to play this game, little girl. It’s not by distrusting us that you’ll be accepted here. I lost a son against your brother at the Whispering Wood, two nephews and a brother-in-law later. So we can distrust each other, or help each other for our mutual interests.”

“What interest do you have in helping me, or getting my help?”

“To have an appropriate Lady of Casterly Rock for the first time in thirty-five years for the first, and for my nephew’s sake for the second.”

Sansa was puzzled before the second statement. Her nephew’s sake? What did she mean? Before she could ask what she meant, Genna Frey rose from her chair. “Come with me. There is something I want to show you.” She walked to the door. Sansa didn’t dare to move. She didn’t understand. “Are you waiting for someone to carry you?”

Sansa finally got up. She followed Tyrion’s aunt outside her chambers, leaving behind their breakfast barely started. Genna Frey led her alone through multiple galleries. No one followed them. The guards remained before the door at Genna’s command. Sansa could see the woman had a lot of influence here at Casterly Rock. The servants they met on their path all bowed before her, much more than before Sansa. It was obvious who was the true Lady of Casterly Rock for the moment. Sansa was nothing more than an outsider for everyone here, an upstart who was luckily married to the man who became Lord of the Westerlands after the Old Lion died. She was never meant to be
Lady of House Lannister.

She and Genna sank deeper into the depths of Casterly Rock, taking stairs and galleries that led them lower and lower in the mountain. As they went down, windows were fewer and light diminished. The torches were less and less alight. Lord Tywin’s sister seized a lighted torch on a wall at one moment. They had reached parts of the castle that seemed abandoned. Everything was dark here. They continued to go lower until they entered a large room. Genna stopped there. Sansa couldn’t say what it was in the darkness. Before she could ask, Genna Frey raised the torch to a place on the wall.

Progressively, a chain of torches lighted all around the room, revealing its details. It was a hall, a very large hall. The Great Hall of King’s Landing was the bedchamber of a handmaiden when compared to this one. There were two thrones at the extremity, entirely made of gold. The one on the left was bigger than the other one. Galleries under archways ran all around the hall. Everything was carved into the rock except the thrones.

“It was the Great Hall of the Kings and Queens of the Rock, hundreds of years before the Targaryen invasion,” Genna explained her. “It is built exactly at the center of Casterly Rock, in its very heart. Some say it was built there so the petitioners and the ambassadors would be intimidated by the fact they were so deep in the heart of the Rock, without any way to escape. This Hall is no longer used now. Another one was built to benefit the light of the day.”

Sansa stared at the place, impressed. Was everything so huge at the seat of House Lannister? “Why did you bring me here?”

“After the new Great Hall was built and this one abandoned, he kept only one purpose.” Genna walked through the gallery on their right. Sansa followed her. She realized there were tapestries all along the walls. “House Lannister of Casterly Rock through the centuries. The tapestries of all the kings and lords with their wife and children are here.”

They walked for a moment, following the gallery until they reached a dead-end. Genna turned towards one of the many tapestries. Sansa could see a man in the thirties standing, a smile on his lips, but leaning towards a young woman with long brown hair sitting in a golden chair, holding a little baby in her arms, her head resting on the back of the chair, a weak smile on her lips as she looked at her baby. The man had his right arm around the shoulders of a little girl. There were also three other boys on the woman’s left, the eldest younger than Robb but older than Bran. Sansa didn’t know what family she was looking at until she noticed the icy stare. There was only one man who could gaze this way.

“Tywin Lannister,” she whispered as her eyes were fixed on the eldest son.

“This tapestry was made not long before my lady mother died.”

Sansa heard Genna speak, but her mind was focused on the people the tapestry displayed. Now she knew how Tywin Lannister looked when he was young. She could already see in this young boy the man who would order the slaughter of her family fifty years later. His stare was so intense that she had the impression he was looking at her disapprovingly. You have no right to be here. You shouldn’t be here, he seemed to tell her. To his left were probably his two brothers, Kevan and Tygett. The baby had to be Gerion, Tyrion’s favorite uncle. He told her one day that his grandmother died not long after her last son was born. The girl gripping the man’s clothes had to be Genna. Sansa could already see roundness on this girl no older than Arya. And Lord Tytos Lannister was the man looking upon his wife, Lady Jeyne Marbrand, who was about to die. That was probably why she sat in a cushioned chair.

“My lord father often laughed,” Genna started to speak again. “He wasn’t called the Laughing Lion
for nothing. But he never laughed or smiled after my mother died. A month after Gerion was born, she was dead. He never was the same afterwards. But he loved all of us, even Gerion. I was my father’s precious princess. When my mother died, my father took the daughter of a candlemaker in his bed and she acted as Lady of Casterly Rock. In the meantime, he was lending money to everyone without caring to get it back, trusting all kinds of people and letting his mistress lead him. People were mocking the Lannisters, talking about lions without teeth. Tywin saw all of it and came to distrust laughter in every form. Then came the rebellion of House Tarbeck and House Reyne. You know what happened?”

“Yes, Tyrion told me. And about the rivalry between Lady Tarbeck and your mother.”

Genna nodded. ‘Tywin obliterated the two houses by annihilating the whole families. No one survived the rebellion. After that, no one ever dared to challenge our house. Aerys Targaryen heard about Tywin’s prowess in neutralizing the rebellion. When he became the king, he made Tywin his Hand, only a year after the rebellion was crushed. My brother was only twenty. A year later he married his cousin, Joanna, in King’s Landing. And three years after the wedding, she gave birth to Jaime and Cersei. It was next year that my father died and Tywin became the Lord of Casterly Rock. He was at the peak of his power then.”

Genna looked at Sansa. “I know you probably hate my brother, and I don’t blame you. I didn’t really like the man he became afterwards, but there’s a reason why he turned so cold hearted and ruthless. He saw our house on the brink of destruction, and he did everything to prevent that from happening again.”

She turned back to the tapestry and continued to talk. “We have all lived in Tywin’s shadow for our whole life. It was hard for all my brothers. That shadow Tywin cast was long and black, and each of them had to struggle to find a little sun.” She pointed the second oldest. “Kevan saw how things stood early on, so he made himself a place by Tywin’s side. He only consulted with Kevan after his wife died.” She turned her head to the other boy. “Tygett tried to be his own man, but he could never match Tywin, and that just made him angrier as the years went by. He died of the pox a few years ago.” She looked at the baby. “Gerion made japes. Better to mock the game than to play and lose. Finally he got this idea in his head to find Brightroar, the ancient Valyrian steel greatsword of our family that disappeared when Tommen the Second sailed to Valyria and never returned. Gerion disappeared as well while searching it.” Genna then look at her younger image. “As for me, I was Tywin’s princess after my father died, until I disappointed my big brother. Tywin never learned to like the taste of disappointment.”

Genna walked away, but not for long. She stopped before another tapestry. Sansa took a last look at the tapestry of Lord Tytos with his children and his wife, then went to Genna’s side. The new tapestry only had four people, a man, a woman, and two children, a boy and a girl. All of them were green of eyes and gold of hair. Sansa recognized immediately Tywin Lannister in his thirties with the same icy stare. The woman at his side was younger than him, in the twenties, very beautiful, slender, with a peaceful and smiling face. The two children had to be Jaime and Cersei Lannister. She could see now they were twins. They looked so alike on this, at no more than five name days. For a moment, Sansa wondered where Tyrion was, but she remembered Tyrion’s mother died when he was born. Tyrion hadn’t come into the world when this tapestry was made. Joanna Lannister was still alive.

Sansa couldn’t detach her eyes from the figure of Lady Joanna Lannister. She saw some of Cersei in her, a few physical traits, some of the beauty, but it wasn’t what kept her attention the most. Her smile. The way she tenderly held the hand of her husband. Her eyes. She had seen these features in someone else. Her own husband. Tyrion. He took after his mother. She made the same empathic face than him. Cersei had some of the beauty of her mother, but it was a cruel and cold beauty when Lady
Joanna’s looked kind and caring. She tried to see Tyrion in his father, but she couldn’t. The only child of Tywin Lannister who seemed to retain some of him was Cersei. She had the same cold stare than him sometimes. Ser Jaime didn’t seem to have inherited anything from his parents except the eye’s color and the golden hair every Lannister had.

“My brother used to say that love was useless, that we couldn’t do anything with it. He never smiled nor laughed after people laughed at our father. But he smiled when he wed Joanna. And he smiled too at Jaime’s and Cersei’s birth. I saw that with mine own eyes. You haven’t met my brother in his best years. He was different when his wife was still alive.”

Sansa turned towards Genna. “Different?”

Tyrion’s aunt tilted her head with a sad smile. “Tywin always said he did everything for House Lannister, but there were a few circumstances when he derogated to this rule. His wedding to Joanna was one of these.”

They remained silent for a moment. “He loved her?” Sansa asked.

Genna nodded. “And she loved him. Very much. People used to say that Tywin Lannister ruled the Seven Kingdoms when he was Hand of the King, but he was ruled by his wife at home. Joanna was the only one capable of changing his mind on any matter. He never recovered after she was dead, and never married again. My brother Gerion used to say the best part of Tywin died with her, and on that he was right.”

Sansa looked more closely to the tapestry. She noticed something we couldn’t see without looking very attentively. The way Lord Tywin and his wife were holding hands. While Tywin Lannister maintained an icy and stern stare, she had the impression his hand was behaving differently than the rest of his body. His palm and his wife’s were sliding one within the other in a very tender gesture. His arm seemed relaxed when the rest of his body was tense. That was quite unsettling. Sansa never saw Tywin Lannister in another way than a cruel man. Was it possible there had been a soft spot somewhere in the man? A spot that died with his wife?

“I don’t really understand why you’re telling me all of this.” Sansa didn’t get the reason why Lady Genna brought her here during the breakfast.

“I told you. I want an appropriate Lady of Casterly Rock. I saw all of them grow up. Jaime, Cersei, Tyrion. All of them suffered from Tywin’s behavior, just like my brothers. And I know all of them very well, and I can see how they take after other Lannisters. Jaime smiles like my brother Gerion and fights like my brother Tyg. He has also some of Kevan in him, else he wouldn’t wear a white cloak and serve. But of his parents, he received nothing. Cersei has some of Joanna’s beauty, and she’s even more beautiful than her mother. She also has the lust for power, the ambition, and sadly the ruthlessness and cruelty of Tywin. But of all of them, Tyrion is the only real child of Tywin. He has his mind, his instincts for politics, his intelligence, his cunning and his patience. He also has some of his ruthlessness, but thankfully Tyrion also inherited the compassion and kindness of his mother, and it tempers this trait. I said so once to Tywin’s face, and he would not speak to me for half a year. Men are such thundering great fools, even the sort who come along once in a thousand years.”

Genna sighed deeply. “I’m glad Tyrion is the Lord of the Westerlands now. Jaime would have been terrible as a lord, and he wouldn’t have liked it. He was born to serve, not to rule, and he knows it. Cersei thought she was born to rule, but she was wrong. Tyrion was born to be Tywin’s heir, but my brother was blinded by his hatred for Tyrion. A consequence of Joanna’s death at Tyrion’s birth, of his dwarfism, and perhaps of the fact Tywin could see too much of both himself and Joanna in Tyrion.” Genna averted her head from the tapestry to look at Sansa straight in the eyes. “Tywin brought back House Lannister on its feet after my father’s follies. He made our family rich, powerful,
respected, and feared, but he also made us hated. Everything he gave us is good, but it’s better if our family is loved. Tyrion may be able to achieve that goal, but he will need your help. He may be a bigger man than he seems, but every man needs a woman at his side, especially a woman he loves.”

Sansa was taken aback by Genna’s sudden statement. A woman he loves. Genna nearly laughed. “Don’t make this face. I only had one discussion with my nephew since he came back and he already speaks of you the same way Tywin spoke of Joanna. At least the way he spoke of her when she was still alive. After she died, Tywin had any image, picture, painting or tapestry of his wife removed from everywhere in Casterly Rock. He didn’t want to be reminded of her in any way. He forbade everyone to talk about her, even to mention her. This tapestry is the last portrayal left of her, and she remained here because Tywin forgot about it.” Genna made a pause. “We’d be best to go back to my rooms. We both need a breakfast to get through this day and it’s quite cold down here.”

Lady Genna Frey walked away to the exit of the Hall, but Sansa didn’t follow her this time. She stared at the tapestry, her eyes fixed on the last image of Lady Joanna Lannister. She looked at it for a long time, seeing more and more of Tyrion in his mother. Sansa now wished she had known her. However, when she looked at Tyrion Lannister, she couldn’t find any resemblance between him and his son, except the blond hair and green eyes all Lannisters shared. But even the eyes and the hair Tyrion had seemed to come more from his mother than from his father. She finally left, joining Genna who was waiting for her. They walked back to the higher levels. On their way, Genna told something else to Sansa.

“I told you Tyrion has a lot of Tywin in him, but also his mother’s compassion. Up to now this compassion has kept Tywin’s ruthlessness away, but I fear one day it might not be enough. When this day comes, Tyrion will need you. It will be your duty to stop him from doing something he may regret for the rest of his life.”

Sansa reflected about everything she just learned. She thought she understood Tywin Lannister better now, but nonetheless she wouldn’t forgive the man for the destruction of her family, or for everything else he did. Her father executed people, but only when they committed crimes. It was his duty and he never liked it. She could understand you had to execute rebels and criminals, but children or innocent people killed only in order to be feared… that she couldn’t accept. The Riverlands and the North followed her brother because they respected and loved him, not because they feared him. And for that he ended up killed during a wedding. Tyrion ruled King’s Landing without assassination or slaughter. And in the end he was abandoned by his allies, stripped of all his powers, and nearly killed on his sister’s order. But Sansa managed to free him and now they were at the head of the Westerlands and House Lannister, and she didn’t have to shed blood for this. No. She wouldn’t believe violence and killing were the only ways to rule and survive. There were other ways. She wouldn’t turn like Cersei. I’ll make people love me. And I’ll make them love Tyrion as well.

Sansa wondered what Genna meant when she said she would have to make sure Tyrion wouldn’t do something he would regret forever afterwards. She said Tyrion was ruthless like Tywin, but Sansa couldn’t see anything of this sort in her husband. Tyrion had made things that caused the death of thousands of people, but he did it because he had no choice. The destruction of Stannis’s fleet killed many people, but he did it to save a city of half a million people. He had the Mountain and his men killed, perhaps even murdered from a certain point of view, but they were monsters who deserved their end. It wasn’t much different from the people her father executed, except perhaps Tyrion wasn’t the one to swing the sword, but the principle remained the same. Anyway, Sansa doubted Tyrion would be able to swing the sword with his small size. He even tried to avoid executions as much as he could, preferring to send people to the Wall for their crimes, even a man who killed babies like Janos Slynt. Sansa couldn’t imagine Tyrion ordering the slaughtering of an entire family, the murder of children, or ordering someone to rape a woman. Tyrion was intelligent, perhaps like his father,
Sansa could admit it, but not ruthless or cruel in any way. Sansa didn’t believe it a single moment. He didn’t use his mind like Lord Tywin did. But if Tyrion needed her help in any way, she would help him, no matter the cost. She was his wife, and she wouldn’t give up on him. She would be at his side forever. Ser Kevan’s words came back to her mind. *He needs you. Not only as a wife to stand beside him during official events or to have children. He needs you in his life. He needs someone to share his life with. Someone who will look after him. Someone who cares about him, who wants him to be happy.*

They came back to Genna’s apartments to finish their breakfast barely initiated. Genna spent the rest of it asking questions about her and to tell her about her duties as the Lady of Casterly Rock, from managing the castle to her role in politics and the management of House Lannister. They also talked about her skills in handling all these tasks, and Sansa discovered Genna already knew a lot about her.

“I heard you have problems when it comes to sums and figures.” Sansa looked in dismay at the lady. Genna Frey smiled cunningly. “There are many people who owe me something or another, and a few were with you in King’s Landing or during your travel on the Goldroad. I asked them a few questions about what they knew about you.”

Sansa could see Genna Lannister, since she was more a Lannister than a Frey, wasn’t someone to take lightly. However, Sansa didn’t feel the woman was dangerous, at least not to her. It was like Tyrion told her. She seemed to care essentially about House Lannister and was trying to advise Sansa so she may succeed as Lady of Casterly Rock. Sansa was careful about her all the same, but she didn’t feel this Lannister was a threat like Cersei had been for so long. They arrived at the end of the breakfast.

“I’m sorry about what Myrielle said yesterday. Her father was Stafford Lannister, Joanna’s brother, and he died during the war when your brother attacked his army. It happens all the time, but Myrielle was quite close to her father and she hates the Starks ever since.” Sansa didn’t feel any false apologies in Genna’s voice. She looked sincere. “I won’t lie to you. That won’t be very easy for you at the beginning here. The injuries inflicted by the war are still fresh and will take time to heal. Many still have grudges against the Starks. But your name can be your strength just like it can be your weakness. It still commands respect if you use it well. And since you managed to defeat Cersei in a trial and to neutralize her, I guess you’re not without ways to defend yourself. But I’ll help you all the same. I don’t want the new Lady of House Lannister overwhelmed with so many problems she cannot handle on her own when she just arrived.”

“I thank you, Genna.”

Tyrion’s aunt smiled at her. “I think you can go now. I kept you in my company far too long. You must have other things to do before midday. Did Tyrion tell you had to attend a dinner?”

“Yes, he did this morning. All the ladies of House Lannister would be there from what he told me.”

“They will. Don’t be late. Jeyne!” A handmaiden who was about twenty-years-old came from behind Genna. Sansa hadn’t noticed her presence until now. “Please accompany Lady Lannister back to her chambers. Remember what I told you. It will be of great help for you. And welcome to Casterly Rock.” The three last sentences were for Sansa.

It was a good thing Genna asked a handmaiden to lead her back to her chambers. Sansa wouldn’t have been able to find her way back alone. As she returned to her chambers with the servant, Sansa thought she may not be in such a difficult situation as she thought. She believed Genna was probably sincere when she said she would help her. The woman would be a precious ally for her beginnings in this new castle. Sansa didn’t care if she did it essentially for House Lannister. She would be an ally all the same. Sansa felt more confident in her future. Only, thoughts lingered in her mind.
Something Genna told her.

*Every man needs a woman at his side, especially a woman he loves.* Did Tyrion really love her? Her heart started to pound in her chest and she felt red rising to her cheeks. She remembered the way he looked at her yesterday in the carriage. Or what happened this morning. But another thought, somber this one, lingered. *Up to now this compassion has kept Tywin’s ruthlessness away, but I fear one day it might not be enough. When this day comes, Tyrion will need you. It will be your duty to stop him from doing something he may regret for the rest of his life.*

Chapter End Notes

I hope I depicted Genna well enough. I regret she doesn't appear in the show. She is only seen briefly at Riverrun in AFFC and her discussion with Jaime was very interesting. I thought she might be the best to give to Sansa a first insight of the Lannister family, an insight that didn't come from Tyrion.

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa (again)
Sansa XVII

Chapter Notes

Normally, this was meant to be part of the previous chapter, but it would have made a very long chapter (longer than the chapter of the royal wedding). So I decided to split it into two chapters. There were so many things that would have happened within a single chapter if I hadn't made a separation. It was best to divide it.

Sansa keeps being introduced to the life and the people of Casterly Rock. And she writes a letter. To who? Read if you want to discover it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sansa XVII

Sansa spent the rest of the morning with the chief dressmaker of Casterly Rock, a thin man with a sweet voice and precious manners. He started to show her the new gowns that were made for her during the last three months. Half of them were red, but there were also of other colors: blue, yellow, white, purple, green, rose… Each of them had gold, silver, or precious stones on it. Sometimes it had the three. The fabrics they were made of were costly and soft, sometimes coming from the Free Cities of Essos. The dressmaker took again her measurements to be able to make more gowns with more precision, then proposed her a multitude of designs for future gowns. Sansa was surprised by the wide range of choices she had, and even more by the cost of the clothes. It seemed money was effectively no object at Casterly Rock.

Sansa didn’t really know what to make of all this. She had wanted to be a great lady or a queen all her childhood, but she lost all her illusions during the last two years. She liked beautiful gowns and fine silk, but she wasn’t sure she wanted such luxury. It remembered her too much of the pageantry and arrogance of King’s Landing. Also, her mother always told her she should remain humble and simple. Sansa couldn’t really make a choice, so the chief dressmaker left her the designs so she may look at them longer before she made a choice. Sansa then called all her handmaidens. They all came from noble families of the Westerlands and showed great respect to Sansa. She didn’t really expect something different. After all, despite the fact all her family were considered traitors, she was still the Lady of Casterly Rock now, and the highborn people of minor houses couldn’t really show disrespect right in front of her. She asked them all their names, and luckily Sansa was able to remember a detail about the family of each one. All the girls seemed happy that Sansa knew a few things about their house. She gave them instructions about how she wanted them to serve her, and soon she could send them away.

Sansa spent an hour afterwards looking at the patterns of the gowns that were suggested. She tried to choose some that weren’t too lavish, but beautiful at the same time. Unfortunately, it was difficult to choose some that weren’t too lavish. They were all. If only Mira was here, she would have asked her opinion, but her friend was about a thousand miles away. She couldn’t even ask Margaery. Finally she put aside this task for later. Two of her handmaidens came to prepare her for the midday meal with the Lannisters. Sansa wasn’t sure what gown to choose. Some people there wouldn’t see her as a Lannister, so she feared she may offense them by wearing the color of their family. Anyway her
mother didn’t wear clothes proper for Northerners and she was accepted in the North all the same. Sansa chose a blue gown with silver at the hem. She was glad at least that all gowns properly covered her body. She remembered the plunging necklines of some Cersei’s gowns, or the light dresses Margaery wore and that revealed most of her back. She wouldn’t feel comfortable in that kind of clothes. These were just fine. The only jewel Sansa wore was her golden necklace. Anyway, she always had it on her. She then left for the gardens where the meeting would take place.

On the way, Sansa discussed with the handmaiden accompanying her and showing her the way to the gardens. Her name was Willia Marbrand, a niece to Ser Addam. They talked about him for a part of their way to the gardens. Sansa had met Ser Addam in King’s Landing where he was still acting as Lord Commander of the City Watch. Sansa had the time to ask the girl where was the Stone Garden. It was the godswood of Casterly Rock. Sadly, the girl couldn’t tell her precisely where it was. She never visited it. Sansa felt she may be the first person who would use this godswood to pray in decades.

Genna welcomed her at the entrance of the gardens and sent Sansa’s maid away. “You’re in time. Come.” The greeting from Tyrion’s aunt was short and she brought Sansa with her through the gardens. Sansa quickly realized they were wider than those in King’s Landing and contained more specimens of plants and flowers. It was strange to think the king lived in a place smaller, poorer and less welcoming than the Lannisters. Genna started to talk to her about what was about to come.

“As I told you, some aren’t very pleased with your presence, but I warned them to have no misplaced comments or gestures towards you, or else I would deal with them if you didn’t deal with them before. They must know their place. Whether they like it or not, you are their lady now.”

No one could argue against this, except if they knew about her unconsummated marriage. Sansa wondered if someone else knew in Casterly Rock except her and Tyrion. Genna probably already knew. They came to a square of golden roses where a little girl was playing with a woman with brown hair and thin arms. Sansa would say the woman was approximately the age of her own mother, Lady Catelyn Stark. She saw them arrive and took the little girl in her arms, coming to meet them.

“Sansa,” began Genna, “I present you my sister-in-law, Lady Dorna Lannister.”

“My lady,” Dorna bowed with a thin smile. Even with the time she spent in King’s Landing as Lady of the Rock, she was still unaccustomed to the fact people much older than her had to bow before her while she didn’t have to reciprocate.

“Lady Dorna. I met your husband in King’s Landing. He’s a good man,” Sansa said. She was Ser Kevan’s wife. Sansa realized she wasn’t the only girl among the Lannisters married to a man who could be twenty years older than herself or more. Dorna had to be in the mid-thirties when Ser Kevan was in his sixties.

“Yes, he is. He talked to me about you in his letters. You also met my son Lancel I think. How was he? My lord husband didn’t tell me much about him, only that he was joining a community of brothers on some island. When Lancel left Casterly Rock with Kevan, he looked healthy enough to travel, but he barely spoke, even to me. I never saw him so silent.”

Sansa didn’t really know what to answer. Lady Dorna didn’t seem aware of what really happened to her son. “I met him. He was alright, but I didn’t speak a lot with him. He left the capital not long before the royal wedding.”

Dorna sighed and averted her eyes on the ground. “We all lose our sons. I lost Martyn and Willem. They were sweet boys. Genna lost Lyonel, and now Cersei loses Joffrey. I won’t have grandchildren
any soon.”

Dorna Lannister knew nothing. She had no idea what happened to her eldest son, or what he did. Sansa didn’t think it to be a good idea to tell her. There were surely good reasons why Ser Kevan didn’t tell her. “I’m sorry for the death of your sons, Lady Dorna.”

Dorna smiled sadly at her and put a hand on her arm. “You don’t have to be sorry. We all lost people we loved.” Sansa felt a wave of sympathy for this woman. They were not in King’s Landing, surely she could assume people were more honest here. She didn’t know much about Dorna Lannister, but she looked essentially like a mother who loved her children above all. She didn’t look much different from Sansa’s mother.

Dorna turned to her little girl she held in her arms. “This is our daughter to me and my lord husband, Janei. Janei.” She tried to catch the attention of the child. “This is our new lady, Sansa. She is the wife of your cousin Tyrion. Bow your head and say my lady.”

Sansa saw Dorna put a little pressure on the back of her daughter’s head as the little girl squealed lowly. “My lady.” She looked scared. Sansa put her largest smile upon her face.

“I’m glad to meet you, Lady Janei.”

After a moment, the little girl smiled back. “Do you want to hold her?” Dorna’s question startled Sansa.

“Are you sure?”

“Of course. I’m sure she will like you.”

“Very well,” Sansa answered nervously. She had never taken a child in her arms before. She was only seven when Rickon was born, not old enough to hold him yet, and already too much occupied by her lessons. But she took Janei in her arms all the same when Dorna gave her daughter to her.

She was heavier than Sansa thought. She feared she may drop her by accident, but she also feared she might hold Janei too tightly. After a moment, the little child with golden hair and green eyes smiled widely and started to play with her hair.

“She likes you,” Dorna said with a large smile. “I think she never saw red hair before.” Sansa had to chuckle a little. It was unnerving to have a little girl playing with her hair using little hands. After a moment she gave her child back to Dorna. Janei was still waving her arms in her direction. “She really likes you a lot. Do you think you’ll have children soon?”

Sansa froze at the question, but she recovered her composure very quickly. “Well, I’m not pregnant yet. I don’t know when I’ll have some.”

“I wish you many children in the future. I always found it sad that my nephew Tyrion wasn’t married. I can understand for Jaime, he is a kingsguard, but Tyrion had no reasons to not get married. He should have been married so long ago. I hope you’ll have children very soon.”

_Tyrion was married before, only Lord Tywin decided the girl wasn’t worthy and had her raped by dozens of men._ Sansa kept her thoughts for herself and tried to not look ashamed. For now there was no chance she would get with child. Should she ask Tyrion to do it? She would have to one day, but she didn’t know when. She noticed a movement in a bush of roses behind Dorna. “What was it?”

Genna went to the bush, and pulled from it a girl who was approximately of Arya’s age. She had green eyes and blond hair. A Lannister for sure. She looked shy and afraid to move out of her hiding
Genna made the presentations. “Sansa, I present you Joy, the daughter of my brother Gerion. Joy, this is Sansa, the wife of your cousin Tyrion.”

Joy moved toward Sansa in a slow pace, encouraged by a little push from Genna. She looked afraid as if Sansa would bite her. She looked to the ground for a long moment, but when she arrived before Sansa, she slowly lifted her eyes towards her and didn’t divert them from her afterwards. She couldn’t be more different than Arya. Sansa’s sister would rush to other people and couldn’t keep quiet for a minute. She looked at Sansa for a long moment before she talked.

“You’re Sansa, Uncle Tyrion’s wife?”

Sansa was puzzled. “Uncle Tyrion? He’s not your cousin?”

“He is, but I call him Uncle Tyrion. Just like Uncle Jaime. They’re very kind with me. He didn’t talk to you about me?”

“Of course, he did. He speaks a lot about you, and about your father too.”

A huge smile appeared on Joy’s face. Tyrion spoke mostly of his uncle in fact, but he also talked about the only daughter Gerion Lannister ever had, a bastard called Joy Hill. Tyrion told her the girl was quite lonely and discreet since her father died. Sansa could see it with her own eyes now, but Joy seemed very kind and sweet all the same.

“Alright. Alright. Time to eat now. Let’s join the others.” Genna nearly forced them to leave the place and walk to another corner of the gardens. Lady Dorna took the lead with Janei and Joy while Genna stayed behind with Sansa. “The three seem to like you. Try to do the same with the others.”

They arrived to a vast open space where half a dozen women of various ages were waiting for them. Sansa recognized the faces of a few of them, without being able to put a name on them. Without surprise, most of them had green eyes and blond hair. Genna first introduced Myrielle and Cerenna, Ser Stafford’s daughters. Sansa remembered Myrielle as the one who passed a comment when she arrived. She didn’t seem pleased by Sansa’s presence anymore in this moment. She curtsied properly, but couldn’t force a smile on her face. Cerenna, who looked a little older than her sister, greeted Sansa more warmly. There was also Shiera Crakehall, Ser Damion’s wife, one of the few without blond hair. She wasn’t a Lannister by blood and lost no one in the war, so Sansa hoped she wouldn’t be hostile to her. She greeted Sansa without showing any sign of ill thinking. Her daughter Lanna stood next to her and greeted Sansa the same way than her mother, though Sansa thought she saw a shadow in her eyes. There was also Lady Darlessa Marbrand, Ser Tygett’s widow. She showed no more hostility than Lady Shiera. Finally came Lady Margot Lannister, another cousin of Tyrion, who was around the end of her twenties from what Sansa could tell. This one welcomed Sansa nearly cheerfully. She was married to Lord Titus Peake, a lord from the Reach.

They all sat at a grand table. Being the Lady of Casterly Rock, Sansa sat at the head of it with Genna at her left and Dorna at her right. Sadly, it also meant she was the center of all the attention. Sansa had to be careful about what she would say, but she mastered courtesies and the art of talking better than everyone now. Not wanting to address any subject that could lead to an argument or any unease, Sansa started to ask questions about the Reach and her husband to Lady Margot. She proved to be quite eloquent about it, and Sansa could talk to her about Margaery and her family. The young woman listened very intently to everything she said. She only met Margaery once when she and her husband visited Highgarden. Sansa didn’t think she would have any problem with this one. Lady Shiera joined the conversation very quickly, telling many tales about her family and their home castle, Crakehall. Sansa remembered a few things she learned about House Crakehall and Ser
Damion’s wife proved to be quite surprised by this. Her daughter Lanna proved to be much more reserved, only saying a few words. Cerenna also participated to the conversation, but Sansa noticed she spent a lot of time looking at her sister who didn’t lift her eyes from her plate. Darlessa contributed as well.

At one moment, Janei escaped Dorna’s arms and went to Sansa, tugging her gown. Dorna had a smile on her face as she looked at it. “I think Janei really took a liking on you. We should give her some time with you.”

Dorna took her daughter and placed her on Sansa’s knees. The little girl immediately started to play with her hair again. Most of the women started to laugh at the scene as Sansa tried to keep her head away from the little hands playing with her locks.

“All right, Dorna,” Lady Genna said after a moment. “I think you should get Janei back before she snatches some hair from our lady.”

Janei was back on Dorna’s knees a few seconds later, not without complaining, her hands still moving in the empty air as if she hoped she could still get to Sansa’s hair from this far. Dorna didn’t need to apologize, but she did. “I’m sorry. She mostly sees blond hair around here, so she finds yours very interesting.”

Sansa chuckled lowly, looking at how the little girl still tried to get free of her mother’s grasp. She acted even more childish than Rickon who used to crush nuts with a stone all time. Neither their mother neither Sansa ever managed to stop him from doing so, and Arya never tried.

“I was surprised when I saw you yesterday, Lady Sansa,” Lady Cerenna suddenly said. “I heard all the Starks had brown hair. I wondered if there was a mistake.”

“All my brothers and my sister have brown hair, but I hold from my mother, Catelyn Tully. She had auburn hair too.”

“Is it true there is snow even during summer in the North?” The question came from Joy. She didn’t talk since the beginning of the meal and they were at the end of the main course now.

“Yes, there is. We call it summer snow. Most of the time it falls during the night and then it melts during the day, but there are times there is more than others.” A memory came back to Sansa’s mind. “One day my sister Arya started a battle of snowballs with me in a courtyard. She was approximately your age the last time I saw her. My other brothers joined us quickly and we all ended up with a good cold.”

Joy was looking at her with obvious joy, looking very interested by that, but it was replaced very quickly by a sulky air. “I never saw snow here at Casterly Rock.”

“Yes, you did my dear,” Dorna corrected. “Only you don’t remember. You had just been born when the last winter ended. You’ll see snow very soon though. This long summer is ended and we’re in autumn. That won’t be long before snow comes.”

“Winter is coming,” Sansa added. She noticed a silence around the table. She just said the words of her family, and it made quite an impression. Joy didn’t seem to notice it however.

“How does snow look like?”

“Well,” Sansa tried to explain. “It’s white, and cold, but it melts into water when you take it into your hands. It can give the impression the ground is all covered by a white carpet when it falls in little quantity, but it can fall in greater quantities and go as tall as our thighs in the greatest tempests. I think
I remember a huge fall like that when I was very young. We could barely leave the inside of Winterfell because doors were blocked by all the snow.”

Joy’s eyes were full of wonder as Sansa told her this. “Do you think you could take me to the North one day?”

Sansa didn’t really know how to answer to this. How to explain it to Joy? “I can’t go in the North right now.”

Joy seemed puzzled. “Why?”

Sansa finally chose an explanation that wasn’t false, but not the entire truth either. “Winterfell has been destroyed by the Ironmen about a year ago, and there are still many of them in the North.”

“Ironmen.” Cerenna Lannister said the words with revulsion. “I was visiting Lannisport ten years ago when they attacked us. I barely managed to make it to the Rock safely. These men are monsters and brutes. We should have burned their islands to the ground when we could.”

“I agree,” Sansa said after a moment. If there was at least one thing she wouldn’t have to argue with the Lannisters, it was their shared hatred of the Ironmen. To think that Theon, her father’s ward, burnt alive Bran and Rickon filled her with rage. They always treated Theon very well, and he rewarded them with treachery and murdering.

There was a gloomy silence for a moment. It was Joy who broke it again. “You… You have a sister of my age, Sansa?”

Sansa gulped before she answered. “She disappeared two years ago. No one knows where she is.”

Joy looked ashamed and sad now. “My father too disappeared a few years ago. He went to find a sword, and he never came back.”

Tyrion told Sansa about the disappearance of his uncle Gerion in his search for Brightroar, the lost Valyrian steel sword of House Lannister. It left Joy without father, without mother, and without any brother or sister. That was the reason of her loneliness.

“I’m sorry, Joy. I know what it is to lose a father.”

Perhaps Sansa shouldn’t have said this, but she wanted to comfort Joy a little. Sansa reflected about the girl sitting at Dorna’s right. In some way, she was no different from Jon. She was set aside because she was a bastard, even if she was allowed to live at Casterly Rock like Jon was allowed to live at Winterfell. What would happen to her once she would be older? Would she be forced to become a septa, or even a Silent Sister?

“I lost all my brothers and my sister during the war,” Sansa continued, talking to Joy. “All but one. He is in the Night’s Watch now, at the Wall. His name is Jon Snow.”

Myrielle snorted. “A bastard.”

Sansa turned to face Myrielle who still looked at her plate, but this time with a cruel smile. Sansa looked back at Joy whose eyes were cast down. Anger rose in Sansa. Without thinking, she spoke with an icy voice.

“Lady Myrielle, if you want to hate me for what my brother Robb did at Oxcross, you can, but I forbid you from ever talking against my other brothers. One was a cripple of ten-years-old, the other a child of eight, and Jon is in the Night’s Watch and took no part in this conflict. And I forbid you as
well to use the word *bastard* this way when your cousin Joy is present.”

Myrielle Lannister looked at her with fury, and Sansa returned it with a face to make the lady understand she had no choice but to obey. Sansa was the Lady of Casterly Rock and of House Lannister, so whoever who was part of House Lannister had to obey her, even more here in her own castle. Tension was palpable around the table. Finally, Myrielle’s sister rose from her seat.

“I think I’ll go and take a walk before the sweet arrives. I think you should come with me Myrielle. We both need to stretch our legs.”

Cerenna couldn’t have chosen a better moment. The main course was over now, and it would take some time for the dessert to arrive. Myrielle reluctantly followed her sister out of the table. After a long silence, Margot started to talk about a brother of her husband who joined the Night’s Watch a few years ago. Sansa saw Joy still with her eyes dropped on the ground. Genna put a hand on Sansa’s, a sad smile on her lips. Myrielle and Cerenna came back not long before the sweet arrived. Cerenna took back her place, but Myrielle came to Sansa’s side.

“My lady, I beg your pardon for my inappropriate behavior a moment ago. I promise it won’t happen again.” Sansa could hear in Myrielle’s voice she wasn’t sincere and that she made her apologies with reluctance, but it was still better than nothing.

“I accept your apologies, Lady Myrielle. But there is someone else you should apologize to.”

Sansa turned her head to Joy, then to Myrielle so she may understand what she meant. After a moment during which Myrielle showed plainly she didn’t want to comply, she finally yielded.

“I’m sorry, Joy.”

She went back to her chair. After a moment, the conversations resumed around pastries, including lemon cakes. Myrielle asked Sansa about her brother Jon Snow, but Sansa noticed she received glares and nudges from her sister. It was obvious Cerenna was the one to force her to speak. Joy quickly asked more questions about Jon and Sansa found herself talking about her half-brother much more than she ever did. She didn’t even realize she knew so much about him.

When they were done with the dessert, Sansa excused herself. She had her meeting with Creylen, the maester of Casterly Rock. Cerenna proposed to accompany her to the maester’s rooms and Sansa accepted. After all, Cerenna didn’t seem to hate her like Myrielle and Sansa still needed someone to find her way through the maze of galleries. She didn’t even know where the maester’s rooms were. She left the ladies, Joy with a wide smile towards her, Genna with an encouraging smile accompanied by an approving nod, and most of the others smiling at her too, though Myrielle only showed indifference and Lanna didn’t look at her.

When they were far enough, Cerenna began to talk. “Please forgive my sister’s behavior, my lady. She’s angry at everything and everyone close to a Stark or a Northerner since our father died at the Battle of Oxcross.”

“And you’re not?”

Cerenna shrugged with a sad look on her face. “My father was old, and he died during a battle. When he left I knew it was possible he wouldn’t come back. He was my father, so of course I’m sad he’s dead, but he would have died soon anyway. I would have cried much more if my brother Daven had died. Anyway, it was Lord Rickard Karstark who killed him, and your brother executed him. I don’t see why I should keep any grudge against you. That’s not as if you killed him yourself. But Myrielle was closer to our father. She was his baby girl, so she’s more deeply affected by it.”
“It’s alright. I used to hate everyone related to the Lannisters until recently. And I lost a father me too.”

Perhaps Sansa was bolder than she should be, but Cerenna didn’t look as if she disapproved Sansa’s remark. She only nodded. “I’m sorry for your father. And for your brothers and your mother as well. I really believed it when I said the Ironmen are monsters. And the Freys are no better.” Cerenna sighed. “And now my brother is to marry one of them?”

Sansa was surprised by this revelation. “Your brother?”

Cerenna looked as if she was about to be sick. “Yes. Daven is to marry a Frey girl. It’s a marriage Lord Tywin arranged not long after what happened at the Twins.” Cerenna sighed. “Before he died, my father was discussing a marriage between Daven and Desmera Redwyne, the daughter of Lord Redwyne. And now instead of marrying a niece of Lord Tyrell, my brother will have to marry a stoat.”

Disgust was plain on Cerenna’s face. Sansa could only share it. If she had been forced to marry a Frey… She preferred to not think about it. “At least your brother won’t marry a dwarf.”

Sansa tried to lighten the atmosphere. Cerenna looked at her with a curious look, but after she realized Sansa was essentially japing, laughs escaped from her mouth. “At least you’re the Lady of Casterly Rock. You got quite a title and a position with your marriage. Daven will only get a wife and nothing more.” She remained silent for a moment. “You know, when we received the news Lord Tyrion was our new lord and that he was married to a Northerner, I was nearly expecting he would arrive before us with some sort of savage woman. Imagine my surprise when I saw you emerging from the carriage. For a moment I thought you weren’t his wife and the true Lady Sansa was somewhere else in the convoy.”

Sansa felt a little insulted, but Cerenna only seemed to find it funny that Tyrion’s wife wasn’t how she expected. “Who did you think I was then? Why did you think I was travelling with Tyrion?”

Cerenna looked a little hesitant to answer. “Well, you surely know… with the rumors about your husband… It’s not that I thought… but well, for a very short time I wondered if… if he didn’t bring… another woman with him.”

The Lannister girl turned her eyes in another direction. Sansa knew what she meant. Tyrion was still known as a whoremonger. It would take time before his reputation disappeared. People would probably whisper against him because of that, and Shae’s revelations, true or not, cast a shadow on him, and on Sansa too consequently. They walked silently for a while, going back into the galleries of the castle. After a moment, Cerenna told cautiously something Sansa didn’t expect.

“You know, my brother is not the only one who must marry a Frey. Joy must marry a son of Walder Frey too.”

Sansa stopped and looked at Cerenna, hoping she was joking. The girl’s face was serious. “What?” Sansa asked, unbelieving.

“And worse.” Cerenna sighed. She looked disgusted and angry at the same time. “She will marry one of his bastard sons. Not even a legitimate one.”

Sansa couldn’t believe what she heard. Joy Hill, married to a bastard of House Frey? “How strange?” Cerenna said on a mocking tone. “The Freys slaughter people at a wedding, they break the guest rights, imprison their liege lord, and not long after Lord Tywin grants Riverrun to the second son of Walder Frey, and my brother, my cousin Lancel and Joy all end up with betrothals to Freys.
And all that arranged by Lord Tywin. I find it strange to reward assassins and turncloaks.”

Sansa could see what Cerenna was trying to say. Of course, Lord Tywin never said to anyone in his family about his secret arrangements with Walder Frey and Roose Bolton, but it was easy to see through the marriages he arranged that he made a deal with the Lord of the Crossing. But it was dangerous ground. It probably wasn’t safe to talk directly against Tywin Lannister so little time after his death here in Casterly Rock. But Sansa wasn’t aware of all these arrangements the previous Lord of Casterly Rock made. He had betrothed two nephews and a niece to Freys, without even asking them first. Sansa shouldn’t be surprised. He didn’t tell Tyrion he organized her family’s slaughtering before it happened, nor did he give him a choice when they were married. Why would he bother about the wishes of nephews and nieces when he didn’t care about those of his own children? The two girls resumed their path.

“Lord Tywin is the one who arranged all these betrothals?” Sansa asked.

“Yes, that’s him. Soon I’ll be the sister-in-law of a stoat.”

The prospect didn’t ravish Cerenna Lannister at all. “Perhaps I could change that.”

Cerenna turned her head towards Sansa. “You think you could?”

“Perhaps,” Sansa repeated. “For now, they are only betrothals, we can break them. My own betrothal to the king was broken after the Battle of Blackwater. Lord Tyrion may be able to do something about that.”

“Daven would like that a lot,” Cerenna said with a huge smile. “Thank you.”

Sansa really thought they should do something about it. Joy seemed to be such an innocent girl. Sansa didn’t want her to end up married to a bastard son of Walder Frey. She didn’t know Daven Lannister, but she wasn’t eager all the same to have House Lannister linked with House Frey after what they did. She was the Lady of House Lannister now, and she had no wish to add connections between the house she was leading and the people who killed her mother and Robb.

As they walked something came up in Sansa’s mind. “Your father was the brother of Lady Joanna, Lord Tywin’s wife, wasn’t he?”

Cerenna looked surprised by the question. “Oh, yes. She was my aunt, but I never knew her. She died before I was born.”

“Your father never talked about her?” Sansa wanted to know more about Tyrion’s mother.

“Not very often. He was afraid to speak of her.”

Genna’s words came back to Sansa’s mind. After she died, Tywin had any image, picture, painting or tapestry of his wife removed from everywhere in Casterly Rock. He didn’t want to be reminded of her in any way. He forbade everyone to talk about her, even to mention her. She could imagine people fearing to disobey Tywin Lannister very easily, but surely they talked about her sometimes. You couldn’t control everything people were saying.

“You surely know a few things about her all the same.”

Cerenna looked at the roof, searching in her memories. “From the few times my father talked about her, she was very beautiful, very compassionate too, with very good manners. He also told us she was the main advisor of Lord Tywin and that they loved each other very deeply. He told us one day that Lord Tywin would have been ready to do anything for her, even start a war. But Tywin
Lannister didn’t spend a lot of time with her apparently.”

“What do you mean?” Sansa found it strange.

“Lord Tywin was Hand of the King for most of their marriage. They even married in the Great Sept of Baelor in King’s Landing instead of here at Casterly Rock. But she was expelled from the capital not long after their wedding. She spent most of her time here in Casterly Rock while Lord Tywin spent most of his time in King’s Landing. He only visited her from time to time.”

“Why was she expelled? Who did this? The Mad King?” Sansa found it strange.

Cerenna hesitated. “It’s only rumors. We don’t know for sure.”

“There must be a reason,” Sansa insisted.

After another hesitation, Cerenna finally spoke. “Lady Joanna was a lady-in-waiting of Queen Rhaella for a very long time, long before she was married and even before Rhaella Targaryen became queen. Apparently, there were rumors in King’s Landing that… there had been something between her and Aerys. The Mad King.” Sansa couldn’t have been more surprised. Her facial expression surely showed it since Cerenna quickly resumed. “These were only rumors. My father didn’t believe them, and he didn’t think Lord Tywin would have married a woman with some… inappropriate relationship with someone else. Lord Tywin would never have married a disgraced woman. But my father said he was present at the wedding ceremony of my aunt. The Mad King said something about the fact it was a pity a king couldn’t bed any wife he wanted on her wedding night any longer and that he did some things to Lady Joanna during the bedding ceremony. And a few years later, she came back to King’s Landing for a tournament and there was another incident. The Mad King said something very improper about her. Lord Tywin even tried to resign as Hand of the King at this moment. She came back to Casterly Rock and died not long after. But my father told us the Mad King was known for desiring many women, including many of the queen’s ladies. Lord Tywin’s wife wasn’t the only one to be sent away from King’s Landing because of that. It was Queen Rhaella who sent her away.”

Sansa thought of Joffrey. That sounded like him. He really was a second Mad King. Who knew what he could have done to her if he had survived? Sansa was glad he was dead. Again she wished Tyrion’s mother had lived. Perhaps the Red Wedding would never have happened then. And perhaps she would have had someone who could have understood what she went through with Joffrey. The bad treatments Sansa endured in Joffrey’s hands weren’t so far from those Joanna Lannister seemed to have gone through.

They walked a long time along galleries and climbed many stairs, much more than Sansa had to climb to reach the rooms she shared with Tyrion. Finally they reached a simple wooden door at the top of spiral stairs. Sansa was gasping. The Tower of the Hand was easy to climb in comparison.

“You only have to enter,” Cerenna told her. “No need to knock. Creylen receives everyone anytime, though not many people come to see him I think. Have a good day, my lady.”

Cerenna bowed her head and went away, but before she was too far, Sansa called her. “Cerenna. Thank you.”

The Lannister girl turned to face her and smiled as she made another bow. Then Sansa was alone before the door. She wasn’t sure about the fact she should enter without being announced, but there were no servants on this side of the door. She entered without knocking like Cerenna told her. After all, she was the lady of the castle now, so she could see the maester and anywhere whenever she wanted. She wasn’t sure who she would meet. Tyrion seldom talked about the maester, only
mentioning him. When Sansa came in, there was no one. A huge desk with a lone and big cushioned chair on one side occupied the center of the room, and many other chairs were on the opposite side of the desk where Sansa found herself. Shelves filled with books, vials and bottles covered the walls, and Sansa could hear the sound of ravens from above. Stairs at the back of the room seemed to lead to the rockery where they were kept. Sansa looked all around the room to see if there was someone, but no sign of life came out.

“Maester Creylen.” She said it loudly. Perhaps he was in the rockery.

“Excuse me.” A man emerged from an alcove Sansa didn’t notice on the left wall. He bowed deeply before her. “Lady Sansa. Welcome to Casterly Rock. Forgive me if I didn’t greet you immediately. I didn’t hear you enter. I beg you, take a seat.”

The maester indicated the chairs with his right arm. He went to sit on the huge one behind his desk. Sansa observed the maester as they both took place on opposite sides. He was old, but far less than Pycelle and probably less than maester Luwin, but only a few years younger. His hair wasn’t entirely grey yet, and he still moved quite nimbly. Sansa wondered why he had such a big chair when he was quite thin. Perhaps only for a question of comfort.

“I hope you enjoy your stay here up to now, my lady.”

“Yes, very much.” Sansa smiled to the old man. He didn’t seem to have any bad thought about her. “My husband surely told you why I’m here.”

“Oh yes, Tyrion told me.” He seized a few sheets of paper on a corner of his desk and put them before Sansa with ink and pen. “These are a few problems I would like you to solve. I’ll be able to know what kind of financial matters and notions I must teach you this way.”

Sansa felt like a little girl in maester Luwin’s study again, but she complied all the same. Tyrion was the one to organize this for her anyway. But she felt in some way humiliated all the same, sitting here and doing what a maester was telling her to do as if she was still a child. There were problems Sansa just couldn’t understand. She abandoned all the parts about the changing value of currencies after a moment. Tyrion had tried to explain her this concept during their travel, but without success. When she handed the completed exercises to Maester Creylen, it only took a few minutes to the old man to go through it.

“I’ve seen better,” he finally said. “But I’ve also seen far worse. You’ll need a few lessons with me during the next months, I’m afraid. But you’re far from being a desperate case like Jaime and Cersei.”

Sansa was quite puzzled by the mention of this. “What do you mean? Ser Jaime and Cersei weren’t good?”

Maester sighed and smiled sadly. “Not at all. Learning didn’t interest them. Jaime always wanted to be in the courtyards sparring with the master-at-arms and knights. He saw the moments he spent to learn with me as waste of time, even more since he had a problem to read. His mind was transposing the letters he read. It was Lord Tywin who managed to get him to learn reading by sitting with him four hours per day practicing. As for Cersei, she found my lessons boring and useless as well. She only dreamed to marry Rhaegar Targaryen and to become the queen, and nothing more. She didn’t find it useful. Tyrion was the only one of Lord Tywin’s children to ever be interested in the things I taught him.”

The old man looked like he was reminiscing. Sansa listened attentively. She didn’t know all these details about Tyrion, Ser Jaime and the former Queen Regent. “Tyrion could spend entire days with
me. He couldn’t train in the yards, and Lord Tywin didn’t allow him to leave the castle, so he had no other choice than studying and reading. At six he was already more advanced than his brother and his sister who were ten at the same time. I started to teach him things we only taught to the maesters at the Citadel. And he learnt quickly, believe me. Sometimes he knew things even before I talked about them to him. He read a lot, and even began to write. I sent some of his works to the Citadel and I asked Lord Tywin to send him there to become a maester. I guess you know what answer I received.”

“He refused?”

“Yes, and several times. The last time I proposed this, Lord Tywin told the next time I suggested this eventuality, I would be the one he would send to the Citadel, and for good.” The old man chuckled bitterly. “Tyrion could have gone very far at the Citadel. He could have become Archmaester, even Grand Maester in time. My colleagues there with who I communicated were ready to welcome him with open arms. His size wouldn’t have mattered there, only his mind. But Lord Tywin refused. After a time Tyrion even considered becoming High Septon.”

Sansa had some difficulties to contain her surprise. “High Septon?” To imagine Tyrion as High Septon was very difficult for her. Tyrion didn’t believe in gods, and anyway he spent so much time with whores… That brought again painful memories and ideas to Sansa.

“Yes. He nearly learned the Seven-Pointed Star by heart. But he abandoned the idea after…” The maester seemed to hesitate, as if he just realized Sansa was present. He straightened into his chair. “Forgive me, my lady. The memories of an aging man. I would say you meet me each three days in the morning. I’ll prepare lessons and you’ll understand the financial principles in time. For the time being, I’ll show you again some basic notions.”

Creylen spent the rest of the afternoon teaching Sansa most of the things she learnt with Luwin during her last year at Winterfell. She realized she didn’t remember half of what the old and kind maester taught her in sums and figures during this time. Tyrion and Creylen were right. She needed an update on these matters. Why couldn’t she be good like Arya at this?

Sansa came back to her rooms, not without asking her way to a dozen of people. Would she need a map to find her way here? She finally got back to her chambers. She was exhausted. She wished she could have stayed in bed for the whole day. She called her handmaids and ordered them to prepare a bath. She felt like she needed one again. While the servants prepared everything, Sansa started to write a message. She took her time, trying to choose well her words. There was so much she wanted to say, and not enough place if she wanted the parchment to be carried by a raven. After half an hour and many crumpled scrolls, she thought she came with a passable result. The bath was now ready. Sansa got rid of her gown, her girdle and her smallclothes. The water was hot as she entered the bath. She commanded her handmaids to leave her alone and they brought her clothes to wash them. Just like yesterday, Sansa let herself drift away and closed her eyes. Warmth surrounded her body from toe to collarbone. She took deep breaths, calming herself after this day. She immersed her head more than once into the water, wetting her hair.

After some time, she decided to leave the bathtub and put on a dressing gown. When she left the bathroom and entered their bedchamber, she noticed Tyrion was sitting there, reading. She froze. Did he see her? Was he looking at her? He didn’t seem to notice her presence.

“Tyrion?” she croaked.

Her husband lifted his eyes from his book. “Sansa. I think it’s the first time I see you dressed this way,” he said with a smile.
Sansa looked at her body. “Don’t worry. I only meant that I never saw you with this kind of clothes, not that it displays your body more than usual. And before you wonder about it, I wasn’t looking at you. Well, except for the moment I entered here and found you in the bath with the door wide open, but I went to read afterwards. From where I am, I cannot see much of the bathtub and anyway your back was turned on me. I couldn’t see much more than what I see at night.”

Sansa had to recognize Tyrion was telling the truth. Her dressing gown covered all her body, perhaps more than the gowns she wore daily, and much more than her nightgowns. When she looked at the bathtub from Tyrion’s angle, she saw he said the truth too. Only a little corner of the bath could be seen from his position. At best he could see her left shoulder, which wasn’t much.

“What are you doing here? I didn’t hear you coming in.” How couldn’t she notice he was there?

Tyrion shrugged. “You looked half asleep. Perhaps that’s why you didn’t hear me. I didn’t want to bother you.” Sansa remembered she brought her head completely under water at some moments. Perhaps Tyrion entered at one of these times. “I didn’t look at you Sansa, I swear.”

Sansa turned towards him. He looked concerned about what she might think of him. “No, I know you didn’t. I’m sorry. I’m still acting like a little girl.” She wasn’t supposed to be afraid about her husband seeing her. It shouldn’t even bother her.

Tyrion scoffed. “I don’t think a little girl could manage to neutralize the Queen Regent and all her allies in a single trial, and to become the lady of two of the greatest castles in the Seven Kingdoms, all that within a few days.”

Sansa flushed. “I’ll go and take a change of clothes.”

She walked to the dressing room and called for her handmaidens. As she put on a gown she brought with her from King’s Landing, she couldn’t help but feel a little sad about the fact Tyrion didn’t look at her. She was glad he didn’t, because she didn’t feel ready for consummating their marriage, and it was proper for a husband to allow his wife some privacy, but at the same time she wished he would look at her with the same admiration he had during the trip. She remembered how his hands wandered on her this morning, and how it felt good. From what I’ve heard, he’s quite experienced. Margaery’s words came back to her mind. Was that what she meant? Sansa felt blood rising to her cheeks again. That was surely not that. Bedding was much more than that. Sansa shook suddenly for a very short moment at the thought of what it might be. She clearly wasn’t ready for that. And yet she wondered what it would feel like.

“My lady, are you alright?”

The voice of one of her handmaidens brought her back to life. This one was brushing her hair. Sansa probably shook too violently and the girl noticed it. “Yes, I am,” she answered shortly, and perhaps a bit too harsh. The girls didn’t dare to speak again.

Sansa went back to their bedchamber where Tyrion was waiting for her as the dinner was brought. She sat with him.

“How was your first day as Lady of the Rock?” he immediately asked.

“It was good. You were right, your aunt doesn’t bite, but she can be intimidating.”

Tyrion smiled at the remark. “What about the other ladies and Creylen? Everything went right with them.”

“Yes. Creylen was very… enthusiastic. And your cousins and your aunts were all very kind, except
a few.”


“No, Cerenna was very kind. She even accompanied me to maester Creylen’s rooms afterwards. But yes, Myrielle made evil comments. Cerenna and I brought her back to order. Lanna was quite silent. I don’t know why.”

“Well, good thing for Myrielle and Cerenna. Lanna probably didn’t feel very well. She’s married to Lord Antario Jast. He was injured and captured by your brother’s men at Oxcross, then kept hostage at Pinkmaiden Castle by Lord Piper, one of your uncle’s bannermen. He was released not long after the Red Wedding, but he’s in a very bad state. Only a shadow of who he was before the war. He came back with us and barely spoke during the entire journey. Don’t be surprised if his wife is quite gloomy.”

Sansa thought she remembered Antario Jast. The sigil of House Jast was three golden lions on three black fields separated by yellow lines. A man in their convoy wore an armor with this sigil and Sansa remembered his eyes were hollow. It was probably Lord Jast. Sansa could understand Lady Lanna was reserved the whole time. Her husband didn’t die, but he came back broken from the war.

“I can talk to my cousin Myrielle about all this if you want,” Tyrion offered.

“No, that’s alright. I can handle her myself.” They continued to eat their main course essentially constituted of peas, carrots and chicken. “Tyrion, is it true there are marriages planned between Lannisters and Freys.”

Tyrion looked up at her from his plate. He nodded sadly. “I’m afraid it’s true. My father promised a lot of things to the Freys for their treachery. Emmon Frey, the husband of my aunt Genna, was granted Riverrun.”

“But it belongs to my uncle, Lord Edmure Tully!”

“Your uncle is kept prisoner by the Freys and a decree from Joffrey before my father died stripped him and House Tully from all their rights over Riverrun and the Riverlands. And they are still considered rebels since your granduncle Brynden holds Riverrun against the Crown. There is nothing I can do about it. Kevan is Hand of the King and he won’t annul previous decrees.” A silence lingered for some time between them. “My father also arranged a betrothal for Lancel. He was supposed to marry Amerei Frey and to rule the lands of Darry, but you made it quite impossible a few months ago. My cousin Daven must also marry a Frey, and Joy must marry a bastard son of Walder Frey.”

It was obvious Tyrion didn’t relish this prospect. Sansa neither. It was just like Cerenna told her. “You’re not going to allow this?”

Tyrion showed a pained expression. “That’s not easy. I hate and despise the Freys. Don’t think I like to be related to the Lord of the Crossing. We already have one of his sons here and even his wife hates him. I don’t really appreciate this uncle.” Sansa already knew it. Genna told her how she disliked to be married to Ser Emmon Frey. “But I can’t cancel betrothals made by my father without a good reason, or else there will be consequences. You remember what happened when your brother set aside Walder Frey’s daughter.”

Sansa didn’t need to reply. They both knew the answer. “Is there nothing we can do?”

“Now that Lancel was exiled to Quiet Isle, I can probably arrange Daven to marry Amerei Frey
instead. That won’t break the agreement my father did, and there are worse women to marry among Walder Frey’s brood. That will make him Lord of Darry. I don’t want the castle and his lands to fall into the hands of someone else. As for Joy, she’s still very young. I can postpone the wedding for many years and find a way in the meantime to have her betrothal called off. And since she is a bastard supposed to marry a bastard, Walder Frey may not complain too much. This is not a marriage of utmost importance, even for him.”

Sansa was relieved. At least Joy wouldn’t marry a Frey. Tyrion changed of subject.

“You wrote to your brother.”

Sansa looked back at Tyrion, in surprise first, then angrily. “You read my message!” she said on an accusing tone.

Tyrion smiled mischievously. “I only read the name on it. It was on the desk. I was wondering to who you destined it. I was wondering when you would decide.”

Sansa averted her eyes. “We talked about him during the meal with all the Lannister ladies. I miss him. I hope he will answer.” Meeting Joy reminded of how unfair she had been with her half-brother. It was time she tried to mend her past mistakes, especially now he was her last kin alive.

“I’m sure he will.” Sansa could only see the same sincerity she always saw in his green eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Many new characters that I enjoyed to shape. I hope you liked it. Tell me what you think of my Lannisters (well, they’re not mine in fact, they all belong to George R. R. Martin, but you know what I mean).

Please review.

Next chapter: Tyrion
Tyrion XIV

Chapter Notes

A few weeks after Tyrion and Sansa settled at Casterly Rock. Life goes on, and the game of thrones goes on too.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

TYRION XIV

- Tyrion was walking along the docks of Lannisport, looking at the warships under construction. The shipyards of Casterly Rock and Lannisport started to expand the Lannister fleet not long after he became Lord of Casterly Rock. The Redwyne fleet was still on its way to King’s Landing in order to launch a decisive strike against Dragonstone. Or perhaps they already arrived and started the siege of the island. Dragonstone was heavily defended, still held by five thousand men under the command of one of the best battle commanders in Westeros. The Redwyne fleet would need some time before they could claim the fortress for Tommen. Everywhere it was the same thing. The Blackfish held Riverrun against the combined forces of Freys, Lannisters and Riverlands lords who sided with the Crown after the Red Wedding. Storm’s End held against the Tyrell army. And now Dragonstone would hold against the Redwyne fleet. All Tommen’s opponents were defeated or too weak to hope for any victory against him, but they still resisted.

Tyrion had no problem to let the Tyrells exhaust themselves at Storm’s End after Mace Tyrell proclaimed him guilty at his trial. However, the siege of Riverrun was draining forces from both the Riverlands and the Westerlands at the very moment the weather was getting worse. Winter was coming. It was no time to fight, especially not in the Riverlands, ravaged by the war, where people should prepare for winter the best they could at this very moment. But the Blackfish was too obstinate and refused to surrender the castle. Not that Tyrion would blame him after what happened at the Twins. The Freys and the Lannisters murdered his niece. As for the forces besieging the castle, there were quarrels between the Freys and the river lords all the time, and a few between the Lannisters and the river lords too. Tyrion’s cousin, Daven, who led the Lannister forces there, asked for reinforcements to take the castle, but Tyrion refused. He wouldn’t send more Westermen to die uselessly in this stupid war. He wrote back to his cousin to tell the Freys they were welcome to storm the castle on their own if they wished. Perhaps their own people who died would be some compensation for their betrayal.

What bothered Tyrion the most was the time needed to seize Dragonstone. Without the Redwyne fleet, they were vulnerable to the attacks from the Iron Islands. They could launch an offensive against Lannisport as they often did in the past. The Lannister fleet wasn’t strong enough to hold the Ironborn, and even less to defeat them on its own. That’s why Tyrion decided to double the size of the fleet. Soon, Lannisport and Casterly Rock would dispose of fifty warships together, but Tyrion knew it wouldn’t be enough to stop a massive Ironborn attack. The Iron Fleet alone consisted of a hundred ships, and it didn’t consider the smaller fleets the major lords of each island could muster. If the Iron Islands decided to attack in full strength, they would outnumber the Lannister fleet ten to one. However, Tyrion preferred to be prepared to all scenarios. The increased fleet could repel minor attacks and give them time before the Redwyne fleet arrived, and they could even launch a
successful quick strike on the Iron Islands if need be. The Ironmen may be surprised then and unable to react before it was too late.

Tyrion wondered why Balon Greyjoy didn’t attack Lannisport before. Instead he only launched limited invasions on the North, a territory without much to steal. Of course, this way he had no problem with the stronger kingdoms, but still. He didn’t get much for his people. The King of the Iron Islands seemed to have more courage than brain. By proclaiming himself king, he rebelled against the Iron Throne and surely knew that, sooner or later, he would be crushed by the Seven Kingdoms. Though Tyrion had to admit the fact his islands were still untouched proved his strategy wasn’t completely unwise. He attacked Robb Stark, leading the southern kingdoms to let him quiet since he made life more difficult for the Young Wolf. And now, they were so focused on Stannis and the Riverlands that they didn’t worry about the Ironmen. The Greyjoys could reave all they wanted without being bothered for now. However, once Dragonstone was taken, then the combined naval forces of the Arbor and the Westerlands would attack the Iron Islands and most likely defeat Balon Greyjoy again. What would they do this time to make him understand he shouldn’t rebel? With Theon Greyjoy who died at Winterfell, his three sons were dead, but he still had a daughter, Yara Greyjoy. Perhaps they could marry her to a son of some lord of the Reach or the Westerlands. Tyrion thought Lord Farman of Faircastle had two sons. He may marry her to one of these and the Iron Islands would end in the hands of one of his bannermen.

Hundreds of men were working on these new ships. The work was advancing, but slower than Tyrion hoped. The supervisor of the dockyard told him they had difficulties to find enough materials and enough men with the number who left for the war. The construction would be totally over in two months. That wouldn’t be too soon. Tyrion went back to his litter and ordered the servants to bring him back to Casterly Rock.

Tyrion faced many problems since he came back to the Rock. First, he discovered during the first week following their arrival that House Lannister wasn’t rich as he thought it was. The mining slowed down during the last years and House Lannister mined half the gold it once mined. Their position as richest house in the Seven Kingdoms wasn’t threatened for now. They had more than ten million golden dragons in store in their vaults under the Rock, plus a few millions lent to the Crown and that would bring interests once they would get it back… if they ever got it back. The finances of the Crown were in such a sorry state when Tyrion left that he feared Tommen may not be able to return the gold House Lannister lent to his father and his brother before him. What worried Tyrion was that many mines were now dried. From what Tyrion could conclude from his research, it was a consequence of his grandfather’s actions for some part. Lord Tytos neglected to search for new veins to exploit during his reign, and it took a few years to his father after he became the Lord of Casterly Rock to resume the searching. The destruction of Castamere and its mines didn’t help either. He was probably too busy ruling the Seven Kingdoms for a mad king. Tyrion already increased the research for new veins to exploit, but it would take time to find them. In the meantime, House Lannister had lower revenues and Tyrion would have to watch out the expenses of his house more carefully. He also had a plan to find other income sources in short term.

He looked through the curtains of his litter at the Rock. It was his home, where he grew up, and sometimes he was still impressed by its greatness. House Lannister had become the most powerful house of Westeros under his father’s rule, and Tyrion didn’t want it to change. Casterly Rock had to be an image of the real power of their house. And Tyrion didn’t want the Tyrells to be the leading family in Westeros.

Tyrion’s thoughts turned to the North. Last week, he started to send delegates everywhere in this kingdom. At Barrowtown, at Cerwyn, at Widow’s Watch, at Deepwood Motte, at Karhold, at White Harbor, in Bear Island, at the Last Hearth, and even at the Dreadfort and Winterfell. The news of the victory of House Bolton over the Ironmen holding Moat Cailin had reached Casterly Rock last week,
and Tyrion decided immediately to send men there. They would represent the interest of House Stark, Sansa being the last Stark alive. But Tyrion also sent spies to learn what they could about House Bolton and their position. It would be useful when the time would come to give the North back to Sansa. Tyrion didn’t expect the Boltons to willingly abandon their rule over the widest of the Seven Kingdoms. They needed to gather information, to know the military strength of House Bolton, its allies, its enemies, its weaknesses, its leaders. Tyrion needed to know what kind of men Roose Bolton and his lieutenants were.

Sansa was aware of that. Tyrion told his agents to direct all their messages to both of them. Sansa was the Lady of Winterfell after all, the true heir to the North. Roose Bolton was Warden of the North only until Sansa had a child at age. Or at least in theory. Tyrion hoped he would be able to send their son to Winterfell and to name people loyal to House Stark to rule the North in its name. First however, he would need a son with Sansa, even two since the first would be heir to Casterly Rock. The second would receive Winterfell. And for now, Tyrion wasn’t about to have a son with his wife. Three weeks after they arrived at Casterly Rock, and many months after their wedding, their marriage still remained unconsummated.

Sansa managed to find herself a good place in Casterly Rock. Most of Tyrion’s kin accepted her now, though sometimes with some reserve, and Sansa was obeyed without discussion by their household and everyone else at the Rock. Tyrion visited Lannisport with her a few days ago and everything went quite well. The common people didn’t trust her entirely since she was a Stark and her brother plundered the Westerlands, but it was also the first time in more than thirty years they had a Lady of the Westerlands. People were excited about this and most of them welcomed Sansa quite warmly. Anyway, with her red hair, her blue eyes and the lavish gowns she wore, it was difficult for people to see in her the sister of the Young Wolf. People liked to have a lady, and a beautiful one moreover, to love. Sansa already had some plans about what she could do for the people in Lannisport, getting her inspiration from the way Margaery put the people of King’s Landing on her side. Tyrion had nothing against it, far from it.

Sansa was however quite anxious since she sent her message to the Wall. She waited impatiently for her brother Jon to answer. She already wondered why she didn’t get an answer yet. For Tyrion, there was no surprise in this. A raven took some time to fly from the Rock to the Wall, and Jon Snow wasn’t necessarily at Castleblack where the raven was sent. Tyrion didn’t know what happened to Ned Stark’s bastard after he visited the Wall. The boy could be at Eastwatch-by-the-Sea or at the Shadow Tower. If he became a ranger, which was more than possible, he could be on an expedition north of the Wall. There was also another possibility of course, but Tyrion hoped it wasn’t the case. The last brother of Sansa could be dead. They received messages before and after the Battle of Blackwater that Mance Rayder, the King-Beyond-the-Wall, was marching on the Wall… followed by other things. Tyrion wished he could send reinforcements to the Wall, but they were blocked by the sieges of Riverrun and Dragonstone, and by the threat of the Iron Islands. And he didn’t think Kevan would believe him if he started to talk about wights and White Walkers. Tyrion himself still hardly believed it. And Tyrion didn’t want to talk about it to Sansa. She was already afraid enough before the possibility that her brother could be dead. It was no time to talk to her about Others. Tyrion was better to reassure her that her brother was surely still alive and needed time to answer for a reason or another.

Thinking of Sansa brought back a memory from the other night. Tyrion had woken up in the middle of the night. That wasn’t unusual and he went to read as he did most of the time when it happened, making sure he didn’t wake up his wife as he lifted her arm resting on his belly. However, as he read, he noticed Sansa rolled in the bed during her sleep and said his name. “Tyrion.” Tyrion thought he just imagined it the first time, but she repeated it a few times afterwards. He didn’t think all these times were an effect of his imagination. His relationship with Sansa didn’t really get much farther since they arrived at Casterly Rock, but he could feel his wife trusted him. The proof was she always
let the door opened when she took a bath. Tyrion told her once she could close it and that was the reason there was a door, but Sansa replied she wasn’t bothered by it at all. As a result, it happened a few times that Tyrion entered their rooms while Sansa washed herself and he had to make a very strong effort to not look at her. At least, her back was always turned on him, so all he could see were her arms, the back of her head, her shoulders and the very upper part of her back. He couldn’t see anything else. All the same, it troubled him to see her with water running on her ivory skin, knowing she was naked right in the next room. He only had to enter the bathroom and get around it to see her naked body. Tyrion wondered how she looked like. But he didn’t dare to do it. He didn’t want to upset Sansa, and he swore he would never do anything she wouldn’t want him to do.

They reached the Lion’s Mouth and entered the main courtyard. Tyrion left his litter and walked toward his rooms, followed by Podrick. Tyrion thought more than once to have the boy knighted. Only for saving his life at Blackwater, Podrick deserved it, but Tyrion didn’t want to get separated from such a loyal squire. Podrick was still very young. Tyrion thought about keeping him a year or two, then to knight him, along with a huge bag of gold to thank him for years of more than loyal service. Podrick went to fetch his clothes for the afternoon. Today would be the ceremony where all his bannermen would pledge themselves to him, like they pledged their banners to his father when he became Lord of Casterly Rock. All the lords and the ladies of the Westerlands would bend the knee before him and Sansa. They were already recognized by the Crown in a lavish ceremony, now they would be recognized by another lavish ceremony here in the Westerlands, with all their bannermen present. Genna prepared most of it, knowing more than Sansa how to make an appropriate ceremony for the Westerlands, but Sansa had a word to say in everything all the same. Tyrion secretly added a few elements Sansa wasn’t aware of.

When Tyrion pushed the heavy doors, he heard giggles coming from another room. “No, I don’t think that will do.”

“Are you sure? It’s probably the most costly gown I’ve ever seen.”

“Believe me, Sansa, I saw more costly gowns in my wife. Though not many. And I’m afraid you’re not yet used to this. You will collapse with so many jewels on you.”

Tyrion followed the voices. They were coming from the dressing room whose door was ajar. He opened it. Sansa was with his cousin Cerenna Lannister, looking at many gowns spread out on chairs and tables. “Am I interrupting something?” he asked before their gazes upon him as he came in.

Cerenna curtsied. “My lord.”

“Cerenna was just helping to choose a gown for today’s ceremony,” Sansa explained.

“Then I’ll leave you to your choosing. Perhaps I should have specified the dressmakers to not make so many gowns so quickly when I sent your measurements. The choice would be less complicated,” he said with a smirk and left.

“He may be right,” he heard Sansa say to Cerenna. “I receive a new gown every day or more. How will I ever be able to wear all of them one day?” His wife sounded discouraged.

Tyrion went to the bathroom where Podrick arrived a few minutes later with fresh and clean garments along with many servants who filled the bathtub with hot water. Tyrion took a quick bath, the door closed. To the opposite of Sansa, he didn’t let it open. Anyway, that wasn’t as if there would be anything interesting or beautiful for Sansa to look at. Soon he was ready for the ceremony, much in advance. Tyrion went to the solar to work on his house’s accounts until Sansa was ready. About an hour and a half later, Sansa came in, wearing a red gown with a silver waistband. The red was deep and close to purple, with golden stripes at the bottom part of the gown. The gown only
allowed her throat and her collarbone to be displayed under her chin. Tyrion knew Sansa preferred
gowns that didn’t reveal too much of her body, so he gave special instructions to the dressmakers to
make sure her gowns would respect this constraint. She also had her lion-direwolf necklace and the
red medallion that belonged to the Lady of Casterly Rock around her neck. Her red hair was braided
in a very complicated way and held thanks to a golden hairnet. She was smiling at him.

“How do you find me?”

Tyrion did as if he reflected about the question for a moment. “I think my cousin has very good
tastes. And you’re breathtaking, as always.” Tyrion rose from his seat and extended his hand. “Shall
we?”

Sansa took his hand in hers and they walked together out. The ceremony was to take place in the
Great Hall where all the noble people would bend the knee to them. Brienne accompanied them,
Sansa’s sworn shield as always, clad in full armor. She was still Sansa’s protector here, though Sansa
didn’t need much protection inside Casterly Rock. Tyrion and Sansa entered the Great Hall from a
backside door only them could use and walked toward the two thrones on the dais. The Kings and
Queens of the Rock used to sit in them before the Targaryen Conquest, but now it was the Lord and
the Lady of Casterly Rock who did. The thrones were as huge as the Iron Throne, but made of gold
with a lion’s head at the top of their backrest and armchairs that looked like lion paws. Tyrion sat in
the throne intended for the Lord of Casterly Rock and Sansa did the same for the one intended for
the Lady on his left. Tyrion showed her the room and its thrones a week ago as workers prepared it
for this day. Tyrion regretted Sansa’s throne was smaller than his own (which was quite absurd since
she was the tall one), but he couldn’t enlarge the seat of the Lady of Casterly Rock or replace it.
Brienne stood aside the dais like a kingsguard guarding her king. She would make a better
kingsguard than most of the actual ones.

There were three people supposed to stand still on the dais behind Tyrion and Sansa for this
ceremony. These people were supposed to represent House Lannister and most of the time they were
important figures here at Casterly Rock. Tyrion’s aunt, Lady Genna Frey, would stand behind them
in the space between the two thrones. Everyone knew the power she held here despite the fact she
was a woman. Kevan and Jaime would have taken place on the dais as well if they were present.
Since they weren’t, his cousin Damion, castellan of Casterly Rock, stood on his right, and Lady
Darlessa Marbrand, the widow of his uncle Tygett, stood at Sansa’s left. She didn’t have much
power or influence in the Rock, but Tyrion had wanted her there. His uncle Tygett was always kind
with him, and he felt he owed some kindness to his aunt after she lost both her husband to the pox
and more recently her only son, Tyrek, in the riot of King’s Landing. Anyway, Dorna wasn’t
interested in being on the dais, which made Lady Darlessa the closest relative to Tywin Lannister
present at Casterly Rock except Genna and Tyrion.

Tyrion looked at Sansa. She sat graciously in her throne, her back straight and her hands folded on
her thighs, as if the throne was made for her. She maintained a perfect posture. She caught Tyrion’s
eyes and smiled thinly at him. Genna, Damion and Darlessa all arrived during the next few minutes.
And the doors opened.

Lords, Ladies and knights had come from all the Westerlands to acknowledge Tyrion and Sansa as
their lord and lady and pledge themselves and their family to their new liege lord and lady. Most of
the people wore costly garments and gowns and competed in displayed wealth. Tyrion knew some
of them were drowning into debts, even more than usually because of the war, but they would spend
fortunes in buying new costly clothes all the same for events like this one to not look humble. The
herald hit the floor heavily with a massive stick made of gold, displaying a lion’s head on the
extremity that didn’t touch the floor. There were three knocks before the man presented them with a
very strong and grave voice.
“Here stand before us Lord Tyrion, son of Tywin, of House Lannister, Lord of Casterly Rock, Shield of Lannisport, Lord of the Westerlands and Warden of the West. And his wife, Lady Sansa Lannister of House Stark, Lady of Casterly Rock, Lady of the Westerlands and Lady of Winterfell.”

Every man knelt and every woman curtsied. From the corner of his eye, Tyrion observed Sansa. She remained impassive, her face expressionless. She was very good at it. A true lady, like always.

“My lords, my ladies, you may stand,” Tyrion said, giving the leave to everyone to stand up, which they did.

The herald took a great scroll from his belt and unrolled it, beginning to read loudly. “Lord Desmond Crakehall of Crakehall.”

The man who mocked him so long ago in the gardens of King’s Landing now knelt before him and Sansa and pledged himself to them. Tyrion recognized many of the people who knelt, though some of his bannermen didn’t have the same lord anymore after the war. Many died during the battles in the Riverlands, in the Westerlands and at King’s Landing. The names went on and on. Lords, ladies and landed knights passed before him and his wife, all saying approximately the same thing. Tyrion and Sansa accepted their pledge. Sometimes, Tyrion let Sansa accept the pledge herself, to show to all these lords she participated in the ruling of the Westerlands and wasn’t to be mocked. She always granted them a smile after they accepted their pledge.


Tyrion’s friend proved to be quite humorous when he bent the knee. He feigned to refuse to kneel (or he really didn’t want to kneel) and Tyrion had to remind him he owed his keep, previously Clegane’s Keep, to him. Finally he bent the knee with a wide grin. The other noble people weren’t happy to see Bronn among them. In their eyes, he was an up-jumped sellsword, but Tyrion didn’t care about it. Bronn served him well and he would prove a much better landed knight than the Mountain. Lady Alysanne Lefford of the Golden Tooth was the last one to pledge her house to Tyrion and Sansa. When they were done with the endless list of noble men and women, the herald proclaimed their titles again and their bannermen bent the knee just like the first time. Tyrion and Sansa rose from their thrones and walked to the great doors through an alley guards made sure to be free of people. Genna, Damion and Darlessa followed them, then all the lords, ladies and knights who were present. They went to the Golden Gallery where a feast took place.

Tyrion’s family was far richer than the Crown, and yet the feast was far less costly and extravagant than the royal wedding. With five courses, it was a humble meal compared to those they took in King’s Landing. Tyrion had his aunt Genna on his right while Sansa had Damion on her left. Most of his family members sat on the dais with them. Many toasts were made, essentially to him and Sansa, but also to the end of the war, to the reconstruction of the Westerlands, to the king, and to his dead father. When they got through all the courses, time to dance came.

Sansa went to dance as he stayed behind, just like when they were recognized by Joffrey. Tyrion mostly found himself alone and without much wine. Sansa gave orders so the servants wouldn’t bring him more than she thought was acceptable. However, Tyrion wasn’t really alone. While lords
and knights fought to dance with their new lady, lords, knights and ladies all found a moment to talk to him. All his relatives came to congratulate him and Sansa, from Dorna to Joy. Tyrion and Sansa forced Genna to let Gerion’s daughter participate to the feast. Tyrion had a very long discussion with Joy. She seemed to like Sansa very much. Lady Lefford was very courteous and offered him her deepest condolences for his father’s death. Tyrion offered in return his own condolences for the death of her father, Leo Lefford. Ryman Sarwyck proved to be quite a good man to discuss with. He lost all his cousins because of Cersei’s ruthlessness and became Lord of Riverspring because of that. He never wanted to be a lord. This man was the same kind than Ser Addam Marbrand. Lord Damon discussed with Tyrion about his son still in King’s Landing. Lord Westerling came to present his apologies for siding with Robb Stark during the war. Finally, Bronn came with a young woman looking all around her in wonderment.

“Hi, my friend. Lacking some wine?” He put a jug right before Tyrion who immediately filled his cup.

“My wife won’t be happy,” Tyrion commented as he took a sip. It was good.

As he drank his cup, Bronn leaned against the table while the girl accompanying him went to sit right next to Tyrion. The former sellsword could wear noble clothes, but that didn’t change his behaviour. Tyrion didn’t recognize the girl Bronn came with immediately, but after a moment he saw under the rich garments who she was.

“Daisy!” The young woman smiled widely at him. Tyrion looked at Bronn. “How does it come she’s with you.”

Bonn shrugged. “You’re not the only one who needs a woman. I brought her with me to Clegane’s Keep when I left the capital. I enjoy her company very much. And she likes the new Blackwater Keep very much.”

“It is a pleasure to see you again, my lord.”

Daisy looked quite enthusiastic about being here. She had to be. It wasn’t all days that a girl went from whore to public companion of a landed knight. Bronn could allow himself this kind of things. Shae never had the same chance than Daisy. The thought of his former lover brought a pang in Tyrion’s heart. He realized Bronn’s companion sat in Sansa’s seat.

“You shouldn’t sit there, my lady. This is the seat of my wife.”

Daisy seemed excited by hearing her being called a lady. She didn’t seem to have understood. “Daisy,” Bronn said before Tyrion could, “this is the chair of the Lady of this rock, not yours. You must leave it.”

With a disappointed look, Daisy left Sansa’s seat and went to sit to Tyrion’s right instead.

“So,” Bronn resumed, “how is it going for our Lord Imp?”

“Many problems, but much less than in King’s Landing. I feel free here. What about you in Clegane’s Keep? You sent me no news after you seized it.”

“It’s Blackwater Keep now,” Bronn corrected. “And I didn’t need to send you any raven since there was no problem. The peasants and the household welcomed us with open arms after Clegane’s cruelty. I’m making many changes to the place right now. It should become a good place to live in a few weeks.”

“Yes, Bronn,” Daisy intervened. “I’m very eager about our new bedchamber.”
Bronn grinned at the comment. Tyrion looked closely at the girl. She had her eyes locked on Bronn as if he was the most fantastic man in the world. It was as if she had fallen in love with him. Tyrion hoped it wouldn’t end badly for her. Tyrion only met one whore in his life who fell in love, and he lost her. Would Bronn take care of her? Tyrion wasn’t sure.

“Well, here are two people I never met before.” Genna appeared right before them with her powerful voice. Tyrion quickly made the presentations.

“Ser Bronn, Daisy, I present you my aunt, Lady Genna Frey, Lady of Riverrun and sister of my father, Lord Tywin. Genna, this is Ser Bronn, knight of Blackwater and now the knight ruling Ser Gregor’s previous lands.”

“Ah, yes. I know who you are. You’re the sellsword who burnt half of Stannis’s fleet with an arrow and got us rid of the Mountain.”

“Not really,” Bronn specified. “I got rid of the Mountain’s men, not the Mountain. Prince Oberyn did much of the job before he died. My men only had to finish him.”

Genna eyed him suspiciously. After a moment, she spoke again. “Well, I guess if my nephew gave you these lands, he had good reasons. He knows how to surround himself with useful people. And you don’t seem mad like Ser Gregor. It will make some good to have one less mad dog in the Westerlands. But you didn’t present me your friend.”

Genna looked at Daisy who didn’t seem to know what to say. She rose from her chair and curtsied awkwardly before Genna. Bronn tried to come to her rescue. “This girl’s name is Daisy. She is my paramour.”

Genna looked at Daisy, then to Bronn. “Your paramour?” She peered the girl disapprovingly. Genna knew who she was. Daisy had her eyes cast down.

“There’s nothing unnatural in that,” Bronn said. “How many of you nobles sleep at least once in your life with someone you’re not married to?” Genna looked at him hostilily. Bronn seemed to regret what he just said. He couldn’t talk to Genna like he talked to Tyrion. “In Dorne they live openly with their paramours and no one talks against it.”

“We are not in Dorne,” Genna said icily.

“Too bad,” Bronn said with regret. He turned to the young woman at Tyrion’s right. “Come on beauty. Let’s dance.”

Daisy and Bronn left, leaving Tyrion alone with his aunt. He didn’t expect to like the conversation that would follow.

“This is the kind of men you work with?” she asked with reproach in her voice.

Tyrion put his emptied cup on the table. “You would rather have talked to the Mountain instead?”

“The Mountain didn’t talk,” his aunt replied. “You should find people with more manners.”

“He’s useful. He saved Sansa’s life and mine many times, and he’s loyal to me. If you would rather have Clegane, just tell me.”

“Clegane was useful.”

“Just like Bronn. Only Bronn isn’t a mad dog.”
Genna had nothing to reply to this. She allowed a thin smile on her lips. “I guess I can trust you on this then. Only he shouldn’t bring this whore with him.”

“This whore has a name,” counted Tyrion, “and I can’t just expel Daisy when she accompanies one of my landed knights. I don’t think it causes any damage to our house anyway.”

Genna came to sit on his right, where Daisy sat a moment ago. “You must be careful, Tyrion. My father made a candlemaker’s daughter a Lady of Casterly Rock in all but name and people laughed at us for this reason.”

“Sansa is no candlemaker’s daughter. She comes from the most ancient noble family of Westeros,” Tyrion stated firmly. “I stopped visiting whores after I was wed to Sansa. As for my wife, she is the virtue personified. And if Clegane didn’t make us look like monsters, then I don’t think Bronn will make us look like weak people or whoremongers.”

Genna nodded, conceding. “There is something I must talk with you Tyrion. You’ve been acknowledged by the king, by the other lords paramount and now by your own bannermen as Lord of Casterly Rock and of the Westerlands. Your position is secured for the time being. But without an heir, your authority may be questioned with time and the succession may pose a problem.”

Tyrion sighed and filled his cup of wine again. “I don’t want to discuss about it, Genna. I won’t force myself upon my wife.”

“You wouldn’t force yourself upon her. I spent enough time with her during the last weeks to see that she appreciates and likes you. You only have to ask her to perform her duty as your wife and she’ll do it without opposition. I would be surprised if she didn’t want to.”

Tyrion took a good sip from his cup. “You know perfectly well that all the ladies in the Seven Kingdoms are taught to obey their husband without question. If I ask her, it’s the same thing than if I ordered her. I would force myself upon her. I won’t do it as long as she doesn’t want me to. That will be her decision, not mine.”

Genna seemed to understand there was no way to convince him to hasten the consummation of his marriage. Tyrion would never force himself again on a woman, and even less on the woman he loved. Genna left and went to dance with some knight Tyrion didn’t know. Not long after, Sansa emerged from the dance floor and came to sit beside him, out of breath.

“You liked the dance?” Tyrion asked.

“Yes, but I’m done for this evening.” She looked at the jug of wine before him. “I see Bronn helped you,” she said on a reproachful tone.

“I didn’t ask for this, but I don’t complain.”

“Did you ask for Daisy?” Tyrion looked back at her, seeing anger in her eyes.

“What do you mean?”

“I recognized her. She’s the whore who testified at the trial. What is she doing here? And what was she doing sitting next to you?”

It dawned on Tyrion. She thought he asked Bronn to bring her here. Tyrion smiled. “Bronn brought her with him to Clegane’s Keep. She’s only accompanying him. I have nothing to see with her presence. I didn’t even know she was with him until a few minutes ago.”
“She was sitting next to you,” Sansa repeated on an accusing tone. “Is she the only one?”

Tyrion looked at her in utter surprise and incomprehension. “Sansa, I haven’t visited a whore, nor been with any woman since we were married. I told you. I swear this is the truth.”

Sansa looked at him with a strange expression, as if she didn’t know if she should believe him or not. Before she could speak again, a man with a broken nose and a grey, close-shaven beard came before them. Tyrion recognized the sigil immediately. House Spicer of Castamere.

“My lord, my lady,” Rolph Spicer said while bowing to each of them. “I wanted to congratulate you personally for being the new Lord of the Westerlands, and you too my lady.”

Sansa had directed her attention to the man. Her face showed no emotion, but her eyes were another matter. They were throwing lightings in the direction of the man for whoever could read them. He was the brother of Lady Sybell Westerling. Both were traitors who joined Sansa’s brothers only to spy on him and turn against him at the last moment. They played an important role in the preparation of the Red Wedding.

“We thank you, Lord Spicer,” Sansa answered with a measured voice. Her eyes were still throwing daggers however. Rolph Spicer turned to Tyrion.

“My lord, your lord father, the late Lord Tywin, granted me the siege of Castamere with all its incomes and lands, but I have several problems in reopening the mines and the castle. There aren’t many people who live on these lands right now, so I have very few workers, and the other lords refuse to lend me money to pay the actual workers. I was wondering if House Lannister would be disposed to lend us the necessary amounts and we would pay back when the mines worked again.”

It was no surprise Lord Spicer couldn’t get loans from other lords. Tyrion sent them instructions to refuse any help to the Lord of Castamere, remembering them what happened to the last people who helped a Lord of Castamere. Tyrion wasn’t about to let the Spicers, these turncloaks, become rich thanks to the silver and the gold of Castamere. Not after what they did to Sansa’s family.

“I’m ready to help you, Lord Spicer,” Tyrion began. “I will lend you enough money. Even better, I won’t charge you any interest.”

Rolph Spicer seemed quite surprised and happy with this new. “I thank you, my lord,” he said with a zealous voice. “House Spicer will never forget the help you provided us in these times of need.”

“I’m sure you won’t,” Tyrion said with a wicked smile. “There will be no interest, but you will give three quarters of all the gold and silver you extract from these mines to Casterly Rock, from this day to the end of all time.”

Lord was agape before him. “But… My lord. That’s impossible. Lord Tywin promised us…”

“He promised you Castamere and all its lands and incomes, nothing more. But if you can’t get incomes from these lands on your own and you need the help of someone else, I don’t see why I should just give you more than you were promised without being compensated.”

“This is outrageous! I will not accept that deal. Never!”

“Then you will live in a castle in ruins. I don’t think the family of your dear sister has the means to finance the reconstruction of Castamere and its mines. And even if you found enough money, I think a golden dragon to each of your workers would be more than enough to convince them to abandon the work. So whether you accept my offer, or else you end even worse than your sister’s husband. Consider I let you a quarter of what you extract. That could be far worse.”
The new lord was agape before Tyrion’s words. And angry. Very angry. “You can’t do this. We served House Lannister. We helped you. You have no right...”

“I have every right,” Tyrion corrected. “And remember you participated in the assassination of people very close to my wife. You helped to murder the brother and the mother of the Lady of the Westerlands. I would feel lucky in your stead that we forget the debt we owe you for this.” Tyrion turned to Sansa who still looked at Rolph Spicer in obvious hatred. Tyrion realized the music was over and people had stopped to dance. The floor was being cleared. He clapped his hands. “A song for Lord Rolph Spicer of Castamere.”

Immediately they came. The young woman who sang at Joffrey’s wedding and who Sansa liked very much came with her bard. Tyrion invited them for this ceremony. Sansa looked at him in utter surprise. The song began. Rolph Spicer turned white at the very moment he heard the first words.

And who are you, the proud lord said

That I must bow so low?

Only a cat of a different coat

That’s all the truth I know

In a coat of gold or a coat of red

A lion still has claws

And mine are long and sharp, my lord

As long and sharp as yours

And so he spoke, and so he spoke

That lord of Castamere,

But now the rains weep o'er his hall

With no one there to hear

Yes, now the rains weep o'er his hall

And not a soul to hear

And so he spoke, and so he spoke

That lord of Castamere

But now the rains weep o'er his hall

With no one there to hear

Yes, now the rains weep o'er his hall
At the end of the song, there was a huge silence, but someone finally started to applaud and everyone followed and cheered the singer and her bard. Rolph Spicer went back to his seat white as snow. The young woman then sang many other songs, most of them much more cheerful. Sansa couldn’t detach her attention from her, except between two songs when she looked at Tyrion with glittering eyes. Tyrion didn’t know how much time they remained here listening, but finally the singer withdrew. Tyrion left the Golden Gallery with Sansa not long after. They were both exhausted from the feast and needed rest.

“You didn’t tell me about the singer,” Sansa told him as they walked to their rooms.

Tyrion smiled to himself. Sansa had told him back in the capital how she had liked the different versions of the songs the young woman performed at Joffrey’s wedding. In fact, Tyrion had planned everything for Rolph Spicer. He wouldn’t execute him or strip him of anything. His father promised him Castamere and its lands, and a Lannister always pays his debts. However, no promise was made about helping the Spicers to exploit Castamere mines. If they needed help from Casterly Rock, Tyrion could make sure the Spicers would be deprived of a great share of their riches. A Lannister always pays his debts, but nothing more. And to take a great part of their future wealth to the Spicers was a good way to make them understand what they got from betraying their liege lord, then their king. At the same time, Tyrion improved the financial situation of Casterly Rock for the future. The mines of Castamere were still full of gold and silver, and they would raise new incomes for House Lannister. Rolph Spicer would think twice before doing anything foolish after he heard The Rains of Castamere. It was a chance the floor was cleared right at the moment the new lord came to speak with them. Tyrion would have sent someone to fetch the lord, and called the singer at the same time, but finally he didn’t need it. Sansa was aware of his plans for the Spicers and the song, but she didn’t know the singer who would perform it. That was Tyrion’s surprise.

“You told me you liked her,” Tyrion said. “I thought you would appreciate to hear her again.”

“Thank you.” Sansa smiled at him, but her smile faded not long after. “I’m sorry for my outburst. I thought that… Well, because of what she is… The girl Bronn came with.”

Tyrion knew what she meant. “If it really bothers you, I can tell Bronn to not bring her again to formal events.”

“No, that’s alright. It’s just, for a moment, I thought… She sat next to you.”

Tyrion shook his head while chuckling a little. “She doesn’t know what is appropriate or not among noble people. Her two short times in the Red Keep didn’t really help her to become familiar with it. I told her to change of place when I noticed it. Sorry for all this. She wasn’t here for me.”

Tyrion shouldn’t be surprised Sansa thought he might visit whores again. After all, they spent most of their days in different places and Tyrion often woke up before her, though it happened much less than before. Nights were the longest moments he spent with his wife and he was sad in some way each time they had to go separate ways in the morning. All the same, Sansa probably wondered if he went sometimes to see whores, even if Tyrion really stopped to see other women after their wedding.

“I think it’s time to sleep,” Tyrion finally said, exhausted. Sansa nodded in agreement and went to change her clothes in the dressing room. Tyrion changed his own in their bedchamber and slipped under the blankets, falling into sleep immediately. The wine had good effects on him.
Chapter End Notes

For the version of "The Rains of Castamere" performed at the ceremony: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2l7wzOaODYQ

Please review

Next chapter: a new POV (the story starts to expand)
The story starts to expand for real here. The effects of Tywin's death begin to be felt beyond King's Landing. The arc of Casterly Rock will include many chapters that happen outside the Rock. This is the first one.

This was a long chapter to write for me. Arya's storyline is not the one I like the most, but I can't simply put her aside. She has a role to play in this fic. Let's discover what Tywin's death will change for her.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They weren’t far away. They travelled through the ravaged Riverlands, then through the mountains of the Vale for months. Finally they were close to the Bloody Gate. It took them a very long time to reach it, slowed by the Hound’s injury and their lack of horse. They had to go through all the way on feet, meeting devastated lands and burned farms all along their journey. They were lucky they didn’t meet the hill tribes while they followed the Eastern Road. Perhaps the burned face of the Hound scared even them. And now they walked into the tight ravine that led to the passage point separating the Eastern Road from the Eyrie. Soon, Arya would meet her aunt.

She didn’t know what to expect from this woman. She never met aunt Lysa. She didn’t know her. Arya wanted her mother, Robb, Bran, Rickon, Jon. She should go to the Wall. Her last brother was there. He would ruffle her hair just like he used to do at Winterfell. She would hug him tightly just like when they went separate ways. And she wanted Sansa as well. She missed her. Her sister was stupid, but she was still her sister. She was her pack. Her aunt was her pack no more than her granduncle, Brynden Tully, was. She felt no bond to them. She had more bond with the Hound than with her aunt.

She hated the Hound. He was brutal, rough, a thief, and he liked to kill for pleasure. Arya liked to kill some people too, but only if they deserved it and if they did something evil. The man who passes the sentence should swing the sword. Her father’s words echoed through her mind. Her father never told it to her, but Jon told her their father’s words one day. Killing was for justice, not for pleasure. Arya felt pleasure because she could give people justice, because she gave them what they deserved, just like when she killed Polliver at the inn. It already happened several months ago. The Hound liked to kill people only because he liked to kill, nothing more. There was no other reason why he liked it. He was the worst shit in the Seven Kingdoms.

And now here she was, walking with the Hound at her side towards the Bloody Gate. They crossed the path of other people who came from the opposite way. All were peasants, most of them carrying empty bundles. The Hound was walking heavily beside her in his full armor. The armor and his injury slowed them a lot. Arya couldn’t understand why she couldn’t manage to escape this man. She was quicker than him after all, even if she had wore full armor and him nothing. Perhaps because she had no reason to escape him. He was bringing her to a member of her family after all, even if Arya didn’t know this person. She had no reason to escape him. It would only make it more
difficult for her to reach the Eyrie. The Hound helped and protected her, even if she didn’t want and didn’t need protection to survive. But she could reach the Eyrie quicker with him, and she realized after a few weeks that she didn’t hate the Hound’s company as much as she thought. Anyway, once her aunt paid him, she would get rid of him forever. What would happen next to him didn’t concern her. As for what would happen next to her, she had no idea. Perhaps she could ask her aunt to send her to the Wall to her brother. There was a harbor in Gulltown where she could take a ship to Eastwatch-by-the-Sea, then ride west to Castleblack where Jon surely was.

“How does it make you feel to know that the man you once served as cupbearer died?” the Hound’s suddenly asked out of nowhere.

They learned a few weeks ago at an inn that Tywin Lannister was dead. Some said he was murdered, others that he died of a disease, or because he was too old. Some said Joffrey killed him, others that it was Cersei, or the Imp. But they also discovered at the same time that Joffrey died at his own wedding. He was poisoned. Arya found it so ironic. Her mother and her brother were slaughtered at a wedding, and Joffrey got himself killed at his own wedding later.

“I wished I had killed him myself,” Arya replied.

“You? Killing Tywin Lannister? I would have liked to see that. How would you have done this?”

Arya tried to imagine how to kill Tywin Lannister. She was his cupbearer for many months. She could have stabbed him in the back many times with a knife, but she didn’t. She should have. But then she would probably be dead. And Hot Pie and Gendry too. All the same, she wondered how she would have killed him. Strangely, she couldn’t find out.

“I would have found a way,” she finally said.

“Aye, I’m sure you would,” the Hound gloomily said. “What about Joffrey?”

“I would have found a way to kill him too.” Arya spoke angrily.

“How do you feel about this? About their deaths?”

The Hound sometimes asked her questions, unlike at the beginning when he always told her to shut her mouth. Arya asked him questions too, more to spend time than anything else. He talked to her for the same reasons.

“I don’t know. Tywin Lannister was Robb’s enemy, but he was kind with me in his own way. He seemed to like me as his cupbearer.”

“Yes, as his cupbearer,” the Hound scoffed. “These noble people are like this. They like us people under them as long as we remember we are inferior to them and as long as we obey. But when dogs stop to obey, they kill them. I disobeyed, so now they want me dead. My brother always obeyed. And I’m the one with a bag of silver on my head.”

Arya knew how the Hound hated his brother. Arya hated him too. They found common ground on this. “He liked me more than your brother. And more than his own men. He treated me better than them, and he didn’t sell me out, even when he knew I was highborn.”

“But if he had discovered who you truly were, he would have sent you back to King’s Landing, or worse. Perhaps he would have ordered my brother to rape you, then to kill you to make your brother understand what happens to those who fight against him. He would still have your sister as a hostage anyway. No need for two.”
“I don’t think so.”

Arya didn’t think Tywin Lannister would have ordered her to be killed. She had too much value alive. The Hound and the Brotherhood without Banner kept her for the same reason. She was of no use dead. However, the moment Tywin Lannister would have discovered her identity, she would have fled, or killed him. She would have been ready to do so. Tywin Lannister may have been kind with her, but he was still her brother’s enemy, and so he was her enemy too. As for Joffrey, she would have killed him the moment he would stand before her. And now he was dead. She would never have the possibility to kill him. Her list decreased of two names. And she didn’t feel happy about it.

“I don’t know how to feel about Joffrey. About his death. I thought it’d make me happy, but it doesn’t. Not really.”

“Nothing makes you happy,” the Hound grumbled.

“Lots of things make me happy.”

“Like what?”


“So you’re sad because you didn’t get to kill Joffrey yourself. Is that it?”

He hit the right point. “At least I could have been there to watch. I wanted to see the look in his eyes when he knew it was over.”

“Aye, nothing in the world beats that look.” He seemed uninterested.

“You protected him for most of his life. You think you could have saved him?” She wished the Hound could have saved Joffrey so she could have killed him later.

“I wasn’t the damn wine taster.” He chose this moment to drink wine from his flask. “Little shit deserved to die, but poison… poison’s a woman’s weapon. Men kill with steel.”

“That’s your stupid pride talking,” Arya said, exasperated. “It’s why you’ll never be a great killer. I’d have killed Joffrey with a chicken bone if I had to.”

The Hound laughed at this. “I’d pay good money to see that.” He scratched the place on his neck where he was bitten and groaned.

“You should have left me burn it.”

“It’s a fleabite.”

“That fleabite’s got you walking a lot slower than you used to.”

“Well, we won’t have to walk too much further.”

The Bloody Gate was right before them. It was made of two long parapets built in the stone of the Mountains of the Moon, a great portcullis made of steel bars, with two watchtowers above that were joined by a covered bridge. There were guards and knights with arrows, bows, spears and swords, standing before the portcullis, atop the cliffs and on the parapets. Some of them aimed their bow and pointed an arrow in their direction as they approached. All wore an eagle on a blue field, the sigil of House Arryn. Arya remembered her father once told her Jon Arryn was a good man, a man of
honor, and he had been her aunt’s husband until he died a few years ago. With some hope, Arya would be welcomed here, but she had her doubts.

“You really think my aunt will pay for me?”

“Aye, she’ll pay,” the Hound assured.

“I’ve never even met her.”

“Doesn’t matter. You’re her blood. Family, honor, all that horseshit. It’s all you lords and ladies ever talk about.”

“I’m not a lady,” Arya specified. She was no lady, and she would never be. Sansa was a lady, but Arya wasn’t her sister, and she was happy to not be like her. Though she would like very much to see her again. Was she still in King’s Landing right now? Or somewhere else? Arya didn’t know. Perhaps her aunt would have answers to her questions.

“Who would pass the Bloody Gate?” a man shouted.

“The bloody Hound, Sandor Clegane,” spat the one speaking. “And his… traveling companion Arya Stark, niece of your lady Lysa Arryn.”

At least he didn’t call me Lady Arya Stark of Winterfell. Arya guessed she should be thankful to the Hound at least for this. She didn’t call him ser, and he didn’t call her my lady. The man who spoke looked at them with curiosity. He approached, a hand on his sheathed sword. He stopped a few feet before them and eyed the Hound.

“You have the face of the Hound, I’ll give you that. But your companion looks like a boy.”

“I’m a girl,” Arya shouted. She was fed up that everyone mistook her for a boy, even with her clothes and her haircut.

The knight eyed her suspiciously. “Anyone could arrive and claim to have found Arya Stark. Why would I believe you?” He turned to the Hound. “You broke your vows as a kingsguard. You abandoned your king. There’s a bounty on your head. You have no honor. Why should I believe you?”

“You can piss on your honor and on mine,” roared the Hound. “This is Arya Stark of Winterfell, daughter of Eddard Stark and Catelyn Stark, the sister of your lady. I can swear it on my shit of honor that it’s her if that means anything for you. But do you really think I would bring her here and present myself as the Hound if I was lying? With a bounty on my head? All I want is being paid for bringing her back to her family. Let your pretty lady take a look at her. Her mother’s dead. Her father’s dead. Her brother’s dead. Winterfell is a pile of rubble. If there is a little chance she is Arya Stark, then you would be better to let your lady see her niece, if you have any shit of honor in you, bloody knight.”

After a moment when the knight looked as if he would draw his sword, he finally seemed to relax. “I will let you see Lady Lysa, but I hope for you this is really the Lady Arya Stark.”

“I’m not a lady,” Arya shouted. The knight stopped for a moment, then resumed.

“I hope for you both that she is who you claim she is. Follow us.”

They went through the portcullis and after a long climb that took many hours, they reached the Eyrie. The knight didn’t follow them, but they were flanked by at least twenty men when they reached the
peak of the Mountains of the Moon. Both the Hound and Arya refused to surrender their sword. She wouldn’t give up Needle. Not again. The guards reluctantly allowed them to keep them before the angry face of Sandor Clegane. They arrived before two great doors and waited before them. One of the men following them went inside and they waited a very long time. Finally, he came back and they entered. It was the High Hall of the Eyrie. Arya saw pictures of it in books at Winterfell. The throne of the Lord of the Eyrie stood at the top of long stairs and was made of weirwood. On it were sitting two people. One was a woman wearing a blue gown and with auburn hair. Arya saw some resemblance with her mother. It had to be her aunt. She was holding, or rather hugging, a little boy in her arms who looked at them as if he was afraid. Probably because of the Hound. The doors closed behind them, but Arya noticed the men who accompanied them all came in and stood between them and the closed doors. There were other soldiers, all bearing the Arryn’s colors, standing next to the weirwood throne, along the stairs, and right before her and the Hound. Arya didn’t like it.

“Lady Arryn. I guess this is Lord Robin Arryn. My lord.” The Hound didn’t bow for her aunt, but he did for the little boy. He looked everything but a lord.

“What do you want from my son? What are you doing here?” Her aunt asked her question with an icy voice, looking at the Hound and only at the Hound. She didn’t even seem to notice Arya.

“I brought your niece to you. Arya Stark.” He turned his eyes towards her. For the first time since they entered, her aunt dared to look at her, but only for a second.

“Are you taking me and my son for fools? You really think I’ll believe this boy is my niece?”

“I’m a girl,” Arya shouted. “My name is Arya Stark. My father is Lord Eddard Stark and my mother is Catelyn Stark. I grew up in Winterfell until I left with my father when he became Hand of the King. I have a sister, Sansa, probably still in the capital. I escaped King’s Landing not long after my father was arrested. I saw Ser Ilyn Payne take out his head on the steps of the Great Sept of Baelor. I left the capital and wandered through the Riverlands during the last two years. I saw my brother being killed at the Twins before I could reach him. The Freys butchered him, my mother, and his direwolf. They cut his head from his body and put on the one of Grey Wind instead…”

“Silence!” Lysa Arryn rose from the throne, yelling. “I defend you to talk about such things in the presence of my son.”

“What happened next?” The boy looked quite interested by everything Arya just said, but her aunt put a hand on his shoulder.

“Shhh, my Sweetrobin. Everything is alright. Your mother is there.”

She sat back and took the head of her son in her arms. And she did something Arya would never have thought possible. She unlaced her gown and freed one of her breast. Then Arya’s cousin began to suckle it. That was so disgusting. Arya looked at the Hound whose face showed outright disgust as well.

“You won’t frighten my son this way. I won’t allow it.” Lysa Arryn was shouting. “Get them out of my sight. Send them away. Never come back here, or I’ll send you through the Moon Door for scaring my son.”

Arya wanted to laugh at this. The Hound brought her here to give her to her aunt in exchange for gold, and instead he was turned down. She never saw a mother and a son so strange and stupid. It reminded her of Cersei and Joffrey. At least, she wouldn’t live with them. How could this woman be her mother’s sister?
“Wait a minute, my lady.” Arya heard a voice on her left and turned to see where it came from. She heard it before, she was sure. “I’m afraid the Hound is telling the truth. This is your niece, Arya.”

He appeared between two guards, but remained behind them. He had blue eyes and brown hair, and a thin beard running around his mouth, a mischievous smile on his lips. Arya remembered him from the tourney for her father. He was the one who told to her and Sansa back then how the Hound got his face half burnt. She also saw him at Harrenhal later, when she was the cupbearer of Tywin Lannister, but he didn’t recognize her. At least she thought so.

“But Petyr, my love, this is impossible. She cannot be.” Her aunt looked bewildered.

“I know it must look strange, my lady.” Littlefinger turned to Arya and bowed deeply before her. “My lady. It is a pleasure to see you alive. Your sister will be very happy to hear such news.”

Her sister? “Sansa? She’s alright?” Arya didn’t have any news from her sister for what looked like years now.

Before she could answer, the Hound stepped before her, clouding her vision of the man. “You order all your men to stand down and let us go. If you do it, no one will die.”

Arya knew this voice. The Hound was angry. His hand was on his sword, ready to draw it. From his position, she could see he was going to draw it against Littlefinger. The other men around them put their hand on the handle of their sword as well.

“Sandor Clegane,” shortly replied Petyr Baelish. Arya changed her position to see what was going on. The thin man was still smiling. Arya didn’t like this smile, and the look in the man’s eyes that came with it. There was something cruel in them. Syrio taught her to read other people’s expression to know what would be their next move. Littlefinger was preparing something. “What a surprise to see you here, especially with the bounty on your head.”

“You fucking cunt! You think I’ll let you seize this bitch so you can deliver her to the Lannisters, just like you did with her sister and her father. I’ll kill you before you do that.”

The Hound’s words caught Arya’s attention. “What do you mean?”

“He betrayed your father,” the Hound answered loudly, not leaving his gaze from Littlefinger. “I was there when Cersei and Joffrey arrested him. Lord fucking Baelish turned this butcher’s son Janos Slynt and his fucking gold cloaks against your father. They slaughtered his men. He put a dagger on your father’s throat. I’m not going to leave you to Cersei’s creature. I didn’t bring you here for this.”

Arya looked at the thin man. He was standing there, still smiling. He didn’t refute the Hound’s words. It wasn’t difficult for Arya to know the truth. This man betrayed her family. He betrayed her father. Everything that happened to her pack, he was responsible of it. Arya drew Needle from her belt and pointed it towards Baelish.

“You let us go, or there will be dead, beginning by you.” People didn’t react to her words before a moment. Her aunt was the one to finally respond.

“Kill them. They threatened my husband. Kill them! Kill them!”

“Make them fly,” added the boy, yelling.

The Hound drew his sword at the same time than the other men. Arya jumped in Baelish’s direction, but two guards stood before her. Swift as a cat, she ducked their arms directed toward her and hit both of them on their legs. She took one in an open space between his pad and his armor, but she
didn’t have the same luck with the other one and hit the pad. She managed to avoid him all the same, but she wasn’t fast enough. Littlefinger was running away, more guards standing on her way to him. Arya avoided two, but finally she received a kick in her ribs that sent her on the floor, out of breath. Before she could react, Needle was taken out of her hands and two men seized her by her arms. She kicked at them, trying to get free of their grasp. She thought she heard one blowing some air when she hit him, but then she received a punch in her stomach and a third man seized her by her feet. She continued to struggle, without success, earning other punches and kicks from time to time.

Arya saw the Hound fighting a huge bunch of men, slashing his sword wildly all around him. A few men were already on the ground and all the others backed before his fury. Then a bolt lodged in his right arm. The knights rushed on him all together after a moment of surprise. The Hound continued to fight savagely, but in the end he couldn’t withstand all of them. The men pierced him with their swords. Arya met his eyes. He asked for her help as he fell on the floor. She wanted to help him, but she couldn’t. Finally, a sword came through his throat. When Arya could see his half burned face again, life had left his eyes.

Arya shouted, screamed, kicked and tried to free herself from the men holding her, but she couldn’t. The Hound was dead. He was dead. Just like her father, her mother, Robb, Bran and Rickon. She heard cries, and other voices, but didn’t really understand what they were saying. They talked about throwing someone through a door, about a head, about proof of loyalty, and about a niece. Finally, Arya received a hard blow on the side of her head and lost consciousness.

When she woke up, she was in a room with only three stone walls. Her head was smashing and she felt a great pain from her right temple. Where should have been the fourth wall, there was only sky and distant mountains and rocks. When she approached the edge of the little room she was in, she couldn’t see the ground below. She was at least a few hundred feet above any ground. She tried to look around the entrance for a way to escape, but there was nothing she could grab. She couldn’t hope to leave this room using this way without falling to certain death. The only door of the piece, a heavy steel door, wouldn’t open. When Arya knocked on it as hard as she could again and again, someone unlocked it and went inside. It was a big man with a scar over his right eye, chainmail and a stick in his right hand. He also had golden teeth.

“Little girl making noise.”

“Where am I?” Arya asked.

“Little girl still making noise.”

“Tell me where I am.”

Arya tried to seize Needle at her belt, but it wasn’t there. The stick struck on her forehead very hard. If she had been in a better state, she would have ducked it, but her head was still making her suffer. Arya lost consciousness again. When she awoke it was night and there was blood running from her forehead to the tip of her nose. She was also at the edge of the fall, and quickly got away from it. Arya rubbed the blood out of her face with her hand. The cut on her forehead had enough time to cicatrize during her forced sleep. She remembered where she was, probably still at the Eyrie, the prisoner of an aunt who looked mad and of a man who betrayed her father and delivered him to Joffrey and Cersei. She had no way to escape, and the Hound was dead, killed while trying to protect her. He only wanted to hand her to somebody for gold, but in the end he fought to protect her. Another name left her list. But it was gone from it before he died. Arya didn’t cry, but she could feel she was sad for the Hound, despite what he did to Mycah.

She was unconscious for too long to sleep now. She didn’t have the force to try to find a way to escape, so instead she sat her back against the wall facing the exit to a certain death. She noticed a
slight slope of the floor to the open wall. She should be careful to not roll to her fall next time she slept, like she probably just did. Needle wasn’t at her belt, so she couldn’t get any reassurance from her friend’s presence. But she felt the coin Jaqen H’ghar gave her when she left Harrenhal in her pocket. They didn’t take it from her. She began to toss it in the air, catching it before it fell on the floor of stone. It didn’t slip from her hand a single time. Then she began to recite the names. It had changed a lot during the last months.

“Cersei. Walder Frey. Meryn Trant. The Red Woman. Beric Dondarrion. Thoros of Myr. Ilyn Payne. The Mountain. Littlefinger. Lysa Arryn.” *Hate’s as good a thing as any to keep a person going.* The Hound told her this once. Joffrey, Tywin Lannister and the Hound left her list, and she replaced them with her aunt and Petyr Baelish. She repeated the names over and over for the whole night. Day finally came. The gaoler brought her hard bread and water in the middle of the day, but Littlefinger came with him as well.

“Leave us alone, Mord. I have my own man.”

Arya’s gaoler left. A knight entered in her cell and stood at the right, on the open wall side. Littlefinger stood on the left, where there was a stone wall. Arya wouldn’t be able to push him to the fall. And even if she did, then the knight would surely kill her. She had no weapon. The heavy door of her cell shut and she heard a clank from the other side. It was locked.

“I’m sorry for the disagreements. My sweet Lysa can be very touchy when it comes to her son’s safety. I’ll probably manage to have you moved to proper rooms in a few days.”

He made a sorry smile, but Arya could see he wasn’t sincere. She stared at him with all the hatred and the disgust she could gather. After a moment, the man who betrayed her father resumed.

“Is there anything I can do to make your stay more comfortable, Lady Arya?”

“I’m not a lady,” Arya shouted. “And I want you out! OUT!” She threw her cup of water to him. The cup hit him and some of the water splashed on him and his fine clothes, but he wasn’t hurt. The cup fell on the floor, rolling in circle for a moment. The knight brought his hand to his sword, but Baelish stopped him.

“I think I’ll come back when you’ll be better disposed.”

The traitor left the cell with the knight. When they were gone, Arya ate the hard bread they brought to her. It would be useless to starve herself. She regretted she threw the cup of water. She had nothing to drink. Her gaoler, Mord, brought her back hard bread and water later in the day. Then she fell asleep with her back on the wall to not roll after she recited her list loudly. “Cersei. Walder Frey. Meryn Trant. The Red Woman. Beric Dondarrion. Thoros of Myr. Ilyn Payne. The Mountain. Littlefinger. Lysa Arryn.”

Days went on and on like this. Littlefinger came back to visit her during the first days, always when she was brought her first meal, but she didn’t want to talk to him. He betrayed her father, and he had the Hound killed. He told her he was trying to get her out of the sky cells as quickly as possible. That was the name of the cells like this one. How convenient for a name. He also continued to ask her if she wanted something, but Arya would always throw her cup of water to him, but only after emptying it now. She needed to drink. After four failed attempts to talk with her, he stopped his daily visits.

Arya tried to remember as many details as she could about how Mord brought her food. It was always the same thing. Twice each day, always at the same hours, she received a hard black bread and a cup of water. From the third day however, she received white bread. And at after a week, she
was served a lemon cake as well with each meal. She tried to remember as many details as she could so she may attempt an escape one day. She may try to hide on the side where the door opened, then jump on Mord as he looked for her, but then she would have to travel through all the Eyrie, a place she didn’t know where she could lose herself very easily, with at least dozens of soldiers. She wouldn’t be able to evade all of them, and had no means to kill them without Needle. All she could do was waiting for an opportunity. There would come a time when her aunt would make her leave this cell, even temporarily. Wouldn’t she?

On her sixteenth day in the sky cell, her door opened sooner in the morning than usually. A knight of the Vale entered. It was the same man who accompanied Littlefinger when he visited her before, but without Littlefinger this time.

“Lady Arya, follow us.” He spoke roughly.

“I’m not a lady,” Arya complained, throwing an angry glare at him, but she followed all the same.

She had no choice, and to be honest she was bored by this cell. Spending her days to recite her list and look at every little detail of the cell, in the hope it might be useful, only disturbed by her two daily meals… That made her days very long. There were four guards encircling her as they walked to an unknown location in the Eyrie. Arya tried to remember every turn, every corner, every door she saw on her way, and how many guards she met. She counted forty-four men without the four escorting her, but there were probably more. Escape would be very difficult.

To her surprise, they brought her to a comfortable chamber with a featherbed and a bathtub full of hot water. Four old women were waiting for her. She thought they would bring her to the High Hall to see her aunt and her cousin. Instead she was there in one of these chambers her sister would like so much. All commodities and furniture a lady could hope for were there, but Arya was no lady.

The guards left her in the room and closed the door behind them. She heard the clank of a lock turning. Of course, she was in a cell. A comfortable cell now, but a cell nonetheless. The four old women nearly forced her to get out of her rags and to come into the bathtub. They scrubbed her and rubbed her so hard with their brushes that Arya thought she would be bleeding at the end of the bath. When they were done with her torture, they dried her with towels and helped her to put on a gown. Or to be more precise, they forced her to put on a gown when Arya only wanted to get back her ragged clothes. It had been so long since she took a bath and wear a dress. She felt naked in clothes not tightened around her body like the ones she wore for the past two years and without the dust and mud she was used to on her skin. The four old maids left with her clothes. Arya wondered if she would ever see them again. She realized too late she had lost the coin Jaqen gave her at the same time.

About two hours later, the lock of her door was unlocked and two people entered, Littlefinger and the same knight than ever. He was making his ugly false smile as always and the knight didn’t leave Arya with his eyes.

“I’m sorry it took so much time to get you out of the sky cells. My wife can be very difficult to convince when she’s fixed on something.” He said it with an apologetic smile.

Wait. His wife? “What do you meant, your wife?”

The knight at Littlefinger’s side advanced towards her with a menacing look. “You stand before Lord Petyr Baelish, Lord of Harrenhal and husband to our lady Lysa Arryn, thus acting Lord of the Vale. You better show him some respect.”

Arya agape before this. Her aunt married this man? The man who betrayed her father? “I have
nothing to do of his titles. He’s a traitor. He betrayed my father!” she spat.

“Be careful about what you say.” The knight started to unsheathe his sword.

“Ser Lyn.” Littlefinger stopped him with a hand on his arm. “Please leave us. I have to talk with the Lady Arya in private.”

The knight looked at her with an angry glare that Arya returned, but he finally left the room, locking it behind him. Arya had a chance.

“You probably think right now you could kill me and reduce the list of people you repeat every night, my lady,” Littlefinger said before she could do anything. “But if you want to cross all these names before you die, I suggest you postpone your revenge on me. If you kill me right now, I don’t think Lysa will spare you a second time.”

Arya froze. “I can tell her what you did.”

“And what have I done?” Littlefinger asked. “Betray the husband of her sister. She already knows it from what the Hound told in her presence. Do you think she believed him? Do you think she’ll believe you? And even if she believed it, she doesn’t really care about her brother-in-law.”

“I’m her niece.”

“And I am her husband. The husband she chose over many pretenders who were much more noble born than me. And you just threatened her Sweetrobin.”

“I didn’t threaten him. That’s a lie,” Arya spat again.

“A lie she believes. A lie she created herself. She’ll listen to me, not to you. And you should be grateful that she listened to me. You probably didn’t realize it while you struggled to get free, but your aunt wanted to throw you through the Moon Door, and Lord Robin was happy to support her. I’m the one who convinced her to not kill you since you were her blood. Without my intervention, your body would be broken in multiple parts as we speak after a fall of hundreds feet.”

Arya hesitated for a moment. She had something else to reproach him. “You threw me into the sky cells!”

“You threw me into the sky cells,” he corrected. “I told her to do it, it’s true, but she wouldn’t have listened if I suggested these rooms instead. I worked for the last fortnight to get you out of these cells and have you brought here. I would expect some gratitude for the better treatment I got for you.”

Arya looked at the man standing before her. What was he doing? Was he lying? She couldn’t be sure. But if he told the truth, why would he do this? “I don’t believe you. Why would you help me?”

Littlefinger looked at her with a sad smile. “Because I loved your mother. I loved her very much. It grieved me when I learned that she died at the Twins. You said you were there when in the High Hall. How was it?”

Strangely, Arya had the impression he was really sad. Could it be true? She remembered him telling he was a very very old friend of her mother at her father’s tourney. Arya didn’t see what she could lose from telling him what she knew.

“It was butchery. The Freys slaughtered everyone. All the Northerners. They played the Rains of Castamere while they did it. They paraded my brother’s body on a horse with his direwolf’s head
while all the camp of the Northerners was set ablaze.”

“What about Cat?”

Arya never heard someone call her mother this way, not even her father. She tried to see any false concern in Littlefinger, but strangely she could see nothing false in this instant. “I didn’t see what happened to her.” She couldn’t tell him about her dreams when she was a wolf and got her mother’s body out of the river. “But I know they slit her throat, then threw her body into the river.”

Littlefinger dropped his eyes to the floor, before rising them again a moment later. “May I sit?” Arya nodded in a positive way. Petyr Baelish seized a chair and sat on it. “I loved your mother. A long time ago, I even hoped to marry her one day. Sadly I never married her. She married someone else. Your father. I’m sorry she died. I feel at least as much pain as you do. And I’m sorry about your father as well.”

Arya turned angry again. “You’re lying. You betrayed my father. You gave him to Cersei and Joffrey. And you did nothing to save my mother.”

“I wish I could have. Your father was an honorable man, but he was stubborn. He wanted to support Stannis against all odds despite the fact Stannis had no chance to win the Iron Throne. And by the way, the Red Woman you mention every night with all the other names, do you know who she really is?” Arya froze again. He knew her list. “You repeat the same names all nights since you were in the sky cells. Cersei. Walder Frey. Meryn Trant. The Red Woman. Beric Dondarrion. Thoros of Myr. Ilyn Payne. The Mountain. Me. Your aunt. I guess these are people you want to see dead. And I think I know who this Red Woman is. But you don’t seem to know.”

Arya didn’t understand where he was going with this. “What do you know of her?”

“I think she is a Red Priestess. Melisandre of Asshai. She is the main advisor of Stannis Baratheon, the man your father wanted to put on the Iron Throne. He supported a man who’s advised by this red woman. A woman who convinced Stannis to burn septs and godswoods wherever he went.”

“You’re lying,” Arya said immediately. “My father would never have done this.” Her father would never support this woman.

“I’m not lying, my lady.”

“I’m not a lady!” she shouted.

“Very well,” he said in an appeasing tone. “How do you want me to call you? Arya?” Arya didn’t answer. He resumed after a moment. “I’m not lying to you, Arya. I’ll tell you the truth. I betrayed your father, indeed. But I tried to save him, just like I saved you when I didn’t tell Tywin Lannister who was his cupbearer. I recognized you, but I told him nothing because you were Cat’s daughter. Your father wanted to overthrow Joffrey, and I advised him to not do so. Instead he decided to fight for Stannis, a fight lost from the beginning. He could have made peace with the Lannisters, and act as Regent for Joffrey. Instead he chose honor, and this led to a war that shattered your family and killed your brothers and your parents. That’s what honor brought to your family.”

“You betrayed him!”

“And I would be dead right now if I didn’t. And you would be too, as a consequence.”

Arya didn’t know what to reply to this. She didn’t know what her father did that led to his arrest, but she felt nothing but disdain for honor. It was only a way for people to believe they were better than they really were. But she didn’t think she could trust Littlefinger. She believed what the Hound said.
She knew the Hound didn’t lie to her, but she had no trust in the man sitting before her.

“I don’t believe you,” she calmly said, but perhaps not with the strong certainty she wanted to have.

Littlefinger smiled. “Then let me help you so you can believe me when I tell you I’m an ally.”

“Help me? How can you help me?”

“By crossing a few names on your famous list. I could help you to get rid of some of these people.”

“I don’t need your help.”

“I’m afraid you do. First, I can give you some information. There are two people you should add to your list. I have many spies and informants through the Seven Kingdoms, and I know who killed your mother and your brother at the Twins. I’m sure you want to know them, so you can avenge your family, so you can give justice to these people.”

That interested Arya. “Who?”

“Your brother was stabbed into the heart by one of his own bannermen. Roose Bolton, Lord of the Dreadfort, and now Warden of the North. Tywin Lannister rewarded him with this for his part in your brother’s death. As for your mother, it was Black Walder, a great-grandson of Walder Frey, who killed her.” Arya would have two more names to speak before she fell asleep tonight.

“Where are they?”

“Black Walder is with his ancestor at the Twins, like most of the Freys who took part in the slaughtering. As for Roose Bolton, my last information seemed to show he was heading for Winterfell where he would rule the North.” Arya boiled inside to learn that the man who killed and betrayed her brother would take Winterfell, her home. “Perhaps you also want information about the other names?”

“I do.”

Littlefinger smiled. “Cersei Lannister is now confined at Castle Stokeworth in the Crownlands. She was sent away from the capital not long after Joffrey died. Walder Frey is still at the Twins, refusing to die. Meryn Trant has taken the black and is probably going to the Wall as we speak.”

“What?” Arya didn’t expect Meryn Trant to join the Night’s Watch.

“It seems the kingsguard you hate incidentally poisoned Joffrey’s wine while trying to poison someone else. He had the choice between the Wall or Ilyn Payne.”

Arya wished Meryn Trant chose Ilyn Payne’s sword, but it seems he was a coward. She wasn’t surprised by this. “So Ser Ilyn Payne is still alive?”

“And still acting as the King’s justice,” Littlefinger confirmed. “The Red Woman is still at Stannis’s side on Dragonstone from what I know. Beric Dondarrion is dead or alive depending on who you ask, and Thoros of Myr still lives from what I know. I’m alive, just like your aunt, but I’m afraid someone took care of the Mountain before you.”


“It is. The new Lord of Casterly Rock had him and his men all killed and stripped the Cleganes of their keep and their lands. He gave it to some pet sellsword he had in his service. With the Hound
who just died, it seems the Cleganes are extinct.”

Arya wished she had killed Gregor Clegane herself, but at least someone got what he deserved. The Hound, however… “What have you done of the Hound’s body?”

“His head was sent to King’s Landing after the confrontation. I convinced your aunt it would be a proof of loyalty to the Crown. His body was thrown through the Moon Door without the head.”

Arya wanted to spit at the man who sat there, speaking so quietly of all this, but there was no use to it, no more than it was any use to insult the Hound. With the information she just received, Arya could cross a name from her list, but she had two others to replace it now.

Littlefinger rose. “I’ll leave you alone. Think about the proposition I made. You’ll need help to kill all these people, and I’m the only one here who could help you.”

“You would help me to kill yourself?”

The man chuckled lightly. “You won’t kill me until you can, and for now you can’t, and I won’t make it possible for you to kill me. But I will give you opportunities to kill the other people you want to see dead. I wouldn’t let such an opportunity pass if I were you. We can both see the people who hurt your mother suffer.”

He started to walk away, but Arya stopped him before he reached the door. She needed to know something else. “Do you have any news of my brother Jon? Or Sansa?”

He turned to face her and took a grim expression. “I know nothing about your half-brother. He’s at the Wall, isn’t he?” Arya confirmed it with nod. “The last news we received from the Wall were that a great army of wildlings was marching on it. Your brother Jon may be occupied for the moment fighting them.”

Arya remembered the stories Old Nan told her about the things beyond the Wall. Not only wildlings, but White Walkers, giants, wargs and many other creatures. Arya wished she could be with Jon right now, fighting the wildlings.

“As for your sister, she seems to be well and happy at Casterly Rock.”

Arya jumped at this information. “Casterly Rock? What is she doing there? I thought she was in King’s Landing. Cersei and Joffrey kept her as a hostage.”

“She is a hostage no longer. In fact, your sister is now Sansa Lannister, Lady of Casterly Rock, Lady of the Westerlands and Lady of Winterfell.”

Arya didn’t understand. “That’s impossible.”

“It is possible. Tywin Lannister is dead, and the Kingslayer is a kingsguard, forbidden from inheritance and marriage. Tyrion Lannister is now the Lord of House Lannister, just like your sister is their lady. Since she is Imp’s wife.”

Arya couldn’t believe what she just learnt. Sansa was a Lannister. She was married to the Imp. “But Sansa was supposed to marry Joffrey.”

“Yes, she was. But the Lannisters broke their betrothal to marry Joffrey with the daughter of Mace Tyrell, the Lord of Highgarden. Now that Joffrey is dead, Tommen sits on the Iron Throne and is expected to marry the Tyrell girl instead of his dead brother. So the Lannisters organized another marriage for your sister and gave her to the Imp.”
Arya now realized what happened. “They forced her to marry him.”

Littlefinger’s face turned bitter. “I’m afraid your sister wanted to marry him in fact.”

It took a moment for Arya to assimilate this information. “Sansa would never want to marry a Lannister. Even less a dwarf.”

“She wanted to marry Joffrey once should I recall you. I offered your sister to make her leave King’s Landing in secret, but she refused. She preferred to stay there and to marry the Imp. Later, I sent a man to offer her to escape the capital again, and she turned him down. My place is with my lord husband, she said. When Tywin Lannister died, the Imp was accused of murdering him. Your sister gave a wonderful testimony that convinced the judges to spare her husband, and she was later acknowledged by Joffrey himself as Lady of Casterly Rock and Lady of Winterfell. And I was present at Joffrey’s wedding. I saw your sister with her husband. She wore a lavish gown with jewels and gold from her hair to her feet. She was laughing with the Imp, holding his hand. She smiled at him during the whole wedding. I even saw them kiss at one moment. Believe me, she was happy. Very happy. The other Lannisters made toasts for her. And now she lives at Casterly Rock with her husband, and my agents there are telling me she enjoys her new life very much.”

Arya didn’t react. Her sister, Sansa, a Lannister? No, even worse, she was the Lady Lannister, just like their mother was the Lady Stark. After a moment of silence, Littlefinger left after one last sentence. “I’m sorry, my lady.” Disappointment was obvious on his face.

When the man had left, Arya was so lost in her thoughts that she forgot to tell him she was no lady. Her sister was married to a Lannister. She was married to Tyrion Lannister, the Imp. Arya remembered the Imp from the time he visited Winterfell with the royal party. He looked very different from Cersei and his brother. They were tall and handsome, he was small. Arya was taller than him. However, he had the same blond hair and green eyes than all the Lannisters. Arya was intrigued by him when she saw him for the first time. She never saw such a little man, but he wasn’t at all what she expected. She thought she would see an imp. Instead, he only looked like a small man with a big head. When she talked with him, he told her his head was big to compensate for the small size of his arms and legs. Arya found his answers quite strange. He didn’t seem to take anything seriously, and he mocked himself. She found him much more interesting than the queen, to the opposite of Sansa. Arya never saw him after she left Winterfell however. He left for the Wall with Jon when she journeyed to King’s Landing with Father and Sansa.

Arya found it unbelievable that Sansa would be happy to marry the Imp. He was the complete opposite of the husband Sansa dreamed of. She could still remember the stupid things she said the last time they spoke with their father. I’m supposed to marry Prince Joffrey. I love him and I’m meant to be his queen and have his babies. I don’t want someone brave and gentle and strong. I want him! He’ll be the greatest king that ever was, a golden lion, and I’ll give him sons with beautiful blond hair. Arya had laughed at her sister’s stupidity, and their father hardly suppressed his laughs. Surely she was no longer in love with Joffrey after he killed their father. Sansa was stupid, but not so much. But to fall in love with a dwarf? Arya didn’t believe it. Littlefinger probably lied.

However, there was something that led Arya to believe this story could be true. Sansa always wanted to marry a great southern lord and live like a great lady if not like a queen. She was the Lady of House Lannister now, and the Lannisters were the richest family in all the Seven Kingdoms. Was it possible she was happy to be married to a Lannister for this reason? Sansa was always stupid and boring. Did she end up happy to get rid of Joffrey and threw herself in the arms of the Imp? Arya had difficulties to imagine Sansa in the arms of the little man. No, there had to be something else.

Arya didn’t think she could believe a man like Littlefinger who betrayed her father. He gave reasons
for his actions, but he betrayed her father nonetheless. He may have lied to her. What stopped him from doing so? He had the Hound killed, and he worked for the Lannisters. She didn’t like this man with his wicked smiles. She wouldn’t trust him, no more than she should have trusted Beric Dondarrion and Thoros of Myr when they said they would bring her to Robb.

However, there was a thing he said that was true. He saw her at Harrenhal, and he didn’t reveal her identity to Tywin Lannister. He recognized her, and did nothing. Why? Because he loved her mother once? Arya found it quite strange. He confessed he betrayed her father, just like the Hound didn’t care to tell her what he thought of her and her family. Littlefinger seemed to do it, though in a different way. He did bad things, but he also did things that saved her life, especially if he convinced her aunt to not kill her. Was the one behind the better food she got during her last days in the sky cell? If he told the truth about Sansa…

Arya felt anger filling her. If Sansa had become the Lady Lannister because she wanted it, then she had betrayed their father, their mother, Robb, Bran, Rickon, Jon, and Arya. She had betrayed the North. Did she abandon their family for a lavish life at Casterly Rock? Arya was angry at her sister. She was so stupid, only wanting to live like a great lady and marry a handsome prince or a handsome lord. Their whole family was killed, and she lived with the Lannisters, enjoying it. What did she have in her head?

Sansa was her sister. Arya didn’t understand. Surely there was some lies in what she just heard. Sansa couldn’t turn on her family so easily. Someone manipulated her. Someone turned her against her own kin if Littlefinger told the truth. Arya had to help her. She was her sister. She was the only family she had with Jon now. Arya paced wildly in her rooms for hours, thinking about ways to save her sister from the Lannisters. She couldn’t abandon her. And she would get her revenge on the Lannisters for everything they did against her family. Arya Stark’s list had changed before she fell asleep this night.


Chapter End Notes

OK everyone. I'm really sorry that I killed the Hound. When I wrote this chapter, the episode of Season 6 where we discovered he survived his duel with Brienne hadn't been released. And this is Game of Thrones. There are good people who die, and this is very possible that Lysa Arryn would have him executed if he came to the Eyrie.

Also, I would like everyone to remember that Littlefinger is very good at manipulating people, and he lies very often. Don't take everything he told Arya for the truth. You may have seen there were at least a few lies in what he said.

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
Sansa XVIII

Chapter Notes

It's not my best chapter so far, but the five next updates will take place outside Casterly Rock. The story is expanding and there is action not only in the Westerlands, but also in Dorne, in the Vale, in King's Landing and in the North. Enjoy this chapter because there will be a few ones without Tyrion and Sansa afterwards. See how Sansa fares at Casterly Rock.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

SANSA XVIII

Sansa’s fingers twanged the wrong string. They had begun so well this time. She thought they could finally get through the music without her doing a single mistake. She released her hands from the golden harp before her, and sat back deep in her seat.

“Don’t worry, Sansa. It will come back with time. Everyone does wrong notes from time to time.” Cerenna was trying to make her believe none of this mattered as always, but Sansa wished she could get back the talent she had before she left Winterfell.

“I was better at playing the high harp than everyone else in the North three years ago. Now I can’t play two minutes without making at least three false notes.”

“That was last month. Now you can play for five minutes without making a single false note.”

“And I always make one at the fifth minute,” Sansa replied.

Cerenna smiled with some exasperated appearance at her. “Let’s stop for a moment. We’ve been playing for more than an hour now.”

Sansa wouldn’t argue against this. She needed to rest her fingers. More than a month ago, while they walked together in the godswood, Sansa and Cerenna had discovered they both loved music, so they started to play the high harp together. Sansa had learned to play the harp and the bells when she was at Winterfell. Septa Mordane taught her. However, she stopped after her father died, first because she no longer had a harp to practice afterwards, second because she had no taste for music anymore. But now, she felt free to start again. However, more than two years without practicing weren’t without consequence on the quality of her play. She would need time before she could get back to the level she reached at Winterfell.

The harp before her was all made of gold except for the strings. Everything was made of gold here it seemed. Even the clothes had gold on them. That was strange but Sansa had the impression to reconnect with her childhood dreams. Casterly Rock was so much the sort of place she dreamed to live in when she was a little girl. The girl she had been would have thought the king should have lived here instead of King’s Landing. The place was beautiful, a splendor for everyone who looked at it, an embodiment of the wealth and power of House Lannister. The castle was so huge that Sansa didn’t have the time yet to visit it all, two months after she arrived. But Sansa knew better than to fall
back into her dreams of little girl. Her dreams blinded her about Joffrey and King’s Landing, then about Loras Tyrell. She wasn’t about to do the same mistake with Casterly Rock and Tyrion.

All the same, Sansa loved her new home, and she loved or at least appreciated the other people living at the Rock. Sansa managed to be accepted by almost everyone here. All the household accepted her as their lady after some initial reluctance from some people. Sansa had to admit she owed a lot to Genna for that. It became very obvious to Sansa that Genna was the real womanly power in Casterly Rock before she arrived. Everyone obeyed her and no one dared to question her authority. Tyrion’s aunt was introducing Sansa to all her duties as Lady of Casterly Rock. Some of her tasks were the same Sansa saw her mother perform as Lady of Winterfell. She had to greet guests, organize special events like feasts and celebrations, and run the castle and its household. The running of Casterly Rock proved to be quite a challenge. The castle was much larger than Winterfell and, in fact, Sansa was never really interested in the management of a castle. As a little girl, she assumed everything would be perfect and she would live without any trouble to face once she would be queen or a lady. The reality was far from it. The management of Casterly Rock implicated hundreds of servants, stewards, cooks, handmaidens, guards, squires, stableboys, singers, dressmakers, and many other workers who maintained the castle. She also had to act as some sort of superior lady for all the other ladies of House Lannister who would ask for her advice on many little details. All matters concerning family affairs were to be brought to her.

Sansa regretted more than ever she didn’t take care better to learn sums and figures in her childhood. Luckily, her lessons with Creylen proved to be very helpful to manage the household. As Lady of the Westerlands, she also took part in the politics. Tyrion was asking for her advice on many matters and kept her informed on everything that happened. She already held court a few times with him in the Great Hall. Her responsibilities increased every week. She realized after a time that Genna was switching duties she assumed herself to Sansa progressively. Genna was demanding with her, but Sansa came to see she learned more quickly this way. Tyrion’s aunt was really a great help. She was making sure Sansa would learn to run Casterly Rock and to handle the family matters, and Sansa succeeded quite well up to now.

Things had improved very much for her relationships with the other Lannisters. Cerenna quickly became a close friend. She was only a year older than Sansa. They would often sew, sing and play music during Sansa’s leisure time. The daughter of Stafford Lannister didn’t seem to have any resentment toward her. Perhaps Cerenna felt a little guilty about Myrielle’s behavior toward Sansa. Still after two months, the youngest daughter of Ser Stafford still did everything to avoid her and showed her hate toward her each time they saw each other, though silently now. All the same, Sansa and Cerenna had many tastes in common and Sansa liked it to have a friend here. However, she didn’t start to make confidence to her yet, a remnant of her mistrust towards the Lannisters. Tyrion was still the only Lannister Sansa could confide in about serious matters.

The other Lannister Sansa was very close to was Joy. After Sansa defended her before Myrielle, the little girl wanted to spend time with her. Sansa would invite her sometimes when she would spend time with Cerenna, or she would be with her and Tyrion for dinner. Tyrion seemed to like the daughter of his favorite uncle more than any other of his cousins, and Joy liked Tyrion too. Apparently, when Tyrion was staying at Casterly Rock, she would sometimes sit beside him while he read and she would try to read another book. Next time they would read at the same time, she would be reading the book she saw Tyrion read previously. She was a lone child, and she seemed happy to only spend time with other people, even if she remained silent doing nothing many times. She even started to follow Sansa when she would pray in the Stone Garden, and after a few times Sansa initiated her to the faith in the Old Gods. There were now two people praying together in the godswood each day.

Sansa would also pray in the sept of Casterly Rock sometimes. The sept was more richly decorated.
than the Great Sept of Baelor, though smaller. That would be the times when Sansa would meet Dorna the most. Ser Kevan’s wife was very kind with her, always wondering if everything was alright with Sansa and if she felt at home here in the Rock. Sansa noticed Dorna prayed very often. Tyrion once told her his aunt would pray seven times each day. Janei was with her most of the time, and sadly it made the prayers much more difficult to perform when Sansa was around. Janei was still very interested by Sansa’s hair, and would seize every occasion to play with them. Sansa took the habit to come with Cerenna to pray in order to have someone else separating her from Janei’s little hands.

Sansa had managed to get along with almost every Lannister. The men showed her the respect they owed to their lady, including the Frey sons of Genna. They were the only ones born from a Lannister who didn’t have the green eyes and the blond hair of the family. Despite their appropriate behavior, Sansa wasn’t very prone to reach the Freys because of the Red Wedding, and they didn’t look very prone to look for her. One of Genna’s sons died fighting against Robb after all. For the ladies however, Sansa only had problems with Myrielle now. All the others seemed to appreciate her. Darlessa and Shiera came from other families and proved to be quite interested in Sansa’s family, just like Sansa was interested in their own. She enjoyed talking of the Reach with Margot, though the young woman left the castle two weeks ago and went back to Starpike with her husband. As for Lanna, Sansa seemed to prove concerned and sorry enough about her husband’s sorry state. Lady Jast really appreciated her now.

Sansa had developed ways to gain the trust and even the friendship of many of the other ladies. She started to invite them in turn to eat with her at the middle of the day. At the beginning, she mostly invited Cerenna or Joy, sometimes both. However, Cerenna came with Myrielle one day. They had a proper discussion as they ate, though not a very joyful one because of Myrielle’s bitterness towards Sansa, but Cerenna managed to make the bridge between them two. After that, Sansa had the idea to always eat with at least one other lady. Her father used to always have someone different sitting beside him each dinner and to talk with this person while they ate. Now she could see through her own experience why he did this. It helped him to keep the trust and respect the people of Winterfell had for him, and also to stay aware of everything going on and to know his people better. Sansa got all these advantages through her meals. She also used to pray in the sept with other people than Dorna, Janei and Cerenna, inviting the other ladies to pray with her. It enhanced her relationships with the other Lannister ladies very much.

She never invited everyone for dinner however. This time of the day was for her and Tyrion alone. Sometimes they would have Joy with them, and Sansa took some pleasure in seeing sparks of jealousy in the other women’s eyes when they saw how she and Tyrion gave Joy some preferential treatment over other highborn ladies. The only one allowed to share their dinner was a bastard girl. For Sansa, it was some way to amend for the wrong way she treated her own half-brother Jon. Two months after she sent the raven to Castleblack, they were still without news. Sansa feared her last brother could be dead. That was unfair, just at the moment she tried to renew contact with him.

Joy was the only one who sometimes shared Sansa’s dinner with Tyrion. All the other times, they were alone at this moment and would talk about various things. Conversations could go from jokes to politics. Often, serious matters were treated in half-serious half-laughing ways. Sometimes Tyrion would leave shortly after dinner for other duties, and sometimes Sansa used these moments to pray in the Stone Garden, or she would simply read some book Tyrion recommended to her, or go to sleep immediately if she was very tired. But Tyrion would always join her in their bed at some moment, and they would always keep a physical contact during the night, even if it was only their hands brushing each other. Sometimes she wished they would do more…

The thought sent chills through her spine. Last week, she had awoken with her head resting on Tyrion, and he had done the same things he did the morning following their arrival at Casterly Rock.
He had kissed her on her temple and lower on her forehead, nearly on her nose. The same feelings Sansa had had her first morning in the castle returned, but they felt better because she expected them. She had wished in this moment that Tyrion continued. She was close to slide her hand under his nightshirt, but Tyrion had relented just like the first time. Sansa didn’t know now if she wanted their marriage to go further. She didn’t even know for sure why she always let the door open when she took a bath. Did she do it only for Tyrion to understand she trusted him? Or did she want something else?

Her marriage with Tyrion confused her a lot. That wasn’t at all the kind of union she was expecting. The whole time she was in Winterfell and received lessons from her septa and her mother, she was always told to remain humble, devoted, and obedient towards her husband. She never questioned it. Her father and her mother were happy together this way, and the stories told exactly the same things. But her marriage with Tyrion was entirely different. He wasn’t asking much from her. The only thing he really obliged her to do was her lessons with Creylen. She ran Casterly Rock and its household, but anyway Sansa was expected to do so and Tyrion never really gave her an order about this. He asked for her advice on political matters when they held court together or sometimes during their daily dinner, but he didn’t really force her to do much.

In fact, Tyrion seemed to expect her to act as Lady of Casterly Rock more than to act as his wife. She had total freedom outside her duties as first Lady of House Lannister. Tyrion didn’t ask her anything as his wife. Perhaps that was what troubled Sansa the most. Her marriage was totally different from what she imagined as a little girl, or even the conception of a marriage she received from her parents. It was as if Tyrion was waiting for her to take decisions about them when he should be the one taking these decisions. Sansa didn’t feel like she should take decisions for them both. It wasn’t supposed to be like that. Everything was alright between her and her husband. Their relationship was very healthy and good, but she had the impression there could be so much more between them, yet she couldn’t resolve herself to take the first step. That would be so easy if Tyrion only asked her. She wouldn’t complain if he asked her something, no matter what it was. She knew he would never hurt her. But he didn’t ask anything from her as his wife. He only asked things from her as Lady of the Westerlands.

Cerenna and Sansa resumed their play for another half-hour, then they left the gardens. They played in the gardens when the weather allowed it, and when not they would play in a room specially designed for playing music. It wasn’t called a music room for nothing. They went separate ways, Cerenna heading to the quarters of her family to dine with her sister and their mother, Myranda Lefford, while Sansa headed to the godswood. She wanted to pray in the Stone Garden before she went to dine with Tyrion. The weirwood tree was a twisted one, but Sansa could still feel the presence of the Old Gods all the same when she prayed there. She found Joy before the tree, praying. Joy prayed often since Sansa taught her how to worship the Old Gods. The faith in the Old Gods allowed a more personal relationship with gods in comparison to the Seven. There were no rituals. You only had to speak to the gods in your heart and they would listen to you. Joy was alone most of the time, so Sansa guessed she found more comfort in this faith than in the Seven. She could speak to the Old Gods as if they were people she knew, and without the presence of anyone else since she was about the only one in Casterly Rock, except Sansa, to follow them.

Sansa silently knelt before the false weirwood tree and started her prayer. She prayed for her dead family. She prayed for her friends Margaery and Mira in King’s Landing. She prayed for the people she had come to know here in Casterly Rock, including Genna, Dorna, Janei, Joy, Lanna, her husband Lord Jast, Cerenna, her brother Daven, Darlessa, and even Myrielle. She also prayed for Ser Kevan still in the capital. He had been kind with her in general, and she had to be grateful to him considering the loss of his three sons. She prayed for the surviving members of her family who were possibly still alive. Her granduncle Brynden at Riverrun. Her sister Arya who Tyrion thought might still be alive. Her brother Jon at the Wall. She prayed a very long time for him, hoping he was still
alive. She didn’t pray for her aunt Lysa. She didn’t prove to be family, and was now married to Littlefinger. Tyrion was more family to Sansa than Lady Arryn. She prayed for him lastly. She also prayed for a short winter, an end to the war, and for the gods to give her the force to fulfill her duties here at Casterly Rock and to give Winterfell back to her family one day.

Sansa opened the eyes when she was done. Joy was still praying next to her. Sansa wondered if the little girl noticed her presence. She was so quiet. Sansa stayed there, looking at Joy who continued to pray for a very long time. Sansa never saw someone pray so fervently the Old Gods. When Joy finally opened her eyes, evening was about to replace afternoon. Joy looked surprised to see her, but her stunned look was quickly replaced by a large smile.

“Sansa! I’m glad to see you!” Joy rose quickly to hug her. It was in these moments that her name took all its sense. She was always happy to see Tyrion or Sansa. Despite the fact Sansa was only three years older than Joy, she had come to see Sansa as some sort of motherly figure. Perhaps it was because Joy saw Tyrion as some sort of uncle since he was twenty years older than her, and Sansa was Tyrion’s wife. Joy never knew her mother. She never had one.

“I’m glad to see you too, Joy. What were you praying for today?” Sansa pulled herself out of Joy’s embrace.

“Well, I prayed for snow to come quickly.” Joy wanted so much to see snow since Sansa described it to her. “I prayed for everyone here. I prayed for my cousin Daven, for you and for Uncle Tyrion.”

Sansa smiled at this. “Thank you, Joy. I appreciate it a lot.”

Joy looked a bit sad at this moment. “I also prayed for my father. And your sister Arya. And your brother Jon. I hope they’re all alive somewhere.”

That nearly brought tears to Sansa. Joy was sweet like Sansa used to be before she came to King’s Landing. She was probably the only one among the Lannisters who really worried about Sansa’s family except Tyrion. Sansa didn’t blame them, after all they didn’t share any close link with Arya and Jon, and until recently they were still at war with the Starks. However, Joy seemed to have taken a real interest in Sansa’s brothers and sister. Sansa had confided a little bit about Arya and Jon, and even about Bran and Rickon to Joy. Joy was very interested in meeting Jon (he was a bastard just like her), Arya (she was approximately the same age than Sansa’s little sister) and to visit the North and Winterfell one day. Without revealing too much or talking against the injustice the Lannisters committed towards her family, Sansa talked to Joy about her entire family except her father and Robb. And now Joy was praying for people she never met. The fact Joy was a Hill instead of a Lannister made things easier for Sansa to tell her how she missed her own family, just like Joy confided how much she missed her father.

Sansa lightly shivered. A little cold breeze blew. “We should get back inside before we catch a cold.”

Joy followed her. “Sansa, can I dine with you and Uncle Tyrion tonight?”

Sansa sighed and smiled at Joy in regret. “I’m sorry, Joy. We have some important matters to discuss this evening. I’ll bring you with me tomorrow. I promise.”

Joy seemed saddened at the news, but she resigned and didn’t complain. Sansa rarely heard her complain about anything. She brought the girl to her chamber, then went to her own rooms she shared with Tyrion. The dinner was already spread on the table and included boar, many vegetables and wine from the Arbor. Sansa looked at the size of the jug. The servants obeyed her orders and made sure there wasn’t enough wine in it to get drunk.
“That’s a change.” The voice came from the solar. Tyrion walked out of it and came to her. “Normally you’re the one to wait for me when dinner comes.”

Tyrion said it playfully and with a small grin on his face. He wasn’t serious. Sansa decided to play. “I thought it was only fair that you wait for one time instead.”

They both chuckled as they took place and started to eat. Tyrion talked to her about the progression in the construction of the fleet to fight the Iron Islands. Just like Tyrion, Sansa hoped the Iron Throne would defeat Stannis Baratheon quickly so they could deal with the Ironmen. They destroyed Winterfell and burnt her two little brothers. Sansa wanted them to pay for that. She wished she could use the same methods she used against Cersei. Sadly, only swords, arrows and ships would force the Iron Islands on their knees, not words. Sansa could only hope like Tyrion that the Redwyne fleet would come back quickly from Dragonstone to attack the Iron Islands with Tyrion’s ships.

Strange news had arrived from King’s Landing last week. Dragonstone was under siege, but strangely the Redwynes didn’t meet great resistance. The five thousand men Stannis was still supposed to command with their ships had mostly vanished and only a little garrison was left to defend the island and its fortress. According to some inhabitants they questioned, Stannis’s fleet left a few days before the Redwynes arrived, sailing north. Sansa wondered why Stannis Baratheon abandoned Dragonstone to head north. Tyrion hypothesized Stannis might try to take White Harbor, or even convince the Manderlys to side with him and to start a war against the Boltons. He could try to bring the North against the people who killed their king and use their will of revenge, but Tyrion doubted many northern houses would follow Stannis. Most of them still had a family member held in hostage by the Freys or the Boltons, and Stannis didn’t and couldn’t offer them very much for their support. Tyrion didn’t expect Stannis to last more than a few days if the Manderlys shut their harbor before his fleet, and no more than a few months if they opened it against all odds.

“Did we receive any raven today?” Sansa asked as they started with the dessert. She asked hopefully, though she knew what would be the answer. Tyrion’s face quickly gave away the answer.

“No, Sansa. We still have no news from the Wall.” Sansa closed her eyes, desperate. “We’ll know the moment we receive the raven. I told Creylen to warn me immediately when a raven would arrive from Castleblack.” Tyrion tried to reassure her.

“It’s been two months now. He should have answered.”

“Your brother may be on an expedition beyond the Wall right now. These can last several months. It could explain the time he needs to answer your message.”

“Do you really think it’s good news if he’s north of the Wall with a wildling army marching against it?”

Tyrion needed some time before he answered. Sansa had asked that defiantly. “I would be very surprised if your brother was dead. He was a better swordsman than your brother Robb, and your uncle Benjen was First Ranger. Rangers know how to survive in very difficult conditions. Even if the Wall falls, I’m quite sure he survived. And anyway I don’t think the Wall fell, we would have received some news about it. Perhaps the Night’s Watch simply decided to answer no longer to ravens from the south since we never answered their pleas for help for the last years.”

Tyrion meant the last proposition more as a joke and that brought a little smile on her lips, though she still worried about Jon. She was grateful that Tyrion tried to reassure her, but she would only be reassured when her half-brother would answer and she would know he still lived for sure.

“Tyrion, when you went to the Wall with Jon, did he ever talk about me?” Sansa wondered if Jon...
was thinking about her right now, but since she had no way to know it, she could only try to know if he thought about her while on his way north.

Tyrion took a sip of wine before he answered, his mouth twisting. “Not much, I must admit. But we didn’t talk a lot on our way. Your brother was quite unfriendly towards me at first. I called him bastard and told him the truth about the Wall, trying to prepare him for what was waiting for him there. He started to call me dwarf after some time.” Tyrion smiled shortly. “I think he was thankful afterwards when he saw what the Wall really was. Imagine how he felt when he discovered the Night’s Watch was a bunch of thieves, rapists and killers and the only one who warned him about this was a dwarf, and even worse a Lannister. He became more opened after that, especially after he received the news your brother Bran had woken up. He talked a little about you and all his brothers and sisters.”

Sansa nodded. “I never really treated him like my brother. I was such an ass to him. I saw him only as a bastard, just like my mother did.” Sansa felt remorseful, thinking of how she never considered Jon like her brother. They had the same father, and yet because her mother saw him like someone who should never have existed, Sansa acted towards Jon as if he was inferior to her. “I would like to go back in the past and change everything.”

Tyrion nodded in approval. “Yes, I know what you mean. There are many things that I’ve done I would like to change me too.” They remained silent for a moment, lost in their thoughts. “If you could change something you did, what would you change first?”

Sansa thought about it a moment. There were so many things she would like to change in the past. She knew what she would change. “I would tell the truth about how Joffrey attacked Arya on the Kingsroad.” Lady would still be alive if she had told the truth back then, instead of believing blindly Joffrey was perfect and lying to protect him. “What would you change?”

Tyrion’s gaze fell to the ground. “I wouldn’t rape my wife.”

Sansa regretted she asked this. She remembered how Tyrion was when he told her the story of Tysha. It was the only time she saw him crying. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have asked.”

“Don’t be sorry. I’m the one who did it.” Tyrion’s voice was full of grief and he didn’t look at her.

“You’re not responsible. Your father forced you to do it.”

Tyrion scoffed. “Not responsible? My father gave the order, but I’m the one who did it all the same. Gregor Clegane is not innocent of the murder of the Targaryen children because my father ordered him to kill them. This is the same for my first wife. I had the choice to disobey, and I didn’t.” He paused for a moment. “You remember when my father ordered me to rape you? Would you say I wasn’t responsible if I did obey his command?”

Sansa had no answer for this. Tyrion looked at her with a painful expression, then averted his eyes on the floor. None of them said anything after that. Sansa wished she could say something to comfort her husband, but nothing came to her mind. When the servants came to take back the empty plates, Tyrion left for the solar, closing the door behind him. He hadn’t looked at her a single time during the rest of the dinner.

Sansa changed for a red nightgown and went to sleep. As she slid under the blankets, she felt Tyrion’s absence. Most of the time, they both went to bed approximately at the same time, but she felt Tyrion would only join her much later, if he ever joined her this night. Tyrion was always able to make her feel better, to give her hope or a reason to live when she was desperate or felt everything collapsed around her. He was always there for her. But Sansa couldn’t tell the same of her. She had
never been able to comfort him in any way in these situations. What a wife she was! She wasn’t even able to say if she loved him or not. Sansa needed a long time before she fell asleep, and when she slept, she had nightmares. She fell asleep without Tyrion, and she woke up next morning without him.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Arya
Arya opened her eyes, awakened by the snores of the old woman lying next to her. Arya hated it. She was forced to sleep with this old boring handmaiden all nights for more than a month now. She would gladly start again to sleep in the same bed than Sansa, but right now Sansa was in Casterly Rock sharing her bed with… Arya preferred to not think about it.

Arya got up from her featherbed. She hated this bed too. She was used to sleep on the ground among rocks, earth, dust, exposed to wind and rain, only a thin blanket separating her from the hard ground when she had one. She didn’t like to sleep in a featherbed again with a nightgown. And to sleep with this old dried maid didn’t make things any better. This old woman was officially her handmaiden, but Arya knew she was there to watch her. She was more spy than servant.

After she was taken out of the sky cells, her aunt gave her an audience in her bedchamber. Lady Lysa Arryn looked at Arya as if she was an enemy, barely acknowledging her as her niece. She told Arya she kept her alive out of mercy because she was her blood according to Littlefinger and it was only because he convinced her to spare Arya that she was still at the Eyrie. Her aunt wouldn’t tolerate any other threat against her son and Arya had to behave like a lady if she didn’t want to be handed to the Lannisters. Her aunt wouldn’t accept any mistake from her.

It became very apparent through the days that Littlefinger was the one ruling the Eyrie. Her aunt always called him Petyr, and the few times Arya saw them together, she always looked at him the same way Sansa used to look at Joffrey, but worse. This disgusted Arya. This man betrayed her father, and her aunt loved him and followed all his advices. The guards in the Eyrie were all in Littlefinger’s pocket, just like most of the servants. Her cousin Robert Arryn always jumped to hug him whenever he saw his step-father. Littlefinger and her aunt made sure Arya was watched day and night. Most of the time, she travelled through the Eyrie with her old maid, and there was always at least one guard to watch her from afar. The one Arya hated the most was Ser Lyn Corbray. He reminded her so much of Meryn Trant that Arya was about to add him on her list. She saw him beating a young servant once.

The Eyrie was a boring place where Arya couldn’t do much. Furthermore, Littlefinger made people believe she was his niece, Alayne Baelish. Except the guards in the High Hall when she arrived and the guards at the Bloody Gate, no one knew who she really was except her aunt, her cousin and Littlefinger. All these people were sworn to keep the secret of her true identity. That wasn’t the first time Arya had to take another identity, but she hated to be seen as Littlefinger’s niece. However, she had no choice for now. The Lannisters couldn’t know she was there. She was a prisoner, but if she had to choose between being prisoner of the Lannisters or Littlefinger, she didn’t think one would be better than the other. Anyway, she couldn’t escape this place. She tried to think about a way to get
out for several weeks and couldn’t find any. She would have to wait for an opportunity when they
would leave the Eyrie. In the meantime, she had to play her role as Alayne Baelish, a role she hated.

Arya had grown impatient. She couldn’t do anything here in the Eyrie. Littlefinger promised her he
would help her to kill the people on her list, but so far he did nothing. She was stuck in this
mountain, condemned to spend days doing nothing. Her cousin Robin Arryn was a little boy
pampered by his mother she rarely saw, and she had no interest in doing anything with this frail boy
who was called Lord of the Vale. She was disgusted by his habit to feed from his mother’s breast at
his age. Arya’s cousin was older than Rickon, but looked younger than him so frail he was. Arya
had to spend most of her days doing needlework, something she hated to do, even more with the old
maid. Instead she spent a lot of time reciting her list in her head. Cersei. Walder Frey. Roose Bolton.
Littlefinger. Lysa Arryn. The Imp. She would escape as soon as an opportunity presented itself.

Looking outside through the window, Arya realized snow was falling. It had been so long since she
saw snow. She put a cloak on her shoulders and went to the godswood. It wasn’t a real godswood
since there was no weirwood tree in it. The soil was too thin and too stony for weirwood to take root
here. Snow was covering it all now. Winter is coming. But right now, snowflakes were falling and
flying all around innocently. It remembered Arya of Winterfell. She had tried to make snowballs the
day they left, but it kept breaking apart all the time. Arya tried to make some now and succeeded.
She remembered a day when she and Bran ambushed Sansa and threw snowballs at her as she was
coming out in the courtyard. Sansa was covered by snow very quickly and ran after her through all
the castle until she slid on ice. Arya had come to see if Sansa was injured, but when she discovered
her sister was alright, she threw another snowball right in her face. Only Sansa got her revenge by
grabbing her leg and pulling her down, then by rubbing snow all over Arya’s hair. Arya wished she
could go back to this time and start again her funny quarrels with her sister.

Arya looked for targets where she could throw snowballs. She started to aim for firs, benches, then
to specific bars of grids and to stones on the walls. After a moment, she couldn’t miss a single target,
but after an hour of throwing snowballs, she grew bored of this. She noticed a branch on the ground
that looked quite straight. She could imagine it was Needle. She couldn’t get back her sword.
Littlefinger said her aunt would never allow her to carry a sword all around, but she suspected the
man didn’t want to have her with a sword either. He was probably afraid she would kill him. Arya
started to practice her water dancing. She was only holding a branch, so the guard watching her
wouldn’t have anything to say against it. Arya quickly got lost in her movements, repeating
everything Syrio taught her in King’s Landing. She made swift and fluid moves, imagining she was
fighting some opponent or another. She wished she had Needle and could kill Meryn Trant or Ilyn
Payne right now, or even the Imp. He wouldn’t be hard to kill. She couldn’t imagine this little man
being able to defend himself.

Arya didn’t know how much time she practiced the Water Dance. It was the first time in an eternity
she could practice it, even only with a branch, when she was interrupted by footsteps behind her. All
her instincts alert, she turned to face the intruder. It was her cousin, Robin Arryn, swaddled in many
furs and cloaks that made him look twice bigger than he was in reality, though he was still far too
much skinny with all this on his shoulders. Arya had put aside her cloak long ago. The gown she
was obliged to wear didn’t make sword practicing easy, but the cloak made it even worse, and she
moved enough for the heat her body released to replace the warmth of her cloak.

“What are you doing?” the boy asked with an odd face, as if he couldn’t understand why she moved
this way.

“I’m training,” Arya replied before she dedicated her mind again to her practice. She could feel the
presence of her cousin close to her, but paid no mind to him. She could make her moves for a few
minutes before he interrupted her.

“Why are you swinging a branch all around like this?”

Arya didn’t stop to move. “I imagine it’s a sword.”

“But this is no sword.”

“Not, it isn’t,” Arya confirmed with an exasperated voice. “That’s why I only imagine this is a sword.”

“But why are you swinging a branch imagining this is a sword?”

Arya stopped and looked directly in the eyes of her cousin. “To practice. To make sure that the next time someone tries to kill me, I can defend myself.”

“Why, there’s no reason to be afraid here. We’re safe and no one wants to hurt us.”

Arya nearly laughed at the stupidity of her cousin. “We’re never safe anywhere. There are always people who want to kill us, and if we’re not ready to fight in order to survive, then when they strike, they will kill us.”

The boy looked thoughtful for a moment. “The knights of the Vale will not let anybody kill me. They will protect me. I’m their lord. No one can hurt me.”

Arya sighed. “You’re really stupid. You think because you’re their lord they will protect you? My father was Hand of the King, and he was killed. My brother was King in the North, and he was killed by one of his own men who betrayed him. Joffrey was King, and he was poisoned inside his own castle while surrounded by his kingsguards. Do you really think you’re safer than them? You can’t rely on anyone, only yourself. When someone strikes at you, in the end, you’re the only one who can protect yourself. And that’s why I train, so when someone tries to kill me, instead I’m the one who kills him. And so one day I can kill the people who murdered my family.”

Arya’s cousin stood right before her, his jaw falling. She really found him stupid. He knew nothing of the real world. He remained hidden here while people were fighting and dying outside. He was a coward, just like his mother and his knights who did nothing to help her brother when he needed them the most. Arya resumed her practice, but after a few minutes she was stopped again.

“Do you think you could show me how you do it? My mother says I shouldn’t worry about learning how to fight, but she says I am strong. If I am strong, I should be able to defend myself. I shouldn’t have to rely on the knights of the Vale.”

Arya looked carefully at her cousin. There was a determination in his eyes, but it was essentially pride who talked in him. He believed he was strong. Well, Arya didn’t have much to do anyway, so she had nothing to lose by trying to teach him a few things. With some miracle, perhaps he would be less childish one day. Arya took another branch on the ground, gave it to the Lord of the Vale and started to teach him the rudiments of the Water Dancing. However, it proved to be quite a challenge. He held the branch like a toy and was unable to make the simplest movements Arya tried to teach him. She quickly lost her patience with him, and Robin Arryn lost it even more quickly. He finally dropped his imaginary sword in fury on the ground.

“This is useless. I can’t use it. It’s not even a real sword, and my mother says I shouldn’t use any or else I could hurt myself,” he nearly cried.

“Of course, you’ll get hurt by using a sword, but because of the others you’re fighting, not because
of yourself. And if you held the branch properly, you would learn the moves well enough. You don’t focus enough.”

“I’m the Lord of the Vale!” the boy screamed. “I don’t need to fight! It’s boring and dangerous according to my mother. She says my men will always be here to protect me.”

Arya stroked him suddenly with her own branch on the cheek, then on is arm, then his legs. The boy screamed in pain. Arya was angry at him. “If it had been a real sword, you would be dead right now. Did your knights protect you? You stayed at the top of a mountain all the time. You know nothing how the world really works. You’ll end up dead, killed by someone in your sleep, or poisoned while you eat, just like Joffrey. You’re stupid, and you’re a coward.”

“I’m not a coward,” he cried. Arya was disgusted by this boy. He was no better than Joffrey.

“Then prove it.” She took the branch he dropped on the ground and threw it at him. “Fight me. Prove you can defend yourself.”

Robin Arryn hadn’t caught the sword when Arya threw it in his direction, and he made no effort to take it. “I don’t need to fight. I’m the Lord of the Vale.”

Arya boiled in anger. She hit him with her branch, using the techniques Syrio taught her. She hit him everywhere. He only raised his arms to protect his face, letting Arya hit him wherever she wanted. After a moment, the boy was on the ground and Arya continued to hit him, trying to bring him to fight back, but he didn’t. At the end, she abandoned when she saw him with a few bruises and cuts, his clothes tattered by her several attacks.

“You’re a coward!” she shouted at him.

“No. No. Please don’t.” Her cousin looked back at her. All of a sudden, she wasn’t at the Eyrie anymore, but on the Kingsroad between Winterfell and King’s Landing, and instead of Robin Arryn it was Joffrey who laid on the ground, begging her to stop and to not kill him while a second before he played the proud prince who could do as he liked. The two boys had exactly the same expression. Arya threw her branch away, revolted before the cowardice of her cousin.

“What have you done?” A maester ran in their direction with two servants and came to look at the craven lord lying on the ground. Arya’s arm was seized from behind by an iron gauntlet. Arya turned to face its owner and found herself face to face with Ser Lyn Corbray.

“I think you’ll have a few things to explain to Lady Arryn.” Arya was about to try getting free of his grip, but before both could do anything, another voice interrupted them.

“Please stop, Ser Lyn.” Littlefinger came down from the stairs of the garden and went to them. “Let me handle this matter. She is my niece after all. I’ll make sure she is dealt with accordingly. Escort maester Colemon with the servants to a place where they can take care of Lord Robin.”

Lyn Corbray released her and left with the three other people carrying Robin in their arms. He shot a last hateful glance at Arya. She would have another name on her list tonight. When they were alone, Littlefinger laughed.

“That was quite entertaining. His mother should have done this a long time ago. I guess we can consider it a step in the right direction. With some hope he will remember what you taught him today.”

Arya looked at the man before her, putting as much hatred on her face and in her voice as she addressed him. “He’s a coward. He’s weak. And he thinks himself to be strong. He remained hidden
here while my family was being slaughtered. And you’re no better. You’re just like him. A coward.”

Littlefinger’s little smile didn’t leave his face. “So fierce. You remember me of your uncle Brandon. You’re right, the knights of the Vale remained out of this conflict when they should have done something, but essentially because your aunt gave them the order. Most of them wanted to go to war alongside your brother, and perhaps the outcome of the war would have been different if they did, but the person who’s responsible of all this is your aunt Lysa. Without her, the Vale would have sided with your brother without hesitation. You saw the results of her inaction at the Twins, and again now. Her son’s cowardice and childish ways are the result of the pampering she surrounded him with for all his life. She’s the one you should really hate right now. You can consider me as a friend, or an ally at least, but I don’t think you can consider your aunt this way.”

“I want to kill you as much as I want to kill her,” Arya replied hostilily.

“Of course, but for now you have every interest to keep me alive, or else Lysa will kill you. And I am the only person who could help in getting other names out of the list you recite every night.”

“How? I’ve been stuck here for weeks without anything to do. You’re not helping me. You’re holding me against my will.”

“Soon, you’ll have your chance to remove someone from your list. I promise.”

“I don’t believe you. You betrayed my father. Why wouldn’t you betray me too?”

“Because I have no interest to betray you. You are the last child of Cat who isn’t dead nor held by the Lannisters. And there are people on your list we both want to see dead. I suggest you go back to your room. I’ll have Ser Lyn watch your door.”

“I hate him. And he hates me. I don’t want him close to me.”

“Ser Lyn obeys my orders. He won’t do anything against you unless I give him the order. So don’t give me a reason to give him the order.”

Littlefinger went away with the same wicked smile he always had. Arya hated this man, but for now she had no choice but to remain with him, just like she had no choice but to remain with Yoren, Tywin Lannister, Beric Dondarrion and the Hound before him. Arya went back to her room. Again, she was stuck with the old maid. She tried again to think about a way to escape, but it was useless. The trail leading from the Eyrie to the Bloody Gate was dangerous and she would have four castles to go through before she reached the Bloody Gate where she would have to escape from the knights and guards keeping it. Then she would have to go through the Eastern Road with the hill tribes who could attack her everywhere at any time. And once in the Riverlands, what would she do? The fact she had no weapon didn’t make the escape easier. She couldn’t get away for now. She had to stay here and play the role of Alayne Baelish.

Arya went to her bed and rested her head on the pillow while the old woman sat to make needlework like she always did. She resumed the enumeration of the names in her head. Cersei. Walder Frey. Roose Bolton. Black Walder. Meryn Trant. The Red Woman. Beric Dondarrion. Thoros of Myr. Ilyn Payne. Littlefinger. Lysa Arryn. The Imp. Lyn Corbray. That was the only thing she could do. She already knew every detail of her room and wouldn’t gain anything from examining all of them again. She repeated the names again, again, and again, until someone unlocked her door. They were about the middle of the day. This person entered without asking and Arya was both angry and afraid to see Lyn Corbray stand on the threshold.

“Come.” He said nothing else.
“Where?”

“This is none of your concern.”

Arya had no choice but to follow, but not without shoving the knight while getting through the door. He couldn’t do anything to her because of the orders he received. Arya took pleasure in shoving him when they crossed paths. She remained on guard. She didn’t want Corbray to do anything against her. All her senses were wide-awake. They started to walk and very soon Arya had a good idea where they were heading. She explored the Eyrie during the last few weeks and managed to know the castle very well. It was smaller than Winterfell, so it wasn’t very difficult to know all the places on her fingertips. She could wander in its corridor in her own mind, and sadly it didn’t help her to find a way to escape. They arrived to the High Hall, the great doors wide opened. Arya noticed only her aunt was present. There were no guards. Only her, and now Arya and Lyn Corbray. Two people on her list were standing alone with her in the same room. Her aunt was looking at something on the floor, in the center of the room, and Arya noticed wind was making waves on her gown. There was an opening inside the circle of marble and Arya thought she saw something white. She realized what it was. The Moon Door. She heard about it once at Winterfell, and a few times here. People sentenced to death were thrown through it and made a fall of hundreds feet, making sure they would die once they hit the ground.

“Thank you, Ser Lyn. You may leave.” The knight left and closed the doors behind him. Arya was now alone with her aunt. “Come here, Arya.”

Arya approached carefully, still expecting anything. She didn’t trust her aunt. She told Arya she would send her to the Lannisters if she threatened her son again. Arya just gave him a few bruises. Who knew how her aunt would react? She remained a step behind Lysa Arryn.

“Do you know how far the fall is?” she asked Arya.

“No,” Arya simply answered. She didn’t know the exact height of the fall, though she knew it was several hundreds of feet.

“Neither do I, precisely. Hundreds of feet.” That was nothing new for Arya. “It’s fascinating what happens to bodies when they hit the rocks from such a height. The impact breaks them right apart. Like eggs dropped on the floor. Sometimes pieces remain intact. You’ll find the head sitting on its own. Every hair in place. Grey eyes staring at nothing.” Her aunt turned to face her, hatred plain on her face. “I know what you did.”

Arya returned her gaze. “Robin wanted me to teach him how to fight. I just showed him.”

“Liar! My Sweetrobin would never ask this. You beat him. I forbade him to fight.”

“You allow him to be a coward, you mean,” countered Arya defiantly.

“I forbid you to call him a coward.”

“He’s a coward! He’s a weak boy without brain! And you’re a coward without brain just like him!”

“I defend you to talk to your aunt like this.”

“You’re not my aunt,” Arya said calmly, but filling her voice with as much hatred and disdain she could for this woman who claimed to be her aunt. “A real aunt would never order her niece to be executed. She wouldn’t abandon her sister. You’re no better than Littlefinger, or Cersei who plotted to arrest my father. Robin Arryn is no better than Joffrey who beheaded my father. He’s a weak and little monster.”
Arya saw the slap coming and ducked right before her aunt could hit her. She hit her aunt in the tummy with her right foot. Lysa Arryn stumbled behind and fell through the Moon Door. In the last moment, she could grab the edge with a single hand. Arya approached to look at her. Terror was obvious on her face, her free arm waving through the air, trying to grip something with it.

“Help me! Help me!” she screamed. She looked at Arya. “Arya! My niece! Save me! I’m your aunt!”

Arya looked at Lysa Arryn, Lady of the Vale, without a single hint of pity. “Did you help my family when they asked for your help? You wanted to throw me through it. Why should I help you? You’re on my list, you did nothing for me or my family. You betrayed my father, you betrayed my mother, you betrayed my brother, and you have nothing to give me.”

Arya crushed Lysa’s fingers with her foot and what had been her mother’s sister fell, screaming. Arya looked at her falling from hundreds of feet of altitude until she lost sight of her. She remained there for a long moment, staring through the opening. She then looked around. No one was here. No one except Lyn Corbray on the other side of the door. He may have heard something. Arya went to the doors and knocked on it. She hid behind a wall out of sight for anyone who entered. The doors opened and she heard footsteps.

“Lady Arryn? You asked for me?” No doubt about the voice, it was Lyn Corbray. The knight passed before Arya, his eyes in the other direction, and right at this moment Arya jumped on him and stabbed him on his right side where his armor didn’t protect him. She had taken his knife when she shoved him before and hidden it in her gown. Then she stabbed him again on the left side while he exhaled a cry of pain, then in his neck. The knight fell on the floor, blood spurting from his throat. He was dead. Two names were erased from her list.

“Seize her! Lock her in her room.” Men flooded through the doors and took her by the arms and the legs. Arya lost the knife she had in her hands. As she was brought outside, she saw Littlefinger with a cruel smile on his lips. She struggled to free herself, without success. She wanted to kill him. However, she wasn’t knocked out like when the Hound was killed and they only brought her back to her room, not to the sky cells. No one came to see her after they dropped her in her room and locked it. She was left alone for the rest of the day.

This night, Arya recited her list again. Cersei. Walder Frey. Roose Bolton. Black Walder. Meryn Trant. The Red Woman. Beric Dondarrion. Thoros of Myr. Ilyn Payne. Littlefinger. The Imp. She just killed her aunt. Well, in fact she wasn’t her aunt. She married a man who betrayed Arya’s family. She abandoned her mother and her brothers. She was a traitor as much as Baelish was. Arya didn’t feel any remorse about it. As for Lyn Corbray, he deserved his death without any doubt him too. She felt he would have done something against her one day, no matter Littlefinger’s orders. When Arya fell asleep, she dreamed she was a huge wolf running with her pack behind her, chasing stags, lions, eagles, birds and men.

On the morning, the old maid brought her breakfast. Arya tried to ask her what would happen to her, but the old woman looked deaf to her words. Arya had no more success when she came back to take the untouched plates. Arya wouldn’t eat what was given to her. It could be poisoned. She wasn’t stupid like Joffrey. The midday meal and the dinner brought exactly the same things with her failed attempts to know what would happen and the food she refused to eat. She could live very long time without much food. Her time in the Riverlands made her used to food scarcity.

On the second morning, the old maid brought food again, but this time she took a mouthful of each plate and drank some of the water destined to Arya. She decided she could eat it finally, but she still had no answer to her questions. This went on for this day and the following one. Then, on the fourth
day of her incarceration, Littlefinger came not long after the breakfast.

“This time you weren’t thrown in the sky cells,” he said as he entered. He looked as if it was meant to be funny, but if that was the case he failed miserably.

“What do you want?” Arya asked. She had no intention to play riddles to discover what this man wanted.

“I want to thank you first.” Nothing could have surprised Arya more.

“What?”

“You helped me a lot. You got rid of Lysa for me, which makes me the Regent of the Vale until your cousin comes of age. You also killed a man devoted to me in the process, but this is a small price to pay for what Lysa’s death brings to me.” Arya couldn’t believe what she just heard. The man was smiling at her, with joy but not in thankfulness. “I told you there were people on your list we both wanted to see dead.”

Arya understood. “You used me! You wanted me to kill aunt Lysa.”

“I did. And I gave you the chance to kill two people you wanted to see dead at the same time. I wasn’t sure you would kill Ser Lyn, but I sent him first inside and alone just in case. He started to be quite hard to please. He cost me a lot in gold and boys. I got rid of an ally who was becoming quite bothersome.”

Arya stared at the man. “And now?”

She saw concern on his face suddenly. “I had to send the news about Lysa’s death to all the Lords of the Vale.”

“And you blamed me, of course,” Arya retorted.

Littlefinger looked falsely offended. “Do you really think I would blame my niece? No. You are Cat’s daughter. I told them Ser Lyn pushed Lysa through the Moon Door and that we arrived too late. We tried to arrest him and he resisted, so we had no choice but to kill him. The guards who witnessed it are with me. I pay them very well. Some Lords of the Vale may have doubts about this story, for sure, but I’ll handle them. Once I have them in my hand, we’ll leave the Eyrie. And you’ll be able to cross off other names. In the meantime, you’ll stay here. I don’t want other accidents to happen before we leave.”

Littlefinger left. Arya couldn’t be sure of anything. She killed people she wanted dead, but she was used by the man who betrayed her father. He wanted her to kill Lysa Arryn. That made Arya angry. She couldn’t trust this man. He was even worse than the Brotherhood and the Hound. At least with them she knew what they wanted, but she had no idea what Littlefinger wanted. She had to get away from him as soon as possible. For now, she could only hope they would leave this damn castle very soon.

Days went on and Arya received no visit. She thought she might die of boredom if it continued that way. If only she was Sansa, she could sew to spend time, but she wasn’t Sansa and she couldn’t remain confined in the same room for days without leaving. She was only disturbed by the maid bringing her meals, emptying her chamberpot and bringing her clean clothes each day. She gave up to learn anything from her very quickly. Arya had been a prisoner several times before, but she always had something to do and at least she could spend a part of her days outside, while now she was confined between the same four walls all time.
Arya’s thoughts turned to her brother Jon. He was at the Wall. If she could escape, she might be able to catch a ship at Gulltown that would bring her to Eastwatch-by-the-Sea, and from there she could go to Castleblack. She wanted to see Jon again. He was her last brother. Surely he thought she was dead now. How happy he would be when he would see her again. And Arya would be happy too. There was surely a smithy at Castleblack. Jon could have a new sword made for her, one like Needle. She could fight alongside him against the wildlings. They could practice together. She could show him how good she became with a sword and with a bow. But for now, these were only dreams. She had to escape first, and before she escaped, they had to leave the Eyrie, no matter the way.

Arya was never good to dream of a perfect life. She didn’t feel it was like her. Her sister was always the one for that. The thought of Sansa at Casterly Rock filled her with rage again. Rage against Joffrey, against Cersei, against the Imp, and against Baelish. Without his betrayal, Sansa wouldn’t be the Lady of House Lannister right now. Arya had come to the conclusion that Sansa may have decided to stay with the Lannisters and to enjoy being with them because she believed all her family was dead. Arya was believed dead by almost everyone. Sansa probably believed only Jon was alive, and Sansa barely saw Jon as a brother, so she gave herself to the Lannisters. She had no pack left, just like Arya, so she was trying to make the Lannisters her new pack, just like Arya had tried to make her a new pack too. She had to get her sister out of this castle. If Sansa knew she was still alive, she might realize her mistake and Arya could bring her back with her to Jon. Only, Casterly Rock was far away, and Arya didn’t see how she could enter Casterly Rock, then escape with her sister and travel all the way to the Wall without being noticed. Sansa wasn’t used to hard life like her, and she would be recognized everywhere. The best course of action was surely to go to the Wall first, then to see with Jon what they could do to help their sister. But Arya wouldn’t abandon Sansa. She was a stupid sister, but her sister nonetheless.

Two weeks after Littlefinger’s visit, two men entered in her room early in the morning. They didn’t bear the eagle of House Arryn as a sigil. Theirs was black points on a bronze field, bordered by runes. They also bore another sigil on their breastplate. Arya thought she saw this sigil once, but she couldn’t remember where. One of them addressed her.

”My lady, I am Ser Alex Coldwater of Coldwater Burn and this is Ser Oris Tollett of Grey Glen. The Lords of the Vale would like to ask you a few questions. Would you please follow us?”

The Lords of the Vale? What was going on? “The Lords of the Vale are here? Why?”

The two knights exchanged a look, then Coldwater looked back at her. “The Lords of the Vale have come to discover the truth about Lady Arryn’s death. They have come to the knowledge that you were there when she died. They would like to know what happened, Lady Baelish.”

Arya had to remember herself who she was in everyone’s eyes before she could shout she was no lady and not a niece of Petyr Baelish. If the lords discovered the truth, they would surely kill her. She killed their lady. They would kill her just like the Lannisters would have killed her if she had assassinated Tywin Lannister. Arya followed them. She had no choice. What did Littlefinger tell them? The truth, for sure.

They travelled through the Eyrie. Arya noticed there were many more guards than usually, and many didn’t have the sigil of House Arryn. It also meant that now most of the guards weren’t under the orders of Littlefinger. They reached a small antechamber with two guards bearing the sigil of a broken black wheel on a green field. One of the guards opened the door. On the other side, three people sat their back turned on her, Littlefinger facing them in a similar position. Arya walked into the room and the door closed behind her. The three people had to be the Lords of the Vale. She walked to the center of the room. She noticed Littlefinger was looking afraid. He didn’t look at her.
Arya found his behavior quite strange. She shot him a look of hatred all the same.

“Come closer, child. You have nothing to fear from us, or him.” Arya turned to look at the three people before her. The woman who talked to her sat between two men. She was very old with short and frizzy grey hair. She reminded Arya of Old Nan. She had the impression to have seen the man sitting next to her on the same bench somewhere, or at least his looks were familiar. But she recognized immediately the man on the woman’s right, alone on another bench. The woman continued to address her.

“You were probably told why we asked for your presence. I am Lady Anya Waynwood of Ironoaks. This is Ser Vance Corbray of Heart’s Home.” She turned to the man on her left. Now Arya knew why this man was familiar. He had the same features than Lyn Corbray. “And this is…”

“You are Yohn Royce.” Arya told the name of the burly man on the left bench. She remembered him very well. She saw her father talk with him. They were friends. “I saw you at Winterfell three years ago. You were escorting your son Waymar to the Wall.”

Lord Royce looked stunned by her words. He looked at her very closely. “Do I know you? I have the impression I saw you somewhere.”

“When you were at Winterfell, your son sparred against my two brothers. He defeated Robb but then Jon beat him. He was angry because he said a bastard defeated him. You fought you too in the courtyard. You defeated Ser Rodrik, and my father.” Yohn Royce looked even more surprised now. But he didn’t seem to recognize her. “I am not Lord Baelish’s niece. And my name is not Alayne. It’s Arya. Arya Stark.”

The eyes of the Lord of Runestone widened in shock. “Arya Stark? You tell lies right to my face, you little worm?” From the way he looked somewhere behind her, she guessed he was talking to Littlefinger and not to her.

“That’s impossible,” Vance Corbray intervened right at this moment. “Arya Stark is dead. This girl cannot be the daughter of Eddard Stark.”

“I am!” Arya shouted to them.

The three all seemed taken aback by her outburst. “She is,” Lady Waynwood said calmly after a moment. “I can see it. I met your aunt, Lyanna Stark, many years ago. You look very much like her. And you behave like her too.” Lady Waynwood let a smile appear on her face. Arya’s father never talked to her about his sister. She only knew she was kidnapped by Rhaegar Targaryen and died at the end of Robert’s Rebellion.

Lord Corbray looked thoughtful for a moment. “In this case… Your secret is safe with us, my lady.”

“I’m not a lady.” Arya was tired of always repeating it.

“Lyanna Stark again. She is Eddard Stark’s daughter for sure,” Lady Waynwood said with another smile.

“Your father grew up right here in these halls. We hunted together many times. He was a fine man.” Lord Royce infuriated her.

“Then why didn’t you help him?” The three people before her looked taken aback again by her words. That made Arya even angrier to see them unable to answer. “I was there when he was arrested. I was there when Joffrey ordered him to be executed. I saw Ilyn Payne cut his head. I was forced to leave the capital with people bound to the Wall to survive. We were captured by Lannister
soldiers and I spent months as a prisoner at Harrenhal. I finally escaped and wandered for more than a year through the Riverlands to go back to my brother and my mother. I finally reached them at the Twins, but the Freys slaughtered them. Where were you when my father was killed? Where were when he needed your help? Where were you when his head was chopped off his head? Where were you when my brother and mother were butchered? I saw what the Freys did to them. I saw the body of my brother, mounted on a horse, his head replaced by his direwolf’s head, paraded by Freys through their camps. I saw the body of my mother, her throat wide opened, thrown in the river. My two younger brothers were burned alive in Winterfell. Where were you?”

The three lords needed some time before one of them answered. “My lady,” began Ser Corbray, “you must understand…”

“I’m not a lady!” That put an end to what the man was trying to say.

“You’re right, child,” Lady Waynwood conceded. “We should have been there when your father died. We should have gone to war immediately.”

“I agree,” Lord Royce added. “You don’t know how much the people of the Vale wanted to go to war for your father. But Lady Arryn prevented us from doing so. She ordered all the lords and knights of the Vale to stay out of the conflict. I lost a son who fought with Renly Baratheon because he refused to obey Lady Arryn’s orders. We did everything to convince her to call the banners and join your brother.”

“You should have disobeyed her.” Arya didn’t see it as an excuse. The lord, the lady and the knight didn’t answer to this. Instead, the woman asked her a question.

“Arya, we were told you were there when Lady Arryn died. Could you tell us what happened? How did she die?”

Arya looked at all of them. Vance Corbray was of the same family than the man who would have been ready to kill her. Lord Yohn Royce was supposed to be a good friend of her father, but he abandoned him. As for Lady Waynwood, even though Arya appreciated she didn’t put the word Lady before her name, Arya could see she did nothing for her father and her family.

“I killed her.” Her revelation let the three people with huge titles before her all stunned, staring at her blindly. “She wanted to throw me through the Moon Door because I had a dispute with her stupid son. She was cruel. She sent me in the sky cells for weeks after I arrived. She wanted to kill me. And she abandoned her family. Don’t tell me you liked to have her as your lady. If that’s the case, then you’re stupid traitors just like her. And by the way, Ser Vance, I killed Ser Lyn too. He wanted to kill me as well, and he was beating servants who did nothing wrong. I pushed Lady Lysa through the Moon Door and I planted a dagger in Ser Lyn’s throat.”

Ser Vance got up from his bench. “You killed my brother, you little bitch? You’re going to pay for it.”

The knight drew a sword out of his robe and tried to slice Arya in two, but she ducked it and gave a kick in his balls. Immediately, the knight dropped his sword and wailed on the floor. Arya tried to get away through the door, but strong and powerful arms grabbed her and lifted her from the floor. She couldn’t get free of the grip. It seemed every time she tried to escape in the Eyrie someone stopped her before she could make more than a few paces. She realized it was Lord Royce who held her alone with his arms. Arya screamed and tried everything to escape from him, but it was without hope. Finally, six guards brought her back to her room and locked her again. Arya was now in her cell room again, shut in, and everyone knew she had killed the Lady of the Vale. She needed a way to escape this place. And quickly.
Chapter End Notes

Well, things went a little different from the show. As a septa would say: Change, change, change.

Please review

Next chapter: a new POV (clue: it happens in Dorne)
The first chapter in Dorne, and not the last one. It's in some way an introduction to the Dorne plot in my fic, a little like the first chapter from Daenerys' POV introduced Meereen's plot.

Doran Martell is a character I love, both in the show and in the books. In my eyes, he is the most worthy of all the Lords paramount of the Seven Kingdoms at the beginning of Season 1. I hated it when they killed him in the show, even more since that looked entirely absurd. He will have a few chapters in this fic, though not as much as I would like. After all, he remains in the Water Gardens and Sunspear almost all the time because of the gout he suffers from while most of the action happens elsewhere.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Doran felt the pain through his legs. The gout was getting worse. Even sitting, he could feel it. Not that it was so bad for him. He spent most of his life sitting and ruling, drinking milk of the poppy to reduce the pain, trying to make sure his people were happy, in peace, and well fed. He devoted his entire life to the well-being and the happiness for the people of Dorne, and yet for that he only received hatred, grief, mourning and pain. He lost so much since he became the Prince of Dorne and Lord of Sunspear, and he lost a lot before too. He sacrificed everything for his people, and he could feel they hated him for that.

Everything started with Robert Baratheon’s Rebellion. Thousands of men from Dorne died at the Battle of the Trident, including Doran’s uncle, Lewyn. But it was nothing compared to what came next. His sister, his sweet little sister, Elia, was savagely murdered by a monster. Doran’s nephew and niece, Rhaenys and Aegon, were also slaughtered. Jon Arryn, the Hand of the new king, brought the bones of Elia and her two children next year and Doran could bury them, but it did little to ease the pain he felt in his heart.

Oberyn had wanted to go to war against Robert Baratheon and Tywin Lannister, to avenge their sister and her children. Doran had wanted nothing more than to kill these people who savagely butchered his family, just like his little brother, but to the opposite of Oberyn, he knew they couldn’t go to war. Revenge wouldn’t bring Elia back to them, and Dorne wasn’t powerful enough to defeat the new Baratheon dynasty and its allies on its own. And there were so many people in Dorne who had lost someone in the war… Doran didn’t want to subject his people to more sufferings. And he had a son at this moment. Quentyn had just been born. He had to protect the family he still had. So he had accepted Jon Arryn’s apologies, and prevented his brother from starting a new rebellion.

Later, he sent his eldest son, Quentyn, to be fostered at Yronwood. Quentyn was his first child with his beloved wife Mellario of Norvos. Doran sent his son to Yronwood to mend the old feud between the Martells and the Yronwoods Oberyn started very young by killing Lord Edgar Yronwood in a duel. However, Mellario didn’t accept it. In Norvos, sons and daughters of noble people weren’t fostered to other families. They were raised by their mother and their father. He could still remember
the argument he had with his wife on this day.

“I refuse to let you send my son away. I won’t allow it,” she said with tears in her eyes.

“I need to repair the damage Oberyn caused years ago. This is the best way to do it,” he had tried to explain.

“He’s your son! What sort of father uses his own flesh and blood to pay his debts? How can you send him away? How can you let someone else raise him, as if he was a burden?”

“Quentyn is not a burden. I love him as much as I love Trystane, and my brother, and you. But I must maintain good relationships with my bannermen.”

“By sending our son away?”

“Only for a time. He will come back. I promise.”

“In a few years, yes. He is only ten, Doran. He is only a child. Our child. You won’t see him grow.”

“I know, but this is the way of things here. I have no choice,” he had said with a remorseful voice.

Mellario had stormed out of his solar. She wept for days after Quentyn left. Doran did everything he could to make her understand. He was sad at the idea to send his son to someone else, but he expected things to be this way as soon as they would have children. He was the Prince of Dorne, and he had to make sure his people were safe. He had to make sure Dorne remained at peace, and it would do some good to his son to see other parts of Dorne and to create friendship with other noble people. Sadly, he couldn’t keep his promise to his wife.

Five years after Quentyn had left them, a raven came from Yronwood with dire news. Quentyn was dead, killed accidentally during a hunting trip when his horse fell on him. Mellario had been heartbroken and Doran had been too. It was then that Doran abandoned the idea of sending their second son, Trystane, to Lemonwood to be fostered by Ser Deziel Dalt. But it wasn’t enough and Doran’s wife left him and returned to Norvos a year later, leaving Areo Hotah behind her with Doran and their last son. Doran never saw his wife again.

And now, Oberyn was dead, killed by Ser Gregor Clegane, the monster who killed their sister, their nephew and their niece. Doran had lost two brothers when they were only infants, and now he lost the only one who grew up to a man. It had been two months now since his bones were brought back from King’s Landing by Ellaria, along with Ser Gregor’s head and a letter Oberyn wrote not long before he died.

Dear Doran,

The Imp Lord of Casterly Rock insisted for me to write this before I avenged our sister in case I wouldn’t get out of it alive, but I doubt you’ll ever need to read it. Tywin Lannister is dead as you already know, and his son confirmed the rumors we heard. Gregor Clegane is the one who butchered Elia’s children, then raped her with their blood still on his hands before he killed her too. The Imp claims his father didn’t give the order to kill Elia, but he recognized that Lord Tywin did order his dog to kill Rhaenys and Aegon.

The Imp promised he would execute Gregor Clegane and send us his head in time, but I’m tired of waiting for justice. Tywin Lannister may be dead, but his dog still lives and I want to kill him myself. I want to hear him confess his crimes before I throw my spear through his heart. I’m going to kill him.
Tyrion Lannister wants me to tell you he is not responsible for my death if the Mountain kills me, but he won’t succeed. Soon, I will bring you the head of the monster who killed our sister and her children. She will rest in peace, at last.

Your brother, Oberyn

His brother brought him the head of Gregor Clegane, only he didn’t come back alive. Ser Balon Swann accompanied Ellaria to Dorne in order to present Ser Gregor’s head to Doran and his condolences for Oberyn’s death. Ellaria confirmed this was Ser Gregor’s head. The kingsguard also gave Doran a letter written personally by the Lord of Casterly Rock for him.

To Doran Martell, Prince of Dorne and Lord of Sunspear,

I have the regret to tell you your brother, Prince Oberyn Martell, is dead. He died trying to kill Ser Gregor Clegane. He already told you this in his own letter, but the rumors you heard were true. Gregor Clegane did kill Elia Martell, Rhaenys Targaryen and Aegon Targaryen during the Sack of King’s Landing. He murdered the last two on the orders of my father, Tywin Lannister, and murdered your sister without any order to do so. I learnt it myself only a few weeks ago, during the last discussion I had with my father before he died.

I can only offer you my condolences and my apologies for the sufferings House Lannister inflicted to your family under my father’s rule. This isn’t much, but this is all I can give you along with Gregor Clegane’s head. I was planning to have him judged for his crimes and executed once I would go back to the Westerlands, but your brother insisted on killing him with his own hands. I couldn’t stop him. I’m afraid the precautions I took to make sure he would win the fight against the Mountain weren’t enough. I had no wish to see your brother die, especially after he cleared me at my trial. I owe him my life. My own wife lost members of her family in a horrible way recently and I can understand the hatred you and your brother had and still have for my house. I regret his death more than you probably believe.

I assume the entire responsibility of your brother’s death for my lack of precautions against Gregor Clegane. He was one of my bannermen and I failed to control him. The king has nothing to see with this affair. But I can guarantee you the two people who were responsible for the death of Princess Elia and her children are now dead, and I will never allow someone to kill any of your subjects like Lord Tywin allowed.

I hope my niece is happy in Dorne and that everything is fine between her and your son. They are only children and have nothing to do with the past horrors between our two houses. With some hope, they may be able to repair the feud between House Martell and House Lannister in time. I look forward for her wedding that will cement the union between the Crown and Dorne.

Yours faithfully,

Tyrion Lannister, Lord of Casterly Rock, Shield of Lannisport, Lord of the Westerlands, Warden of the West

Doran sent an appropriate reply about how regretful Oberyn’s death was and that he didn’t hold Lord Tyrion responsible for this. He also sent a message to King Tommen that he gave to Ser Balon before he went back to King’s Landing. The alliance with the Crown had to be maintained. Tyrion Lannister was right on this. Doran couldn’t allow Oberyn’s death to start a war his people couldn’t win, not with the power of Casterly Rock and Highgarden on King Tommen’s side. Dorne would be easily defeated against such military force.

Doran wondered if the words of the new Lord of Casterly Rock were honest, or only lies to get out
of it without infuriating Dorne. Examining the question, Doran had come to the conclusion that if Oberyn died, it wasn’t what Tyrion Lannister intended. The letter from his brother proved that Oberyn cooperated with him to kill Gregor Clegane, and the discussions Ellaria reported between Oberyn and the Imp seemed to show the Imp tried to stop Oberyn from killing the Mountain himself. And the head was really the one of the man who killed their sister. Doran negotiated through ravens with the Imp when he was Hand of the King to arrange the betrothal between Princess Myrcella and his son Trystane, and from what he heard of the Battle of Blackwater, the dwarf didn’t seem to be an idiot. He had no reason to wish Oberyn’s death. The Lannisters had nothing to gain from it. The Imp wouldn’t have arranged Oberyn’s death. He knew like his father the alliance between Dorne and the Westerlands was vital for both the families. As much as Doran hated to admit, Oberyn was unwise in his obsession to kill the Mountain himself, and he was mostly responsible of his own death. He always feared it would happen to his brother one day. He feared Oberyn’s lack of caution would lead to his death one day. And finally it happened. Doran could only mourn his brother now, and he had no reason or interest to blame the Lannisters and take a revenge on them for Oberyn’s death.

Tywin Lannister was dead, and it was very good news for Doran. Not only the man who had his sister, his nephew and his niece killed was dead, though he died too softly in his bed for what he did, but House Lannister was deprived of his head. However, the Imp was to be taken carefully. Doran knew the rumors about the drunken whoremonger of Casterly Rock, but it seemed the Imp wasn’t stupid as people would like to think. He ruled King’s Landing in very difficult times and held the capital against Stannis Baratheon, and remained on the small council as Master of Coin afterwards. His writing style let see an intelligent and cunning man who chose his moves and words carefully. Perhaps he wasn’t ruthless like his father, but he seemed to have some of his intelligence. And now he was married with the heir to the kingdom of the North. The Imp had a lot of power within his hands. His presence wouldn’t make Doran’s future plans easier to execute. He would have to be careful with the new Lord of Casterly Rock.

Doran looked down on the Water Gardens. It really was a beautiful place and he enjoyed the view of the fountains, the plants, the bushes, and the people walking freely without concern or worry about what was going on outside. Among them were his son and his betrothed. The princess Myrcella had grown into a beautiful young women during the time she spent here. When she arrived, she looked wary about the people here, though she was also amazed by the beauty of the palace. Very quickly, she lost her doubts about Trystane, then about everyone else here, and came to love her new life. She embraced the culture and usages of Dorne and came to love Trystane. And Trystane came to love her very deeply too. Doran had spoken with the princess many times, and he discovered her childhood hadn’t been very happy. She talked very fondly about her two uncles and her younger brother, but Doran could see she was uncomfortable when it came to her mother, her father or her older brother, the late King Joffrey. She matured and bloomed here. Trystane helped her a lot, and now she was happy.

Doran only made this betrothal for political reasons. He couldn’t let Dorne remain neutral in this war entirely, but he didn’t want to risk his people by engaging them too much into a conflict. He couldn’t declare for one of the pretenders without getting anything. The people of Dorne would never forgive him if he supported a Baratheon pretender, the family who butchered a Martell, without getting anything in return. Of the three, only Joffrey, through his Hand Lord Tyrion, made him a proposal. Lord Tyrion only asked him to position troops on the Dornish Marches to slow down Stannis and Renly Baratheon. Doran couldn’t have asked for better. He wouldn’t engage his people in an open war, except if he was aggressed directly. He wouldn’t side with Renly or Stannis who would ask him to fight for them and enter the conflict directly. He made sure his people didn’t engage in the war with his movements and got a hostage through the betrothal of Princess Myrcella with his son. The Iron Throne wouldn’t dare to do anything against Dorne now, in fear to put the life of the princess in danger and to destroy the alliance between the Lannisters and the Martells. Only, he didn’t expect his
son and the princess to fall in love.

Doran looked again at his son and his betrothed. They looked so happy. They didn’t know how dangerous their love could be for both of them. A Lannister and a Martell. He had to protect them. Especially now that Oberyn was dead.

“The prince does not wish to be disturbed.”

Doran heard the voice of Hotah, using the same words he always used when someone would approach his prince. Hotah was one of the last things Doran still had left of Mellario. Hotah’s loyalty to him was infallible, and he was ready to kill anyone who would attempt anything against Doran or his family.

“Remove yourself from my path or I’ll take that long axe and I’ll shove it…”

“Captain. Let her pass.” Doran ordered Hotah to stand by before one of them did something they would regret. Doran didn’t need to look at her to know who wanted to see him. He recognized her voice, and the scorn in it. He heard it far too much ever since she brought back Oberyn’s bones here.

Hotah let Ellaria Sand pass and she came directly to him. “Your brother was murdered and you sit here in the Water Gardens staring at the sky and doing nothing.”

“Oberyn was slain while attempting to kill another man everyone, including you, told him to not try. His death was horrible, but his own doing all the same.” Doran replied without looking at her, keeping his eyes on the gardens.

“You don’t have to remind me.” He looked back at his brother’s lover this time. “He was my brother long before he was anything to you.”

Doran could still remember the first time he saw his brother. He was already ten-years-old when Oberyn was born and he saw him grow from a baby to the man full of life he was during forty years. No one had to tell him he was his brother. He knew it better than anyone else.

“What will you do about his death?” she asked.

“I will bury him. I will mourn for him.”

“And then?”

“You would have me go to war?”

“The whole country would have you go to war.”

“Then we are lucky the whole country does not decide.” Doran stared right before him, averting his gaze from Ellaria. He would hear nothing about going into war. It was a war they couldn’t win. Many in Dorne might want war, but Doran had seen war. He saw the bodies piled on the battlefields. He saw the orphans starving in the cities. He saw widows wandering alone in the streets without a home. Doran wouldn’t lead his people into that hell.

“The Sand Snakes are with me,” resumed Ellaria, disdain plain in her voice. “They have the love of their people. They will avenge their father while you sit here in your chair doing nothing.” Doran didn’t give her an answer. He had nothing else to tell her. She may believe he was doing nothing, but that wasn’t the case. Far from it. “Oberyn is dead and this Lannister girl skips about the Water
Gardens eating our food, breathing our air. How many of your brothers and sisters do they have to kill? Let me have her. Let me send her to her family one finger at a time.”

Doran looked back at the woman standing before her. Anger filled him now. “I loved my brother. And you made him very happy. For that, you will always have a place in my heart. But we do not mutilate little girls for vengeance. Not here. Not while I rule.”

“And how long will that be?”

Ellaria left the balcony where Doran was sitting. He looked at her going out. Hotah lowered his axe until the blade was in his hand. Should I kill her? The question he asked mutely was quite obvious. Doran shook his head. He wouldn’t kill Oberyn’s paramour and the mother to four of his nieces. Too many people already died.

Doran looked at the gardens again, seeing Trystane and Myrcella still walking and talking together, smiles on their lips, happiness plain on their faces. Doran felt guilt filling his mind. Guilt for his son, and guilt for this girl. But no matter what happened, he wouldn’t allow anyone to hurt Myrcella. Even Oberyn would never have dropped so low to mutilate innocent people. He would never have approved it. He would have fought against it. Doran knew it, but it seemed Ellaria, and perhaps some of Oberyn’s daughters, had forgotten it. They would soil Oberyn’s memory if they hurt the girl in the name of revenge. Doran wouldn’t let them stain Oberyn with their actions. Before he went to sleep, maester Caleotte informed him Ellaria had left the Water Gardens. Doran had a good idea who she was going to see.

Ellaria and Oberyn’s daughters only thought about avenging his brother now, no matter the cost. Deep inside, Doran wanted to avenge Oberyn too, but the price would be too heavy for Dorne. Men would die, children would lose their father, parents would lose their sons, wives would lose their husbands, and all this for what reason? To avenge the death of a single man? Doran would sentence thousands of people to death, and probably even lead Dorne to destruction in a war they couldn’t win. He was the prince of his people, and he had to watch over them and stop them from doing mistakes that would lead to their end. Doran wouldn’t engage Dorne in a war. Not now. Not if they had no chance to win this war.

Chapter End Notes

I know that Quentyn Martell didn't die years ago in the books, and that Doran also had a girl, Arianne, but since Trystane is the only son Doran has in the show and that my fic is based on the show, I decided Doran had two sons and the eldest one died before the story of the show started.

Please review

Next chapter: Jon

Announcement: When the next chapter of "A shadow and a Wolf" will be uploaded, I will start at the same time a new fanfiction about Game of Thrones. Keep looking at my profile for this new fic, "A Rose and a Lion".
Jon II

Chapter Notes

Jon comes back after an absence of almost 50 chapters.

Réponse à Sanrion (Guest): Merci beaucoup pour ton commentaire sur fanfiction.net. J'ai vraiment tenté de faire une histoire réaliste où les personnages réagissent comme ils réagiraient dans la série si un seul élément ou un seul événement avait été modifié. Dans Game of Thrones, changer une seule chose peut modifier toute l'histoire et c'est ce que j'essaie d'explorer dans cette fanfiction. Je crois que si Tyrion et Sansa avaient eu plus de temps à passer ensemble, leur relation aurait pu devenir plus sérieuse. Il y avait déjà une certaine amitié basée sur la confiance et la compassion mutuelle qui s'était installée entre eux avant qu'ils ne soient séparés et je crois vraiment que ça aurait pu aller plus loin s'ils en avaient eu la chance. J'ai adoré développer les personnages à Castral Roc qui n'apparaissent ni dans les livres ni dans la série. Ça me permet de montrer un visage différent de la famille Lannister et de les humaniser davantage, en plus de donner la chance à Sansa de voir qu'il y a du bon et du mauvais dans chaque famille. Je peux t'assurer que la suite de l'histoire réserve bien des surprises. Je n'ai jamais vu de fanfiction Tyrion/Sansa en français moi non plus malheureusement. Je ne vais probablement pas en écrire en français puisque plus de personnes peuvent lire les fanfictions quand elles sont en anglais. Je regrette ça un peu moi aussi, mais je peux faire profiter plus de personnes de mes fictions en les écrivant en anglais et je peux en discuter avec plus de gens. Je t'envoie mes salutations du côté ouest de l'Atlantique. Si tu veux laisser d'autres commentaires à l'avenir, ce serait peut-être plus pratique de les laisser ici sur AO3, comme ça je pourrais y répondre plus facilement.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

JON II

To say the king was obviously not pleased would be an understatement. “I ordered Mance Rayder burned at the stake. You prevented that order from being carried out. You showed mercy to Mance Rayder. A king’s word is law. Perhaps you should ask Ser Davos how much mercy I show to lawbreakers.”

Jon looked at the Onion Knight standing next to Stannis’s desk. His missing fingers were the proof that despite rewarding the man with titles and lands for saving him at the siege of Storm’s End, Stannis also punished the knight for his years of smuggling. They were in the solar Ser Alliser Thorne granted to Stannis in the King’s Tower after he rescued the Night’s Watch from the wildlings. All the brothers of the Night’s Watch were praising Stannis for coming to the help of the Wall while the other lords and kings remained deaf to their call for assistance. However, the ritual sacrifices the Red Woman made cooled the enthusiasm of many of them. Even those who hated the wildlings were distraught and shocked by the way the King-Beyond-the-Wall was executed and by his screams of agony. For Jon, it had been too much. Mance Rayder may have been an enemy of the Seven Kingdoms that the Night’s Watch swore to protect, he may have been a turncloak and a traitor by deserting the Night’s Watch, but he only tried to save his people from the White Walkers. Just like
all the wildlings, he was born on the wrong side of the Wall and didn’t deserve to die this way. Seeing him screaming in agony as fire consumed him had been too much for Jon and he shot an arrow in his heart, ending the man’s agony and giving him a painless death. And now Jon stood here, in Stannis’s solar, berated for disobeying an order from the Lord of the Seven Kingdoms. While the king was more than angry with him, his Hand looked somewhat sympathetic to Jon.

“Show too much kindness, people won’t fear you,” resumed Stannis. “If they don’t fear you, they don’t follow you.”

“With respect, your Grace, the Free Folk will never follow you no matter what you do. You’re the man who burned their king alive.”

Jon had tried to explain to Stannis it would be impossible to enlist the wildlings in his army, but the king sitting before him didn’t understand the people from beyond the Wall. The moment it was certain Mance wouldn’t bend the knee to Stannis, he had no chance to convince his people to fight for him. And Jon’s arrow didn’t convince Tormund or any other wildling to fight for Stannis or to not fight for him. Their decision was made long before.

“Who, then? You?” Stannis asked.

“No. Only one of their own.” The wildlings would never follow someone from the south of the Wall. They would never bend the knee to anyone. Not to Stannis after he killed their king. Not to any king. Not to Jon who betrayed them, who betrayed Ygritte.

The self-proclaimed king took a short parchment on his desk and handed it to Jon. “Do you know this wretched girl, Lyanna Mormont?”

“The Lord Commander’s niece.” Jon heard of her. Mormont mentioned her once, and Jon knew she was named after his aunt Lyanna.

“Lady of Bear Island and a child of ten,” Stannis confirmed on a grim tone, but his tone was always grim and hard. “I asked her to commit her house to my cause. That’s her response.”

Jon read the answer aloud. “Bear Island knows no king but the King in the North, whose name is Stark.” Jon couldn’t repress a smile while reading it. The Northerners would remain loyal to his family to the end, even when they were girls of ten-years-old.

“That amuses you?”

“I apologize, your Grace. Northerners can be a bit like the free folk. Loyal to their own.” Both descended from the First Men and fought against the White Walkers eight thousand years ago.

“I know. My brother Robert went on often and loudly about how difficult it was to control them. Even with your father’s help.” Jon thought he saw the beginning of a smile on Stannis’s face, but only the beginning and it lasted less than a second. Ser Davos was the one to speak next.

“Tonight, the Night’s Watch elects a new Lord Commander. Ser Alliser Thorne is going to win.”

“Most likely,” Jon replied.

“Unpleasant man. He thinks you’re a traitor. What’s your life going to be like here at the Wall with Thorne in command?”

“Unpleasant, I expect.” Ser Alliser would make sure his life was a living hell if he didn’t execute him.
“Your bravery made him look weak,” Stannis commented. “He’ll punish you for it. I don’t punish men for bravery. I reward them.”

“I don’t doubt it, your Grace,” Jon said. “But I’m a brother of the Night’s Watch. I pledged them my life, my honor, my sword. I don’t know what I have left to give you.”

“You can give me the North.”

Jon nearly wanted to laugh at this. “I can’t. Even if I wanted to, I’m a bastard, a Snow.”

“Kneel before me. Lay your sword at my feet. Pledge me your service and you’ll rise again as Jon Stark, Lord of Winterfell.”

For a moment, Jon could see his home, the castle in which he grew up, as if he was there. He could see its massive walls. He walked in the yards where he practiced sword fighting and archery with Robb, where they thought Bran to shoot arrows. He wandered in his room inside the Great Keep. He was praying in the godswood. He looked at the statues of the ancient Kings and Wardens of the North in its crypt. He followed his lessons with Maester Luwin in his tower. He sat on the raised platform with his brothers and sisters while they dined with their parents. Only the parents of his brothers and sisters. Lady Stark wasn’t his mother, and never was.

Jon’s vision disappeared as quickly as it appeared. “Do I have some time to think about it?”

“You may,” replied Stannis, “but tomorrow Thorne will be your Lord Commander. I suggest you think about it very quickly.”

“Your Grace.” Jon bowed and left the solar.

As he went down the stairs, he thought about the offer Stannis just made. That was what he always wanted. Jon wanted to be a Stark all his life, and now he could be. He only had to accept the offer, ride to Winterfell with Stannis, assemble the northern lords to take back his home from Roosse Bolton, and avenge his family. But for that, he would have to forsake his vows.

Night gathers, and now my watch begins.

It shall not end until my death.

I shall take no wife, hold no lands, father no children.

I shall wear no crowns and win no glory.

I shall live and die at my post.

I am the sword in the darkness.

I am the watcher on the walls.

I am the shield that guards the realms of men.

I pledge my life and honor to the Night's Watch,

for this night and all the nights to come

Lady Stark wanted him out of Winterfell. Mormont wanted him to be Lord Commander of the
Night’s Watch. Qhorin Halfhand wanted him to be a spy. Ygritte wanted him to be a wildling. Alliser Thorne wanted him to be a dead body. Stannis wanted him to be Lord of Winterfell. But what do I want? Jon knew what he wanted. He wanted to be a Stark. He wanted to get back the home of his brothers and sisters. But that would mean leaving the Night’s Watch, forsaking all the vows he took. Was that what he wanted? If Ygritte had been alive, the choice would have been much easier. Roose Bolton ruled in Winterfell now. The traitor who plunged a dagger in Robb Stark’s heart. Don’t you want to avenge him? He wanted to avenge him of course. I want a great many things. But I’m a sworn brother of the Night’s Watch. Now, with the possibility of taking back Winterfell, he wasn’t sure anymore. But if he took Winterfell, then what? His father was dead. The mother of his brothers and sisters was dead. Robb was dead. Bran was north of the Wall, Rickon was nowhere to be found, and Arya neither. The three could be dead. He only had one sister left he could be sure she was alive.

Jon pushed the door at the end of the stairs and entered the courtyard. Melisandre was praying the Lord of Light with the Queen’s men, reciting prayers in a language Jon didn’t understand, all of them surrounding a great fire. He stopped to look at the ceremony. After a moment, the prayers were said in the common tongue. All the believers started to chant together with the voice of the priestess coming out louder than any other.

“Lord of Light, show us the way. Cast your light upon us. Protect us from the darkness. Burn away our sins. Yours are the stars that guide us.”

In the end, only Melisandre spoke with a vibrant and powerful voice. “Lord of Light, protect us, for the night is dark and full of terrors.”

There was something horrific about the prayers, especially when they came from this woman. Perhaps because Mance died, burned by the hand of the woman leading the prayers. Melisandre let Jon quite puzzled and uncertain with the way she looked at him. When Ygritte was kissed by fire, Melisandre was fire. Jon stood there, looking at the men disbanding once the prayer was over. He noticed Stannis’s wife, Selyse Baratheon, with her daughter Shireen. The little girl didn’t seem very happy. Jon noticed suddenly the Red Woman was staring at him. He went away to the Flint Barracks where the dormitories were.

Jon entered, threw his black cloak on his bed and sat on it. He took a parchment inside his doublet. It had been there ever since he received it approximately two months ago. He had read it each day up to now.

Jon, I hope you’re alright. I am at Casterly Rock and married to Tyrion Lannister. He treats me very well and I am safe. I am now the Lady of House Lannister. I should have written to you before. I was never very kind with you and I regret it now. Please forgive me. You are my last brother still alive. Write to me, I beg you.

Your sister, Sansa Lannister of House Stark, Lady of Casterly Rock, Lady of the Westerlands, Lady of Winterfell

Jon had found it strange when Sam came to him during one of their watch at the top of the Wall with a scroll that a raven brought from Casterly Rock. It bore the seal of House Lannister. But it was nothing compared to his surprise when he recognized the handwriting of his sister, and even less when he understood that his sister was now the Lady of House Lannister. It took him a while to assimilate the news. Jon had learned recently that Tywin Lannister was dead when he received the letter. He didn’t give much consideration to the new, except he thought the man probably received what he deserved after having Jon’s family slaughtered by the war. But he didn’t realize that Tyrion Lannister would become the Lord of Casterly Rock in his stead, which meant Sansa was now Lady
of Casterly Rock.

He had read the scroll again and again. His sister’s neat writing couldn’t be mistaken, but the words were squeezed to make them hold on such a little piece of parchment. Sansa had probably wanted to tell more, but she couldn’t because of the size of the piece of paper a raven could carry. *I am at Casterly Rock and married to Tyrion Lannister. He treats me very well and I am safe.* Was she really safe? Jon couldn’t be sure. Sansa may have written it under constraint. She didn’t look in distress from her message, but it was a very short message sent by raven. Jon couldn’t decipher his sister’s feelings through it. She could have been forced to write it.

However, there was one thing Jon knew. If he accepted the offer of Stannis, he would have to fight against Sansa. Since everyone believed Bran and Rickon were dead, and they could be dead, Winterfell belonged to Sansa. If Jon fought for Stannis and was proclaimed Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North, he could find himself in war with his own sister, contesting her rights. Could Jon do this? He didn’t want to see the Lannisters, not even Tyrion Lannister, take Winterfell, but he knew that his father would never have wanted him to fight against his own family. And that would legitimize the hatred Lady Stark had for him. He would have stolen the rights of her children.

Anyway, helping Stannis to take Winterfell would mean burning the godsdowood for the Lord of Light Stannis’s men worshipped. Melisandre would make sure there would be nothing left of the godsdowood of Winterfell, nor anywhere in the North. Jon wouldn’t make himself responsible for the destruction of the Old Gods his father and his father before him worshipped. To become Jon Stark would mean to betray the Old Gods, to break his vows and to turn against his own blood. He couldn’t do it. *I’m a sworn brother of the Night’s Watch, for this night and all the nights to come.*

An hour later, Jon entered the common hall. Nightfall was upon them and all the brothers were gathering to choose their new Lord Commander. The common hall was full of people as a consequence. Jon went to Sam. His friend greeted him with an excited smile.

“Jon. I have good news for you. Edd is going to propose you as Lord Commander.”

It seemed Jon wasn’t done with surprises today. “What do you mean? I can’t be Lord Commander.”

“Of course you can. Anyone who said his vows can be nominated.”

“I can’t be Lord Commander Sam,” Jon repeated. “Half the men believe me to be a traitor.”

“The other half love you,” Sam argued. “I and Edd have been discussing with them during the last days. Most of the men respect you. They’re not all like Janos Slynt or Ser Alliser. You led the defenses of Castleblack against the wildlings. There are many men who want to vote for Ser Alliser who would be ready to vote for you if you were among the candidates. He made too many enemies among the recruits here. And most of Ser Mallister supporters would vote for you too.”

Jon only answered after a moment. “Sam, I can’t. I’m not old enough.”

“You want Ser Alliser to be Lord Commander? The youngest Lord Commander of history was ten-years-old when he was elected. And he was a Stark.”

Jon shook his head slowly. “No, Sam. I cannot be Lord Commander with half the Night’s Watch hating me.”

Sam looked disappointed. He looked on his left and shook slightly his head. Jon turned to see to who he made the sign. It was Edd. He didn’t seem pleased either and turned his back on them. Olly was sitting next to him.
“Things won’t be good with Ser Alliser. Gilly is afraid of him. He could send her north of the Wall again with little Sam.” Jon didn’t reply to Sam’s arguments. He refused the offer of Stannis to become Lord of Winterfell. He wouldn’t accept to be placed among the candidates for being Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch. “People have seen you coming out of the King’s Tower. Did you speak with the king?”

Jon supposed he could reveal it to Sam. He wouldn’t tell anyone, but anyway, if people came to know he refused Stannis’s offer, it may enhance his image for the other brothers. “He wanted me to join his army. He wanted my service to overthrow Roose Bolton. He proposed to legitimate me as a Stark and to become the Warden of the North.”

Sam’s eyes widened. “He’ll make you a Stark with the stroke of a pen?”

“It’s the first thing I ever remember wanting,” Jon admitted. “I’d daydream that my father would ask the king and just like that, I would never be the bastard of Winterfell again.”

“You deserve this. You do. I couldn’t be happier for you.” Sam was smiling widely, but Jon had to crush his hopes just like he crushed them for being Lord Commander.

“I’m going to refuse him.”

Sam’s smile faded. “But you’d be Lord of Winterfell.”

“I swore a vow to the Night’s Watch, and I have a sister to who Winterfell belongs. What sort of Lord of Winterfell would I be if I don’t take my word seriously and take her home away from my sister?”

Jon sat and took a cup of ale to calm himself. He was a brother of the Night’s Watch. That was who he was. No one would be able to change it, no matter how many men in the Night’s Watch hated him. That was when Alliser Thorne came into the hall and took place among his followers, including Janos Slynt, the man who betrayed Jon’s father in King’s Landing.

“Crowded. You’d think we were serving venison stew,” the acting Commander joked. His supporters laughed, but still more than half the room was silent, including Jon. Ser Alliser had no humor, except when he could mock the others. Maester Aemon rose slowly from his seat on the platform and spoke with his frail voice. The voting was about to begin.

“Does anyone wish to speak for candidates before we cast our tokens for the nine-hundredth-and-ninety-eighth Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch?”

Without surprise, Janos Slynt was the first one to speak, and the one for who he spoke was no surprise either. “Ser Alliser Thorne is not just a knight, he’s a man of true nobility. He was acting Commander when the Wall came under attack and led us to victory against the wildlings.” Some of the men approved with gruff voices. “He’s a veteran of a hundred battles and has been a defender of the Watch and the Wall almost all of his life. He’s the only true choice.”

Men cheered and pounded on the tables until another brother rose. “Ser Denys Mallister joined the Watch as a boy and has served loyally longer than any other ranger. Through ten winters he served. As commander of the Shadow Tower, he kept the wildlings away. We could do no better.”

Men cheered for Ser Denys and Jon joined them by pounding his cup on the table. He would vote for this man. He was more open-minded than Ser Alliser and much less hateful towards him, and a very capable commander. He defeated the wildlings when they attacked the Shadow Tower at the Bridge of Skulls. However, Jon knew very well what would be the result. Too many men supported
Ser Alliser. The cheers and pounding for Ser Denys were much less than those for Ser Alliser.

Maester Aemon started to speak. “If there is no one else, we will begin the voting. The triangular tokens count for Ser Alliser Thorne. The square tokens for Ser Denys Mallister. Each brother will…”

“Maester Aemon.”

Jon recognized Sam’s voice and turned his head towards him just like everyone else in the room. Jon shook his head. Don’t do it, Sam. If Sam did this, Jon’s friend was dead with him.

“Samwell Tarly. Go on.” Maester Aemon gave to Sam the right to speak, but Jon’s friend seemed to hesitate. Jon hoped he would hesitate enough to never speak.

“Sam the Slayer.” Janos Slynt’s comment brought laughter in the room. “Another wildling lover just like his friend Jon Snow. How’s your lady love, Slayer?”

“Her name is Gilly. Brother Slynt knows her quite well. They cowered together in the larder during the battle for the Wall.” Men laughed at Sam’s revelation. What are you doing Sam?

“Lies!” Slynt’s shout didn’t stop Sam.

“A wildling girl, a baby, and Lord Janos. I found him there after the battle was over in a puddle of his own making.” In other circumstances, Jon would have laughed with his sworn brothers, but now Sam was digging his own tomb. “Whilst Lord Janos was hiding with the women and children, Jon Snow was leading. Ser Alliser fought bravely, it is true. And when he was wounded, it was Jon who saved us. He took charge of the Wall’s defense. He killed the Magnar of the Thenns. He went north to deal with Mance Rayder knowing it almost certainly meant his own death. Before that, he led the mission to avenge Lord Commander Mormont. Mormont himself chose Jon to be his steward. He saw something in Jon and now we’ve all seen it, too. He may be young, but he’s the commander we turned to when the night was darkest.”

Cheers and poundings followed Sam’s speech. Now Jon was candidate for being the nine-hundred-and-ninety-eighth Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch, and there was nothing he could do against it. He couldn’t withdraw. Judging by the noise, Jon noticed he received approximately the same number of supports than Ser Alliser. Could he have a chance to be elected Lord Commander?

Ser Alliser rose from his seat to speak too. “I can’t argue with any of that. But who does Jon Snow want to command? Night’s Watch or the widlings? Everyone knows he loved a wildling girl and spoke with Mance Rayder many times. What would have happened in that tent between those two old friends if Stannis’s army hadn’t come along? We all saw him put the King-Beyond-the-Wall out of his misery. Do you want to choose a man who has fought the wildlings all his life or a man who makes love to them?”

Jon looked up to see Ser Alliser staring at him with obvious hatred. He questioned Jon’s honor and loyalty to the Night’s Watch. Jon fought as valiantly and without rest for the Night’s Watch than Ser Alliser, and yet this man stood there, insulting him, insulting his father, insulting his family and everything he did. If Jon hadn’t killed Qhorin Halfhand, he wouldn’t have been able to gain Mance’s trust and to bring back valuable information that allowed them to hold against the wildlings. He broke his vows with Ygritte, and he regretted it, but almost all the brothers in this room broke it. If Ser Alliser was elected, Jon would be hanged from the top of the Wall. He had no choice. Whether he became the new Lord Commander, or he died, and Sam too. Jon raised.

“Brothers. Do you remember the Fist of the First Men? Some of you were there, and those who
weren’t there know what happened. Three hundred brothers were killed that day, and they weren’t killed by wildlings. They were killed by the dead. By White Walkers. The wildling attack we just managed to hold was nothing compared to what’s coming. We cannot defend the Wall on our own against them. We need men, supplies, and weapons. Where Ser Alliser plans to get these men, these supplies and these weapons?” Jon paused for a moment, looking at Ser Alliser defiantly. “The kings and the lords of Westeros have refused to answer our calls for help, except one, and Stannis is about to leave Castleblack to try to seize the North, and he has no men to spare for us. The others don’t believe in White Walkers. They’re laughing at us. All except one.”

Jon pulled from his cloak the parchment he always kept on him. “This message comes from my sister. Sansa Lannister, the Lady of Casterly Rock. Her husband, Tyrion Lannister, the Lord of the Westerlands and the Warden of the West, visited the Wall three years ago. He spoke with Maester Aemon and the Lord Commander Mormont. He is the only one among the great lords of the Seven Kingdoms who may believe us. He is the only one who may send us what we need. Men, supplies, weapons, and even gold if necessary. But we won’t get it if Ser Alliser is Lord Commander. He and Lord Tyrion hated each other when he visited the Wall. Ser Alliser is so proud that he will never ask for anything from the Lord of Casterly Rock. And even if he did, I doubt Tyrion Lannister would send us anything if we made the mistake to choose this man. Choose a man who can convince the Lord of the Westerlands to send us what we need. Choose this man,” he pointed Ser Alliser, “and the Wall will fall when the dead will come. The Night’s Watch will be destroyed, and not by the wildlings.”

Jon held Alliser Thorne’s gaze. He could see the man hated him more than ever right now. Jon may have reduced considerably the chances of the knight to become Lord Commander. The men would think more seriously about voting for Ser Denys… or for Jon. As long as Ser Alliser wasn’t chosen, it was alright for Jon. He could write to Tyrion Lannister in Ser Denys’s name if he became the Lord Commander. Ser Denys wouldn’t be against this idea. He wasn’t proud and stubborn like Ser Alliser, and he didn’t hate Jon. Ser Alliser would never ask for Jon’s help, especially not after what he just said. The important thing was to prevent Alliser Thorne from being Lord Commander. It didn’t matter if Jon or Denys Mallister was chosen as long as Alliser Thorne was put aside.

Maester Aemon rose slowly from his seat like always. “It is time.”

All the brothers made a line and started to put their token in the jar. Circle tokens were added for those who would vote for Jon. He picked a square token. It took a while for everyone to drop his token in the jar. Once they all had voted, Othell Yarwick broke the jar and started to pile the tokens on three different stalks. Everyone looked closely how the number of each type of tokens evolved. After a moment, one of the stakes started to get obviously higher than the two others. When all the tokens were piled, Ser Denys and Ser Alliser were equal. Jon’s stake was about twice higher than the other two.

The common hall resonated with cheers, applauses and poundings. Jon needed a moment to realize what just happened. He wouldn’t be hanged. He was the new Lord Commander of Night’s Watch. People were shouting his name. “Jon Snow! Jon Snow! Jon Snow! Jon Snow! Jon Snow!” For the first time in a very long time, Jon allowed himself to smile. He could see the happiness and smiles on the faces of his friends. Sam. Olly. Maester Aemon. Even Edd. Ser Denys made a sign with his hand meaning he conceded him the victory, while Alliser Thorne, Janos Slynt and their followers gave him sour looks. Othell Yarwyck stood on the platform, his face impassive. Jon had to talk with many people before he could leave the hall. Ser Denys came to offer him more formal congratulations. Othell Yarwyck and Bowen Marsh came to offer him their services as First Builder and First Steward, which meant they wanted to keep the places they occupied under Mormont and Thorne. Finally he managed to get out with Sam, Edd and Olly.
“Damn you, Sam,” cursed Edd. “You did it! You stole me the right to nominate him. But I have to admit you gave a better speech than I could ever have done.”

Sam smiled with pride. “What are you going to do now, Lord Commander?”

That was strange for Jon to be called Lord Commander by his friends. “I’m going to rest. Olly.” The boy looked at him. “I would like you to be my steward. Move my things in the former rooms of Donal Noye, behind the armory.”

“Yes, Lord Commander.” Olly immediately went to carry on his duties.

“Why don’t you move in the King’s Tower?”

“Because Stannis resides there, and I burned the Lord Commander’s Tower when I saved Mormont from a dead man,” Jon answered to Sam’s question.

“You are the Lord Commander. Just tell him to move out.”

“I don’t think it would be wise,” Jon replied to Edd’s suggestion. “He saved us from the wildlings, and he’s a king. Kings tend to be touchy.” And I don’t want to add an outrage to the one I’m about to make to him.

Later in the night, Jon could sleep in Noye’s bed. He thought about what he said in the common room. It was true. Tyrion Lannister may be the only one who could be listening to their claims that White Walkers were about to attack the Wall, and he was his brother-in-law now. Through Sansa he may be able to convince him. I am at Casterly Rock and married to Tyrion Lannister. He treats me very well and I am safe. I am now the Lady of House Lannister. Though Jon doubted Sansa would believe him if he told her about the dead. She never saw the Wall, and being her half-brother wouldn’t be enough to make her believe tales about White Walkers. But would Tyrion Lannister believe it? He saw the Wall. He spoke not only with Maester Aemon and Mormort, but also with his uncle Benjen. With some luck, Jon may be able to convince him. He would have many sensitive matters to attend tomorrow on the morning.

Jon proved to be right in his expectations. Very soon in the morning, Stannis came to visit him with his Hand. Olly just finished to organize his solar. His words of introduction were as simple as always. “Lord Commander.”

“Your Grace,” as Jon rose from his seat behind his desk.

“I’d like to speak alone.”

“Olly is my steward now as I was Lord Commander’s Mormont. I want him to attend my meetings to learn from men with experience. One day he might command.”

“Very well.” Stannis begrudgingly accepted to let Olly stay after he looked at him closing the door of Jon’s solar. “Have you considered my offer?”

Jon had to be careful now. Stannis was a just man, just but hard. And he didn’t like to be refused or contested in any way. Jon sat as Stannis did the same. “I have. And I thank you for it. You do me great honor. All my life I wanted to be Jon Stark.”

“Say the word and you will be.”

“But I have to refuse you. I’m Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch. My place is here.”
Stannis seemed to give a sidelong glance to Ser Davos. “I’m giving you the chance to avenge your family, to take back the castle where you grew up. To rule the North.”

“The North is not mine, your Grace. It belongs to my sister, Sansa.”

“Sansa Lannister. You want the Imp to rule the North?”

“No. But I can’t fight against my own sister. I know my father would never have wanted this.” Jon thought he saw something in the eyes of Stannis. Perhaps something like regret. Jon didn’t know for sure what his father would have told him to do if he was there, but he wouldn’t fight against his last sister still alive for their home. “I wish I could fight beside you. Believe me, I do. But I swore a sacred vow at the godswood. I pledged my life to the Night’s Watch.”

“You’re as stubborn as your father. And as honorable.”

“I can imagine no higher praise.”

“I didn’t mean it as praise. Honor got your father killed. But if your mind’s made up, I won’t try and dissuade you.”

Stannis rose, but Jon asked him a question before he could leave. Not as Jon Snow, but as Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch. “May I ask, your Grace, how long you plan to stay at Castleblack?”

“Are you bored of us already?” Stannis’s voice was quite irritated. That was to be expected. Jon just turned down his offer, and now he was encouraging him to leave.

“You saved us from Mance Rayder’s army. We will never forget that. But it’s a question of survival. The Night’s Watch can’t continue to feed your men and the wildling prisoners indefinitely. Winter is coming.”

Stannis pursed his lips. “I know it. We march on Winterfell within the fortnight, before the snows trap us here.”

“And the wildlings?”

“If they’d rather burn than fight for me, so be it. I leave their fate to you. You could execute them. That’s the safest option.” Stannis added something else after a moment, probably noticing Jon’s reluctant face. “Or you could see if this Tormund fellow is more willing to compromise than Mance ever was. I assume the brothers of the Night’s Watch would rather see the wildlings dead.”

“Most of the brothers, yes. There’s little love for the free folk here.”

“You’re the Lord Commander. Your decision.” Stannis started to walk to the door Olly opened for him, but turned to face Jon again as he reached it. “You have many enemies in Castleblack. Have you considered sending Alliser Thorne elsewhere? Give him command of Eastwatch-by-the-Sea.”

“I heard it was best to keep your enemies close.”

“Whoever said that didn’t have many enemies.”

Stannis left the room on these words, without a glance behind. It was over. Davos Seaworth lingered behind, as if he hesitated to leave the room. Jon didn’t know the man very much, but it was obvious he was entirely loyal to Stannis. No wonder the king kept the Onion Knight close to him despite his years of smuggling, but not without depriving him of a few fingers.
“He sees something in you. Might not be apparent from his tone, but it’s the truth. He believes in you.”

“I’m sorry I disappointed him,” Jon told Stannis’s Hand as an excuse.

Ser Davos sat on a bench before Jon. “The king is a complicated man, but he wants to do what’s right for the Seven Kingdoms.”

“As long as he’s ruling them.” Jon’s reply wasn’t without sarcasm.

“He’s the one true king.” Northerners don’t think so, nor the free folk. “He has a blood right to that throne.”

“I’ve sworn to stay clear of the politics of the Seven Kingdoms.”

“Have you now?” Ser Davos looked above his shoulder at Olly. “How does the Night’s Watch vow go again? I’ll bet you’ve got it memorized since you got here.”

Olly looked at Jon, and Jon nodded to tell the boy he could recite it. “Night gathers and now my watch begins.”

“No, not that bit. The bit at the end.”

“I am the sword in the darkness, the watchman on the walls, the shield that guards the realms of men. I pledge my life…”

“Right, that’s enough.” Davos looked again at Jon. “The shield that guards the realms of men. That’s what you swore to be. Now, I’m not a learned man, but the best way to help the most people might not be sitting in a frozen castle at the edge of the world. It just might mean wading in the muck, getting your boots dirty and doing what needs to be done.”

“And what need to be done?” Jon was a little exasperated that someone was teaching him the sense of the words he said three years ago, and even more that this someone spent time at the Wall no longer than two months.

“As long as the Boltons rule the North, the North will suffer. Just one man’s opinion.”

Ser Davos Seaworth rose and left the room. Jon sat and sighed heavily. He knew the North would suffer under the Boltons, but his place was here at the Wall, even more now that his brothers chose him to lead them. The dead were coming. He was needed here at Castleblack.

“Do you need me for anything else, my lord?” Olly’s question got him out of his thoughts.

“Yes, Olly. Just wait a minute.”

Jon now had to attend two other sensitive matters. He wrote a first message as Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch, then attacked the second message. He thought a long time about what he could write. His sister surely faced the same problem than him when she wrote her message. He couldn’t write much on a single piece of paper a raven could carry. After a few minutes thinking about it, he settled for the following.

Dear Sansa, I’m glad to receive of your news. No need to regret anything except leaving our home. Everyone else is dead. I was afraid you might be dead as well. We both made a good way since we last saw each other. I just became Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch. I’m alright. We defeated the wildlings who attacked us. Send me more ravens.
Your brother Jon.

Jon sealed the two parchments with the seal of Castleblack and gave them to Olly. “Bring them to Maester Aemon and tell him to send them at Casterly Rock immediately. I want every message coming from there given to me the moment they arrive.”

Jon wished he could tell Sansa that Bran and Rickon may still be alive, but he didn’t know if he could trust her husband, and he didn’t think he could trust the people at Casterly Rock with this information. For now, he couldn’t reveal Bran’s and Rickon’s fates. Once Olly was gone, Jon thought about the words Ser Davos told him. *The shield that guards the realms of men.* Their vows talked about the *realms*, not the Realm. *You could see if this Tormund fellow is more willing to compromise than Mance ever was.* Stannis’s words joined those from Davos.

Chapter End Notes

The change starts to affect the Wall, though not too much yet. Jon is now the brother-in-law of the Lady of Casterly Rock, so his political weight is increasing in the Night's Watch.

Please review

Next chapter: Mira

For everyone interested, the first chapter of my second fanfic about Game of Thrones, "A Rose and a Lion", has been published.
Mira II

Chapter Notes

I always forget to do it, but I thank all of you who read this fic, left kudos or commented up to now. Special thanks to my recurrent commenters: Tativi, Adira+Das+Roy, AzraelGFG, CLH, iluqaqt, aeb, Veldari, wildhoneyfitri, ThamasD and many others. Your comments really help me and I enjoy discussing with you.

This fic took a size bigger than what I planned at the beginning. It's still a long way before it's over and I hope you'll enjoy it for a long time.

We go back to King's Landing. With this chapter I start a new subplot turning around Mira Forrester. I hope you'll like the storyline I'm creating for the only surviving member of House Forrester (well, only surviving member officially). It will involve original characters and a new house that will join the game.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

MIRA II

She was in the grove at Ironrath. Mira was playing with her sister and her brothers in it, hiding behind trees and trying to find them all. Rodrik. Asher. Talia. Ethan. Ryon. She looked everywhere in the grove, behind every tree, but she couldn’t find them. She went to look at each place a second time, then a third, but there was still nothing. She didn’t understand. She was normally very good at finding them all. In fact, she was always the better at this game. Perhaps they were playing her a trick and left the grove to let her search for them for the rest of the day. They were probably in the castle right now, laughing at her. Mira left the grove. She had to find them. She would find them.

When she arrived at the keep, she realized it was in ruins, entirely burned. There were still a few fires here and there. A few bodies laid on the ground, blood covering their faces, their bellies, their legs, their arms. Some wore the sigil of her family, others wore the sigil of House Whitehill. There were also people wearing all kinds of armor she only saw in books about Essos. And there were people without any protection. They were peasants. Some were old men. There were women and children among them. Some had been killed by a sword, others had arrows planted in their bodies. The portcullis was open and Mira could see there were bodies hanged before it from the battlements. She looked away. She couldn’t look at it. She had to find her family. Her parents, her sister, her brothers and her uncle. They had to be somewhere here. Surely one of them was still here.

Mira went inside the keep to see if she could find anyone. The Great Hall was in ruins, ironwood blackened by the fire, tables and chairs turned down. She took ashes from the floor in her hands and let it fall between her fingers. That was everything that was left from her home. The wall where the tapestry representing her family was hooked had been all destroyed, but after she searched the debris, she managed to find them all. The faces of all the members of her family. Once they were all joined together on the tapestry, but now it was in tatters and their faces were all separated. No one could see Mira reading with her mother, or Ethan playing music as Talia sang. They were all scattered now. Nothing linked them together anymore. Mira went to visit the rooms of all her kin, but they were all desert and in ruins too. Even her own had been ransacked and there wasn’t much left. The book of
her favourite northern tale, *Frozen*, was all gone because of the fire and only a part of the cover and the binding remained. Mira could still remember entire passages of the tale. If she wanted, she could have recited them without changing a single word.

Mira left the keep to search the courtyard. There was nothing alive to find here either. Only bodies and burned buildings. Mira saw again the feet of bodies hanging from the battlements before the portcullis. She didn’t want to go through the gate and look at them. She feared who they might be. She didn’t want to see them. *Iron from Ice*. The words of her family resonated in her head, but she didn’t believe in them in this moment. Ice wasn’t strong like iron. You could break it in several pieces very easily, just like they did with Mira’s family. Ice could also melt. She looked all around the courtyard, finding nothing. Finally she gave up and went under the gate and outside the enclosure of her family’s castle. She looked on the ground, averting her eyes from the bodies hanging above her. But once outside, she knew she had to look at them. She turned around, eyes still on the ground, then took a large inspiration and looked up.

She knew they would be there. But to know they were there and to see them there were two different things. Their faces were all rotten, their eyes eaten by the crows, mud and blood covering their bodies and their torn clothes. Her father and Rodrick were still clad in full armor. Her mother was only recognizable by the hair hanging from her head. Ethan still wore his daily clothes and Mira noticed a huge wound in his neck. That was probably where he was stabbed by the bastard of the Dreadfort. And she could recognize Ser Royland Degore, their master-at-arms, from his armor. Beside him was Maester Ortengryn, only distinctive thanks to his chain. Mira remained still for a moment, looking at the bodies with a noose around their necks. After a moment, she couldn’t hold it. She fell on her knees and cried. *Iron from Ice*. These words meant nothing. Iron couldn’t come out from ice. Ice wasn’t strong enough. Her family was dead. All dead. They had been murdered. She screamed and felt someone shaking her.

“Mira! Stop that! Wake up! Wake up!”

Mira opened her eyes. She wasn’t kneeling before the gate of Ironrath, but laying in her bed in King’s Landing. And the only person present was her friend Sera, shaking her by the shoulder. Mira’s breathing was fast, her cheeks and eyes wet by tears, her whole body shivering and sweating. Mira closed her eyes again and sobbed. She couldn’t be iron all the time. Right now, she simply couldn’t be strong.

“Mira. What’s going on? What do you have?”

Mira turned on her to face the side where her friend wasn’t, turning her back on Sera. How could she know? Sera had no family. She didn’t know what it was to lose everyone you loved and to be forced to continue as if everything was alright. During days, Mira maintained her armor, her mask of northern handmaiden that nothing could disrupt, thinking the less possible about her dead family. But when night came, she couldn’t escape them. Each time she fell asleep, she would dream about her home, about her parents, about her brothers, about her sister, about the people she knew at Ironrath. Only this time it had been too hard, to see people she loved in the state they were killed, hanged like criminals only because they did what was right and tried to defend their kin. Sera couldn’t understand how Mira felt, how she had to fight every day to not succumb to despair and hatred.

“Mira, tell me what you have.” She felt the mattress sinking where Sera sat. “You helped me in the past. I beg you, let me help you.”

“It’s only nightmares,” Mira said dismissively.

“I heard you cry and scream from the corridor. Please, Mira. Tell me what’s going on. I’m your friend, remember.”
Mira’s heartbeat steadied after some time. She didn’t turn to face Sera, tears still running on her cheeks. “I dreamed of my family.”

A silence followed. “Do you often dream of them?”

“Each night I see Ironrath, or someone I knew there. Only… this time I saw them, hanging before the gates. Their bodies all eaten by crows. They were butchered like animals.”

Mira closed her eyes again to let tears come out of her eyes. She could feel Sera’s presence next to her. Her friend put a hand on her shoulder. “I’m so sorry, Mira. I know it must be more than hard for you.”

Both remained in their respective positions for a while. Sera didn’t leave, and Mira slowly managed to dry her tears and stop her shaking. She finally sat in her bed, still panting a little. Sera was at her side, a hand still on her shoulder.

“It was just a dream,” Mira finally said.

“You never look like this during the day.”

“I wear an armor of courtesies like the Lady Sansa I guess.” Mira smiled weakly to her friend. “I stay occupied and I do my best to not think too much about this. But when night comes, I can’t help but think about them. It’s better this way. I can carry out my duties during the day, and I keep my feelings for the night when I’m not needed.”

“If you want, I can tell her Grace you don’t feel well. I’m sure she’ll allow you a day of rest.”

Mira shook her head, refusing Sera’s proposition. “No, I’m alright. I just need a few minutes. You can go, Sera. I’m fine.”

Sera rose from her place and went to the door. “I’ll see you in the afternoon.” Mira found herself alone in her chamber when Sera close the door. She got up from her bed, dressed for the day, and braided her hair in the Reach fashion. Despite the preparation her mother gave her at Ironrath, the change had been difficult for Mira when she had arrived at Highgarden. She was only thirteen when she arrived there, and everything made her different from everyone in the Reach. But Mira adapted. She embraced most of the culture of the Reach and earned a good place at Margaery’s side. Mira hadn’t forgotten the North, and she would never forget it, but it didn’t prevent her from adopting some usages of the south. After all, her mother sent her to Highgarden to learn the southern ways.

Mira thought about her dream of this night. Not all her family was hanged before the gate. Talia, Asher and Ryon weren’t there, no more than Duncan and his son Gared or her uncle Malcolm. Mira had received more news from the North since Lord Tyrion’s trial, and she knew more about the Battle of Ironrath, or at least the rumors about it. It was said that her mother died trying to stab Lord Whitehill with a dagger, and that Ludd Whitehill’s fourth son, Gryff, died from poison too. At least it was the official version the Whitehills gave, and Mira doubted greatly it was the true version. The Whitehill men she spoke with for the ironwood business seemed to say that her brother Asher killed many Whitehill men and fought like a savage beast. However, from the conversations she eavesdropped between the same men when they thought she wasn’t listening, Lord Whitehill’s daughter, Gwyn, disappeared not long after the battle, and Asher’s body was never found. Some said Lord Whitehill was cursing all day, yelling that his daughter betrayed him. If Asher was alive… if her dream was true… Talia and Ryon may have survived as well. And Duncan and Gared and Malcolm too perhaps.

Mira pushed these thoughts aside. Ironrath was entirely destroyed in the battle. Even if one or more
of her kin managed to escape, what was their chance to be still alive? She was clinging to the hope that she may not be the last Forrester alive, but she was alone now. She had to accept it. She was the only Forrester still alive. If the bodies of her brothers and her sister weren’t found, they were probably under rubble or unrecognizable, and they weren’t found for this reason. Mira banished thoughts about her family from her mind and went to perform her duties as the queen’s handmaiden.

On her way to the royal apartments, Mira crossed the path of a page she knew to be in service of the Hand of the King. “Lady Mira, Ser Kevan would like you to eat with him at noon in the Tower of the Hand.”

Mira was quite surprised by the request. She never took any meal with Ser Kevan Lannister. She had to meet him from time to time for the ironwood business and the rebuilding of the royal fleet, but their meetings were always quite short and rare, since Mira mostly dealt with Lord Tyrell, the Master of Ships, and Ser Harys Swyft, the new Master of Coin. But no matter the reason of this request, Mira had to comply. A request from the Hand of the King was an order, especially when the Hand was the man who really ruled the Seven Kingdoms.

“Tell Ser Kevan I’ll be there in time. It will be a pleasure for me.”

The page left to bring her answer to the knight. Mira resumed her way to the royal chambers her mistress and King Tommen now shared. When she entered, the young king was there playing with a cat on his knees. Tommen immediately rose from the floor where he sat in crossed legs position before the intruder.

“Lady Mira.” The boy smiled at her. Tommen was always happy to see one of Margaery’s handmaidens like he was happy to see Margaery. Mira curtsied.

“Your Grace.”

She then went to clean the royal rooms. Tommen was still present, but now he sat on the bed, still with his cat on his knees, cuddling him. The king loved cats. He was probably the first man who sat on the Iron Throne in centuries to love cats, and the first one in decades with good intentions. Mira hoped Queen Margaery would help him to become a good king. They were wed two weeks ago and Tommen looked happier than he had ever been. Mira assisted to the ceremony from the back of the Great Sept of Baelor and then attended her mistress the new queen during the feast that followed. It had been a much more pleasant wedding ceremony than the previous one. Tommen wasn’t mad or spoiled like his brother and acted like a true king for the whole time. There was no incident from the wedding in the sept to the end of the ceremony, including the bedding, except a short moment when Tommen had difficulty to swallow a piece of meat and people feared there could be another poisoning, but Ser Boros Blount was assigned to taste everything the king would eat and drink before him. Anyway, Mira didn’t think someone in the capital had an interest in poisoning Tommen. He wasn’t a monster like Joffrey, so the Tyrells had all interests to keep him alive, and he was their best chance to have a prominent role in the government of the Seven Kingdoms.

Margaery seemed to enjoy her marriage so far. Not that she loved Tommen, Mira knew her mistress better, but she didn’t hate him and saw him as a kind young man. Margaery mostly enjoyed being queen more than she enjoyed being Tommen’s wife. She loved her new situation and often joked with her friends about how enthusiastic Tommen was in bed. She said that very soon, Lady Olenna Tyrell would be a great-grandmother. All in all, this was a much happier marriage than the one Mira’s mistress would have if Joffrey was still alive.

As she was cleaning, the king asked her something. “Lady Mira, may I ask you a question?”

Mira smiled at this and stopped her work. “Your Grace, you are the king. Of course you can. In fact,
I’m the one who can’t refuse to answer your questions, whatever they are.”

Tommen chuckled nervously. “Sorry. I still find it hard to believe I am the king. I’m not used to all this. Margaery says I’ll get used to it with time.” Mira remained still, waiting for the question to come, but it took some time to Tommen to ask it. He seemed to realize something after a while. “Oh, the question. Yes. What does Margaery really like? What does she like above all? I’ve been trying to think about something very great I could do for her these last days, but I want to give her something she would really love more than anything else. What would you suggest to me?”

Mira thought about it for a moment. “Well, your Grace, Queen Margaery loves flowers. There are many beautiful gardens in Highgarden, but there are many specimens of flowers that are missing there. Perhaps you could create a garden here in King’s Landing with all the flowers we can find all over the Seven Kingdoms. I’m sure the queen would like it very much. She would spend a lot of good time with her friends in them.”

Tommen smiled after a moment when he seemed to be thinking about the idea. “Yes, that’s a good idea. That’s what I’m going to do.”

“You could also ask the queen to bring you for a visit at Highgarden. I’m sure she would be more than pleased to show you the place where she was born.”

“Yes, I’d like to visit Highgarden, but Ser Kevan believes first I must learn to be king and stay for some time.”

“He may not be wrong. Ser Kevan is a cautious and good man. He’s wise.”

“I want to be wise too. I don’t want to end up like Joffrey.”

Mira didn’t know if he meant he didn’t want to end cruel like his brother was, or if he meant he didn’t want to end up poisoned. “I’m sure you won’t, your Grace.” Mira smiled fondly at the king as she said that. She went back to her work but Tommen kept asking questions as she carried on her duties.

“Lady Mira, do you think Ser Pounce would like Highgarden?”

“I guess he would. There are a few cats in Highgarden. The queen and her friends loved to play with them.”

“I think he would like it more than King’s Landing. Joffrey didn’t like him. He once told me he would skin Ser Pounce alive, then mix his innards with my food so I wouldn’t know I was eating him.” Tommen stopped to speak for a moment. “I shouldn’t be happy about Joffrey’s death, and I don’t think I am, not really. But I don’t regret his death. And Margaery doesn’t regret it either. My brother scared me. And I think he scared her too. He wasn’t a good king, and he wasn’t a good brother either.”

Mira stopped her work. Tommen didn’t know how dangerous it was to say these things. She turned to face him. “You know, your Grace, my father exiled one of my brothers one day.”

The king looked at her in utter surprise. “Really?”

“Yes. He killed people. My father chose to exile him instead of facing a war with another house. But despite what he did, he was still my brother.” The story Mira told wasn’t the entire truth, but there was enough truth in it for Tommen to understand what she meant.

The king nodded. “Yes, you’re right. Joffrey was my brother too, even with everything he did. It
was horrible for him to die this way.” The way my family was slaughtered was horrible as well.

“How were your brothers? Were they kind with you?”

Memories that were at the same time beautiful and painful came back to Mira’s mind. “Rodrik was my eldest brother. He used to suggest me books to read and to advise me too when I was at Highgarden in his messages. He grew a little distant during the last years I spent in Ironrath because he started to train to be Lord of Ironrath. But he was always kind with me and all his brothers and sisters. My brother Asher was more the big brother who always wanted to defend us all. Whenever he saw one of us mistreated, he came to fight for us, no matter the consequences. Ethan was always a very good boy, playing and singing with my sister Talia. We all loved listening to them. As for Ryon, he was only a baby when I left my home, but I know he was a very sweet boy. They were all very good people.”

They both remained silent for a moment. “I wish Joffrey had been like one of your brothers. Instead he only mocked me, and laughed at me, and threatened me. He wasn’t kind.”

Mira went back to cleaning the room. When she was done, she felt something soft rubbing against her legs. She looked at the bottom of her gown and saw Tommen’s cat turning around her.

“That means he likes you. He likes Margaery too. Perhaps there’s a link.” Mira smiled and took the cat into her arms, bringing him to the king.

“He should be with your Grace.” She released the cat on the bed and he went on Tommen’s knees. “Do you have need of me, your Grace?”

“No, it’s alright. You may leave.” Mira went away, but Tommen told her one last thing before she left the royal apartments. “Lady Mira, and Margaery, we’ll do everything to give you back Ironrath. Your family didn’t deserve what happened to them. It should never have happened.”

“Thank you, your Grace.”

Mira curtsied one last time and left. Thoughts about her family filled her head as she went to the queen’s solar. Her discussion with Tommen revived her memories about them. She spent the rest of the morning helping her mistress writing letters to various people through all the Seven Kingdoms. Queen Margaery already had a lot of writing to do before she was queen, and now she had even more. When time for the midday meal came, Mira excused herself and went to the Tower of the Hand where Ser Kevan was waiting for her.

“Lady Mira.”

“Ser Kevan.”

“Please sit. The servants will bring us food very soon.” They took place at a table in Ser Kevan’s solar. Mira knew the Hand of the King only moved in the Hand’s apartments recently, many months after he assumed the office. “I do hope you appreciate your stay in the capital, Lady Mira.”

“It’s been more than a year that I’ve been here. I have enjoyed it so far, except when Lannister guards were bribed to arrest and execute me.”

Ser Kevan nodded. “A regrettable accident. What about the queen? I hope my granddaughter-in-law is pleased with her marriage.”

“Of course, she is. She loves the king very much.”

“I have no doubt about it.”
The servants came in with the plates at this moment. Ser Kevan had spoken with a casual voice, not showing much emotion. He wasn’t an emotional man who would pity situations, but he wasn’t cold either. Overall, he was a pragmatic man with a logic mind who tried to rule the Realm the best he could, which was no small feat. They started to eat. They made a few comments on the food and a short discussion followed about the rebuilding of the royal fleet and the ironwood the Whitehills sent. Ser Kevan said Ser Harys was very pleased with the low price of the materials, but that Mace Tyrell was very displeased with the bad quality of it. Mira had to repeat to him, like always, that the Whitehills were the ones to cut ironwood with inappropriate and obsolete methods. Before they were done with the main course, Mira decided to step forward.

“Ser Kevan, please excuse me if I am so straight, but why did you want to speak to me?”

The Hand of the King took a sip of wine. “Lady Mira, the rebuilding of the royal fleet revealed that the Whitehills are unable to provide us with ironwood of good quality. Only your family had the secret of how to work this material, and the Whitehills seem more eager to destroy the ironwood forests than to give us what we need. Hence, we need to find a solution to this problem, and this solution can only be reached through you since you are the last Forrester.”

“What are you suggesting?” Mira hoped it was what she believed.

“I think it’s time for a Forrester to be in Ironrath once more. Would you be able to provide us with enough ironwood of good quality if you were reinstated at the head of your family’s lands?”

That was much more than Mira hoped. “You would give me Ironrath?”

“If this can help you to re-establish the appropriate harvesting of ironwood, then yes.”

Mira answered very carefully. “That would be possible. Many craftsmen and woodsmen in my family’s service are probably still alive, but the Whitehills don’t use their skills like they should. I could manage to have them harvest ironwood in a durable way, but for that I would need to be granted the lands that belonged to my family before the war as well, or else the Whitehills will destroy these forests.”

“According to my information, my lady, your family still has half its territory from before the war. This a decision of the Warden of the North.”

“This decision is not respected, my Lord Hand. The Whitehills are destroying the forests everywhere. Whether the Boltons granted them these territories or not isn’t relevant. They cut all the territory that once belonged to House Forrester. They won’t respect a decree from the king, and not even from Lord Bolton. They will raze the forests. Unless you send someone with enough men to prevent them from doing so.”

Kevan Lannister looked at her very long. “In fact, Lady Mira, I was planning something else. I want you back at Ironrath to make sure ironwood still exists in ten years, but not to rule it on your own.” Mira frowned. What did he mean? “House Whitehill and House Forrester have been in war for centuries. It is time to put an end to this.”

“What are you suggesting?” Mira’s heart was beating quickly.

“Before Ironrath was burned to the ground, Lord Whitehill had accepted to unite his house to yours through a marriage between his daughter and Lord Asher Forrester, your brother. The wedding ceremony didn’t go as planned and this ended with the destruction of your home. Who was responsible for this butchery is irrelevant for now. It is still possible to unite your two houses.”
Mira needed some time before she could croak a reaction to this. “Ser Kevan. You don’t mean…”

“Lord Whitehill had five children. Among them he had four sons. The elder died of greyscale many years ago and the second is a maester. The fourth died at the Battle of Ironrath, but he still has one last son, Torrhen Whitehill, who is his heir. I have proposed Lord Whitehill a marriage between you and this young man. Ludd Whitehill would remain Lord of Highpoint, while you and his son would rebuild Ironrath. He would rebuild your home, and you would force the Whitehills in return to work ironwood in proper ways.”

“Ser Kevan, I cannot marry a Whitehill.” Mira’s voice wasn’t without disgust.

“You’re not married, Lady Mira. Nothing prevents you from marrying this man.”

“The Whitehills slaughtered my family and burned Ironrath. It would be the same as to force a Stark to marry a Bolton, or a Lannister to marry a Tarbeck.”

“We’re not talking about the Starks or the Lannisters, Lady Mira. And from what I heard, it is your mother who tried to kill Lord Whitehill with a knife during the wedding that ended in slaughter. To mend the injuries between your two families and re-establish the business of ironwood, this is the best course of action.”

Ser Kevan spoke on a firm tone without emotion. Mira couldn’t believe he didn’t realize what he was doing. “The Whitehills hate the Forresters, ser. As soon as they will have enough children from me to have Whitehills both at Ironrath and Highpoint, they will probably kill me. Anyway, Lord Whitehill is a spiteful man. His fourth son Gryff died at Ironrath. He will never forget that. He will probably refuse to organize such a marriage. He will want to destroy my house to the roots and will never accept a Forrester in his family.”

Ser Kevan pursed his lips. “You use the word probably quite often, Lady Mira. I already sent the proposition to Lord Ludd Whitehill. We’ll see what he thinks about that. I merely wanted to inform you about this so you may not be surprised if the answer was positive when it arrived, and it is because I am thankful you helped us with the royal fleet. I know you are loyal to your family, but you also stated many times you were loyal to the Crown. This is the time to prove it by bringing peace between two houses who never stopped to fight for decades and by making sure ironwood will still be available in the future. And you could go back to your home and see Ironrath restored. I would see it as an opportunity if I were you.”

The rest of the meal was mostly spent in silence, only a few words being exchanged. Mira finally took her leave once it was over and went back to Margaery’s solar. The queen was preparing other charity works for orphanages, septs and houses for cripples and sick people. Mira did the work the queen asked from her, but she was absentminded at the same time, thinking about the wedding Kevan Lannister talked about. She didn’t want to marry a Whitehill. She wouldn’t let them put their hands on Ironrath. The simple thought to share her bed with a Whitehill filled her heart with disgust and revulsion.

Near the end of the afternoon, Margaery decided to take a walk in the gardens and asked Mira to accompany her. The handmaiden complied, but without much enthusiasm. She followed her mistress to the gardens where they walked arm under arm. Mira had absolutely no problems with the other people in King’s Landing now. She had been a witness in a trial that cleared the current Lord of the Westerlands, and acted as handmaiden in service of the Lady of Casterly Rock and Winterfell before she came back into the service of the future queen, then the queen. For now everyone respected her, at least in appearance. Mira knew she had to be careful about appearances here in King’s Landing. Things were never what they looked like. But now she had the trust, the support and the friendship of the queen, so her situation was quite good. She was safe here for the time being, but she wouldn’t
be safe any longer once she would leave the capital to marry Torrhen Whitehill.

The queen and her handmaiden walked among parquets of flowers in the waning of the sun. Margaery greeted everyone they met on their way. Mira had admired Margaery very soon for her ability to put people on her side with courtesies, smiles, words and good manners. She didn’t necessarily command the respect, but she instigated love and friendship to the other people, which was a much better way than threats to remain in power.

“You look strange today, Mira. I never saw you talk so little and in a dark mood like this since the Red Wedding. And you were distracted just now.”

“Sorry, your Grace. I had nightmares last night. I apologize if I’m not of good company today.”

“No need to apologize. Sera told me about your dreams.” Mira looked at the queen to meet compassion. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“No. Thank you, your Grace.” They resumed their silent walk for a time. “I think the king is preparing a surprise for you.”

“Really?” Margaery smiled at this. “I wonder what it will be this time. He already covers me with gifts every day.” The queen stopped to pick a rose among the many there were on their left. She handed it to Mira. “You used to like this place before, just like you loved Highgarden.”

Mira took the rose Margaery gave her. “I still love it, your Grace. Believe me. Only it’s hard for me to appreciate the things I love like I did before.”

Margaery nodded. “I understand.” They arrived at a corner with pillars, benches and many bushes of rare flowers. Margaery sat on a bench and Mira joined her. The queen inhaled and exhaled deeply. “I miss Highgarden. I wish we could go back there. I think we all miss our home.”

Margaery was looking at her with a sorry look. Mira knew Margaery’s expression didn’t always show her true feelings, but she knew her mistress was sincere when she talked about how sorry she was for her family. Mira could only nod to approve. “I do. And I do miss Highgarden as well.”

Margaery nodded sadly. “We’ll go back there one day. And I’m sure we’ll find a way to give you back your home too. Not now, but someday that will be possible, I’m sure.”

It would be better for Mira to tell her. “In fact, your Grace, your husband already told me this morning you would both do everything to give me back Ironrath.”

“Really?” Margaery asked it with an amused curiosity.

“And I suggested he could accompany you to Highgarden.”

Margaery chuckled. “The king has taken a liking on you. He talks to you more than to any other servant.”

“He’s always the one to start conversations. I didn’t ask him anything, your Grace.”

“You do well. If you need something, just ask me, Mira. I’m the better one placed to influence Tommen. But by the way, you talked to him this morning?”

“Like I just told you, your Grace.”

“Then what is the surprise he’s preparing for me?” Margaery looked at Mira with a mischievous
smile.

“He only asked me what you like.”

“What did you answer?”

Mira allowed herself to smile the same way Margaery did. “I cannot betray the king’s secrets.”

“And I thought you once said you were loyal to me, and in front of Cersei furthermore.”

“And I said your interests and those of the king were the same. If the king’s interests are to hide you a surprise, then it is in your interest to not know about the surprise.”

Both of them laughed at this. The queen put a hand on Mira’s. “That’s the handmaiden and the friend I like. Lord Tyrion was right when he said you were the most dangerous handmaiden in all of King’s Landing. Let’s go back to my solar.”

The queen rose and started to leave the circle of pillars. Suddenly, an idea crossed Mira’s mind. *If you need something, just ask me, Mira.* She rose from the bench as well but remained behind Margaery. “Your Grace. I would have a request to ask you.”

The queen slowly turned on herself to face Mira again. “You have something to ask from me?”

“Yes, your Grace.”

Margaery approached her with a dubious and hesitating face. “The last time you asked something from me, it didn’t end quite well.”

Mira averted her eyes and nodded sadly. “I know. And I think we both regret it.”

“Indeed. What is it?”

The queen and the king were the only ones who could help Mira in this matter. She had no choice. “This is not something you’d expect from me, you Grace. And myself, I didn’t think I would ask it from you anytime soon.”

When Mira stated her request, Margaery displayed a complete surprise that Mira never saw on her face. Mira had been right. Margaery would never have expected such a request.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Arya (a new character appears)
The carriage bumped all the time as it moved forward on the road. Arya was tired by this trip. She had to stay in this stupid little house on four wheels that moved all the time. She didn’t have the right to go out, except to make water. Arya was bored like hell about all this. And the worst in all that, she had to share a part of her days in this carriage with the man she hated the most in the world right now.

“Where are we going?”

“Somewhere there is someone you want to kill,” he answered.

No need to go anywhere to have someone I want to kill near me. You are close to me all day. She had asked the same question to Littlefinger every day since they left the Eyrie, and every day she received the same answer. She knew it was useless to ask the question, but better that than to remain silent all day doing nothing. And yet, she spent most of her days sitting in that damn carriage doing nothing, seldom speaking to her gaoler.

About a week after her meeting with the Lords of the Vale, Littlefinger had entered her chamber cell. Apparently, the Lords of the Vale argued and discussed for days about what to do with her. Some of them were pleading for her execution since she killed the Lady of the Vale and Ser Lyn Corbray. His brother, Ser Vance, was probably among them. Some also suggested they should deliver her to the Lannisters to prove their loyalty and let them deal with her. However, for all the lords and knights who proposed these solutions, an equal number thought they had to protect her, if only in memory of her father who had been like a son for their late Lord Jon Arryn. Some also supported Lysa Arryn’s death was probably an accident or that Arya was defending herself when she pushed her through the Moon Door. After much arguing and discussion, they finally reached a compromise. Arya wouldn’t stay in the Eyrie, and would have to be the farthest possible from Lord Robin Arryn, but she would stay in the Vale. She wouldn’t be handed to the Lannisters or any of their allies, and the Lords of the Vale would keep the secret of her existence and her presence in the Vale of Arryn. She would be kept at the Fingers, in the keep of House Baelish, an isolated place where no one would think to look for her. Lord Petyr Baelish would ensure her safety like he did in the Eyrie.

That was a few weeks ago. They had left not long after. Arya finally managed to leave the Eyrie. Only, she was a prisoner again from the same man. She couldn’t leave this carriage, in day or in night. She had no weapon and no way to escape. And since she wore a dress ever since she arrived at the Eyrie, she wasn’t clad in clothes that would help her to get far away from this horrible smirk. Days were even more insufferable than in the Eyrie. Arya couldn’t find a way to break out. She found no weakness in the watch of the guards around the carriage. They were even standing next to
her when she would make water, only a few feet from her.

When she spoke to Littlefinger because she was bored, she tried to grab some information about him and where they were going. He was very cryptic. Once she asked him what he wanted and he answered with a single word. *Everything.* She couldn’t decipher his true intentions, but she knew she couldn’t trust this man at all and that he only wanted to use her, just like he used her father. He would betray her at the first occasion. She needed to escape. She tried to have information about his keep so she may try an escape once they would be there, but he didn’t give her much to think about.

Arya didn’t see much of the roads they travelled, but she realized very soon they weren’t in the Vale anymore. They were crossing territories of the Riverlands. She recognized a watercourse that looked like the Trident, and another like the Green Fork, and many other places she explored with Mycah while they travelled south to King’s Landing. Soon she realized they were following the Kingsroad, and they were going north, not south. That was strange. If Littlefinger wanted to deliver her to the Lannisters, which would be very logical, they would head south. Once she tried to know why they were going north, nearly bursting to the man, but again he only gave her cryptic answers.

The carriage stopped suddenly. The thin man smiled wickedly. “I guess we arrived. There is something I want to show you.”

He opened the door of the carriage and invited her to come out. Arya didn’t need to be asked. She spent so much time confined between the walls of this wheeling house that she would give her soul for breathing fresh air only for a few minutes without the excuse of making water.

Arya was escorted by four guards who surrounded her to the top of a hill. The air was damp and moist. She knew this smell. She smelled it during the last days. They were in the Neck, following carefully the Kingsroad to the north. Looking far before her, she could see the ruins of Moat Cailin. She stayed there with her father, Sansa, Jory and many others along with the king, Cersei, Joffrey and their retinue on their way south. Arya turned to Littlefinger who now stood next to her, but with a guard between them.

“Why did you bring me here? Why are we going in the North? Where are we going?”

She was tired of cryptic answers. For once, the man who betrayed her father accepted to be sincere. “I’m bringing you back to your home. At Winterfell.”

Arya sneered. “Winterfell was destroyed.”

“It was, but not anymore. Roose Bolton took residence in it and started to rebuild it. Your home will soon return to its former glory.”

Arya was furious the Boltons were now living in her family’s home. Roose Bolton killed Robb and now he occupied Winterfell. She wanted to rip his heart apart. “This is not his. Winterfell belongs to my family. To the Starks.”

“I agree. And this is why Lord Bolton accepted my marriage proposal.”

He smiled wickedly at her again. “What do you mean?”

“Roose Bolton needs a Stark in Winterfell to strengthen his hold on the North. And for that, there is no better way than marrying a Stark to a Bolton.”

Arya realized what he meant. “I’ll never marry him. He killed my brother. He betrayed my family.”

“You’re not going to marry Roose Bolton,” he said calmly. “You’re going to marry his son, Ramsay.
You want to kill Roose Bolton. And I want him dead too. However, this time you’ll need to be more subtle. You’ll have to gain the trust of the Boltons, and especially of your future husband, and when the Lord of the Dreadfort won’t be expecting it, you’ll stab him in the back.”

“They will kill me immediately. I won’t have any chance to escape.”

“Yes, you will. Stannis Baratheon has an army at Castleblack where your half-brother is. He means to take the North. He has larger forces than Roose Bolton and is a seasoned battle commander. He will defeat the Boltons. You will have the opportunity then to avenge your brother. And Stannis will name you Wardeness of the North at the same time. You’ll get your home back.”

“I won’t marry a Bolton. Never!” Arya shouted. She wouldn’t marry a traitor, or a traitor’s son, or anyone. She wasn’t a lady. She wasn’t Sansa.

“Stop to cry like a child. You want to avenge your brother. Avenge him. And seize the power that belongs to you and your family. There is no justice in this world. Not unless we make it. Make your justice.”

They stayed there, eyeing each other for a long time. “I hate you!” Arya walked away in a furious pace, going back into the carriage. She wouldn’t be able to escape, so there was no use trying to. She got back to her place in her wheeling prison. After a moment, they resumed their path. They entered Moat Cailin about fifteen minutes later and Arya was led to a chamber where one of Littlefinger’s men stood guard before her door. They were all knights and sellswords he paid handsomely.

Arya was brought her dinner in her chamber, with only a spoon and her fingers to eat it and a towel to dry her hands once she was done. They didn’t even dare to give her a fork or a knife in fear she might use it. And they were right. She would use it against them. Arya recited her list again before she went to bed this night. Cersei. Walder Frey. Roose Bolton. Black Walder. Meryn Trant. The Red Woman. Beric Dondarrion. Thoros of Myr. Ilyn Payne. Littlefinger. The Imp.

Arya went to sleep in the ragged covers and blankets on her wooden bed. Everything was in bad state here at Moat Cailin, but it was no worse to what she was used to. She didn’t fall asleep, but she controlled her breathing so the guard may think she was sleeping. He would be less on his guard if he thought she was sleeping. She had to escape now, and for real. She couldn’t continue her road north. Littlefinger was using her, lying to her, just like he lied to her father. She couldn’t stay with him or his men, and she couldn’t go to Winterfell. She would never marry Roose Bolton’s son. She would get justice and revenge for her family, but not by following Littlefinger’s schemes. She would kill him one day. But not this night. This night she would escape. And she had an idea where she would go once she would be outside Moat Cailin. They were in the Neck after all.

She was no longer confined in the carriage. That meant she could find a way to escape. She would have to get rid of the guard on the other side of her door first. But how to do it without a weapon? She missed Needle more than ever. Arya silently sat in her bed and started to look around for something that could be used as a weapon. There wasn’t much except a table, a chair and the bed she sat in. Everything was in wood.

By observing attentively the headboard of her bed, Arya noticed a piece of wood that separated from it. She started to pull it, very slowly to make no noise. After a few minutes, the piece detached from the bed. It was sharp. She had her weapon.

Arya began by cutting the bottom of her dress until it reached only the bottom of her thighs. She would be able to move more swiftly this way. She wished she wore breeches. In the water, the absence of clothes around her legs would make it colder. It took her some time with only a sharp piece of wood to cut it. Once she was done with it, she went silently to the door and knocked on it
very quietly, as if she just woke up.

“Go back to your bed, girl,” the guard grumbled to her with a sleeping voice. That was good. His reflexes would be slower. Arya held tightly the piece of wood in her left hand.

“I need to make water.”

“You’ll make it tomorrow.”

“Then I’ll tell Lord Baelish you slept while guarding me.”

The man grunted. “Alright.” He opened the door very lazily. Arya waited out of sight. All the candles were extinguished. He wouldn’t see anything. “You could have asked befo…”

Arya didn’t let him finish his sentence. The sharp point of the wood pierced the man’s throat without problem as Arya managed to push the knight to the wall so he may not fall loudly on the floor, but rather slowly slip along the wall. The knight tried to make a sound, but only a strange gargle went out of his mouth that was already filled with blood. To be sure he wouldn’t alert the others, Arya put a firm hand on his mouth, and soon, the man was dead. Arya had blood on her hands and her clothes but it didn’t matter, as long as she wasn’t captured.

Arya went to look outside in the corridor. There was no one. She knew there were exactly fourteen men, both knights and sellswords, who protected and guarded her on the road. She managed to identify and count them through the times she made water outside the carriage. One was dead, but thirteen others were left, and she had to add Littlefinger, though she doubted he was any warrior. Anyway, she wouldn’t be able to kill all of them discreetly, and Littlefinger was probably guarded by more than one man right now. She couldn’t kill him. She would have to wait for that. Her priority and sole objective for now was to escape Moat Cailin. She took the dagger from the dean man’s body. That would make a much better weapon, but she kept the piece of wood. Better to have two weapons than only one. She left her chamber and closed it silently with the dead man still inside. They would need some time to discover his death.

Arya travelled through the corridors, quiet as a shadow. She crossed no one’s path. Most of the men were probably sleeping by now. All the same, she took all necessary precautions for no one to notice her, walking quickly but without a sound, making sure she took another path than the one they used to bring her to her chambers. She had explored Moat Cailin the first time she stayed there, and she knew the place better than anyone else here. She finally reached the courtyard. There were three guards there, two before the main entrance, the only exit, and one before the corridor from which they led her to her chamber. That would be a problem. Arya couldn’t kill all these men only with a dagger and a piece of wood. She could take one, perhaps two, but she wouldn’t be able to kill the three of them. And one would sound the alarm before she could deal with him even if she managed to get rid of all of them.

Arya was stuck. She couldn’t go back to her chamber, not with the body she left behind. She had to escape, and now. She remained in the shadows, unseen by the three men. She needed to get at least one of them away, preferably the one guarding the corridor. Then she could take care of the two others with her two weapons. But Arya couldn’t find a way to distract the third man. And anyway, she couldn’t be sure she would be able to deal with the two men who would be left.

She thought about the battlements. She could climb on it. There were two men on them, separated from each other by a long distance. The battlements weren’t too high. She could jump from it and survive. Though she would probably break some part of her body. Unless she rolled on her back. The battlements weren’t entirely straight. There was a slight slope. That was her best chance. But she knew what she would have to do once on the ground. Run. And run very fast. In fact, she had to run
fast right now.

Arya prepared herself, took a great deep breath, then jumped like a cat to the stairs leading up to the battlements, not taking time to look at the reaction of the guards. She had reached the top of the battlements when the first guard shouted after her. One of the two men guarding the battlements was in her way as she crossed them. She planted the dagger in a joint of his armor between his shoulder and his arm. He screamed. Now everyone would know she escaped. Arya abandoned her two weapons, climbed the fortifications and rolled on the palisade.

The slope was very thin. Arya landed on her back as if she fell. However, she fell on soft grass and swamps. It hurt, but she had nothing broken. She ran very quickly in the direction she believed to be south. She had to get far away from this place immediately. She ran on the Kingsroad, but after some time, she heard sounds of horses getting closer and closer on her, and men yelling. Arya turned right, abandoned the Kingsroad and sank into the swamps, advancing much slower than before in the cold water.

She did right by cutting her dress, or else she wouldn’t have been able to run and would probably fall face first into the water. She heard the men behind her dismounting and recognized the voice of Littlefinger.

“Get her! Take her back!”

“We can’t go. There are lizard-lions and snakes in these waters.”

“I'll give ten times what I'm already paying you to the man who brings her back alive?”

Arya heard splashes in the water behind her as men jumped into the swamps. She heard their growls and curses as they advanced with a lot of trouble, slowed by their armors and weapons. They couldn’t bring their horses in the swamps. They were too afraid. The water got higher and higher around Arya and she had to be more careful. Her advance started to lower as she looked behind her more frequently. At some point she was nearly swimming. It was a chance they had hot pools in Winterfell where she had learned to swim.

She didn’t know how much time they chased her, but she was getting tired, and so they were from what she could see behind her. She approached a clod of earth and climbed on it. All of a sudden, she found herself held by two pairs of arms. She struggled to get free, managing to release her feet before she released her hands by punching and kicking blindly. She jumped into the water and swam away. She thought she heard bows bending and arrows released. When she looked behind her again, she saw no one was following her. Where were Littlefinger’s men? And the men on the clod who tried to seize her?

“Who are you?”

She had swam again for some time when someone called for her. She looked on her right where the voice came from and saw a little boat with four men inside. Arya tried to get away, but she didn’t succeed. Again arms grabbed her out of the water into the boat. She struggled again for some time, but finally she realized it was futile.

“Who are you?” the same man repeated again. “Why were these men chasing you? And what did you do in the swamps? There are very dangerous animals in these waters. We must never swim there. You could have died.”

These men were smaller than all those Arya ever saw, but they were men fully grown, not children. Their beards gave away their age. She realized who they were.
“You’re crannogmen.”

“We are. And who are you?” the man who seemed the leader of the group asked again.

“I need to speak with Lord Howland Reed.”

The four men looked at each other in confusion. “Why would you want to speak with him?”

“My father was a good friend of him. They fought in wars together. I need his help.”

Arya couldn’t reveal her identity right now. Howland Reed was a great friend of her father. He once told Arya and her brothers and sister that he saved his life during the war. That was her plan as soon as she decided to escape Littlefinger. If there was someone who would be ready to help her, that would be Howland Reed, and no one would be able to find her at Greywater Watch. But first she had to go to this moving castle, and she wouldn’t reveal who she was until she was before her father’s friend. Some crannogman could decide to sell her out. She would only trust Howland Reed, and no one else.

“Who are you?” the leader of the group asked her again.

“I’ll only tell my name before Howland Reed,” Arya replied.

“We cannot just bring a girl to Lord Reed because she claims her father knew him,” another man argued.

“Aye, it’s true,” another added. “How can we trust her? And anyway, Lord Reed would laugh at our face if we simply brought a girl from nowhere before him.”

The leader of the group was older than his three companions. He looked at Arya with piercing eyes. He didn’t seem to notice the argument between his fellows.

“I’ll bring her,” the older man finally said. “I had to go to Greywater Watch very soon anyway.”

“But, Aran…”

“It will be alright, Rickard. Lord Reed will decide what to do of this girl if she really is who she pretends to be. He’s the best to judge about it.”

They rowed for about fifteen minutes afterwards before they reached what looked like a small village. On the way, she learned Littlefinger’s men following her were killed with arrows by the crannogmen when they tried to attack them. Arya realized as they approached that the village was floating. It was built upon a crannog, one of the floating islands the people of the Neck lived on. It was difficult to see, but it seemed it was made of some drift of wood, leaves and plants. Arya recognized a few of these plants she observed with Mycah as they traveled through the Neck the first time. When landed on the crannog, Arya noticed there was earth on it as well. She followed the chief of the men, the one called Aran, to a simple wooden house. It was no different from the other half-dozen habitations there were in this place.

Aran led her to a place where she could sleep, saying they would leave for Greywater Watch early in the morning. Arya could sleep a few hours before she was awaken by a shaking of her shoulders.

“Come, we leave for Greywater Watch.”

Arya complied and followed the man to the boats. But as they walked, he told her something he never expected.
“I’m surprised to find a Stark in the Neck.” Arya looked back at him, surprised her too. “Don’t worry, I’m the only one who noticed it. The brown hair and the grey eyes, they don’t lie. I fought alongside Lord Reed during Robert’s Rebellion. I’ll bring you to him. You don’t have to worry.”

Arya nodded. He knew she was a Stark, but not which one. Perhaps he thought she was Sansa, because everyone believed Arya was dead. They embarked a boat similar to the one they arrived in and left at daybreak.

They needed more than a week to get to Greywater Watch. Apparently, the castle was built upon a crannog like all other habitations in the Neck, and it always moved, so they had to ask to other people hunting aboard small boats and to stop in villages they encountered in order to know where the castle was right now. Aran did most of the talking. He had three other men with him, different from those he was with when he found Arya. They were all small, not exceeding Arya’s height. They spent most of their days rowing. It was tiresome, but Arya was happy to finally have something to do, and to be in the open air. She also wore better clothes now. Aran gave her some clothes crannogmen wore daily so people wouldn’t realize she wasn’t from the Neck. They were better to move than the gowns and dresses she had to wear since the day she arrived at the Eyrie. She realized from their meetings with hunters and villagers that women were hunting as much as men and wore approximately the same outfits. Arya liked that. Here she didn’t have to behave like a lady.

When they reached Greywater Watch, she saw a huge castle made of wood moving on a crannog like every house and building they encountered up to now in the swamps. This building was higher however, though far less than all the other castles Arya ever saw. And it was entirely made of wood from what she could tell. There were battlements, but weakly manned. Arya only counted about three men on them. They landed on rudimentary wharves and disembarked.

The narrow path leading to the gates of the castle forced the five of them to walk one behind the other. Two people couldn’t walk side by side with such a thin causeway. Two men stood guards before the entrance gate with spears.

“Lord Fenn. Welcome to Greywater Watch,” one of the guards saluted them. Arya needed some time to understand. Aran was at the head of their group. The guard bowed before him. This man was a lord. Arya didn’t expect a lord to live in a small village. Perhaps things were really different among crannogmen. Lords lived among their people, not in castles. Except Howland Reed perhaps.

“Thank you,” Lord Aran Fenn replied. “I have business with Lord Reed.”

“Of course. He was expecting you soon. You may enter.”

The doors opened and they got in without problem. No one asked about Arya or seemed to notice her. They travelled through short corridors where wood got along with moss. They barely needed two minutes to reach what looked like a hall. It was much smaller than the Great Hall of Winterfell and the one in King’s Landing. In fact, when five hundred people could sit in the Great Hall of Winterfell, Arya estimated this one could probably hold at most a hundred people if they were squeezed enough and if they had enough benches and tables.

There was a man sitting in a simple throne made of oak with moss and flowers on it. He was small, like all the crannogmen, with a beard and brown hair. He wasn’t old, but not young either. He was probably about the same age than Arya’s father. Aran led their group before the man who was probably Howland Reed. He bent his knee and the others did the same. Arya followed them.

“Lord Reed,” Aran said as he knelt.

“Lord Fenn. You may rise, Aran, and all your friends too. The hospitality of Greywater Watch is
Howland Reed had a pleasant and grave voice. It was sad, but not threatening. Just like his face. She didn’t see any happiness in it, but there was no anger or threat either.

“Lord Reed,” Aran advanced. “During our patrol near Moat Cailin, we ran into a young girl who was being chased by a few men in armor. They had blue sigils with an eagle on them.”

Howland Reed’s gaze turned perplexed. “House Arryn? What were men of the Vale doing in the Neck?”

“We don’t know, my lord. We dealt with the men when they threatened to kill us, but the girl refused to tell anything but to you. She said her father was a friend of you.”

Aran stepped aside and turned his eyes to Arya. She advanced. “Lord Reed. My name is Arya Stark. My father told me you were friends.”

Howland Reed showed a lot of surprise at the revelation of her name. He was obviously agape. She heard gasps of surprise behind her as well from the three men accompanying Aran who didn’t know she was a Stark. Howland Reed got up from his throne and descended the low platform where he stood. He was about the same height than Arya and looked at her without blinking.

“Aran, take your men and leave us alone.”

Aran left with his three men on the lord’s command and Arya found herself alone with her father’s friend. There was no one else in the hall. He continued to study her for a long moment. Arya started to get uncomfortable about it.

“You were my father’s friend?” Arya asked. Howland seemed to find back some of his mind.

“Yes. I heard what happened to him. That was horrible. I’m sorry for your loss, my child.” He really looked sad about it, much more than Yohn Royce. “I fought with your father during Robert’s Rebellion. I considered him like one of my best friends, even a brother. I wish I had been in King’s Landing to save him.” He looked to be far away in his thoughts as he talked and Arya thought she saw water in his eyes. He centered his attention on her again. “You are welcomed here, Lady Arya. My house swore allegiance to the Starks for thousands of years. And you’re my friend’s daughter. You are under the protection of House Reed as long as you wish to stay here.”

“Thank you. But I’m not a lady.”

He looked at her with some consternation. “Of course. Please excuse me, Arya. It doesn’t bother you if I call you by your name?” Arya shook her head. “You must be hungry.”

Arya was. Howland Reed clapped his hands. A servant clad in clothes very like his lord’s came and received orders to bring something to eat. Howland Reed invited Arya to sit at one of the nearby tables. Arya took place on a bench and Howland sat in face of her.

“Even here in the Neck, we heard you were dead,” he began to say when they sat. “Though I’m happy to see it wasn’t true. Most of Ned’s children are dead. I’m glad one is still alive.”

“Aye,” Arya confirmed. “Robb and my mother died at the Twins. Bran and Rickon died when the Greyjoys took Winterfell. Only I, Jon and Sansa are left.”

Lord Reed nodded with a sad expression. They stayed silent for a moment until the food arrived. The meal was simple and scant, but Arya was used to it and the food was good enough. The water was
fresh, just like the fish and the cooked roots.

“How did you manage to survive?” Reed asked after a moment. He didn’t eat much of the food before him. “From what I heard, you disappeared about the time Ned was executed. Where have you been all this time?”

Arya started her story from the assassination of Syrio Forel to her running into Aran Fenn, giving him all the details. The boy she killed with her sword in King’s Landing. The execution of her father before the Great Sept of Baelor. Yoren’s and Lommy’s deaths. Harrenhal and her time as cupbearer of Tywin Lannister. The Brotherhood Without Banners. Gendry’s sale to the Red Woman. Her time with the Hound. The events she witnessed at the Twins when she was close to get back to her family. Their way to the Eyrie. Sandor Clegane’s death. Her imprisonments in this place. Her aunt’s death. Littlefinger’s plots. Her meeting with the Lords of the Vale. Finally her escape from Moat Cailin and how she ran into Aran Fenn and his men.

Howland Reed’s reactions changed a lot while she told her story. He seemed close to tears when she described her father’s execution. He looked horrified when she told him about the way the prisoners were treated by the Lannisters at Harrenhal, but very surprised to learn she served as Tywin Lannister’s cupbearer for months without him realizing who she was. He seemed sorry whenever she told him about the death and the disappearance of someone she considered a friend. But his strongest reactions were about the events at the Eyrie and the revelations about Littlefinger and his attempt to marry her to Ramsay Bolton. He looked furious enough at this moment to go into war against Roose Bolton and Petyr Baelish immediately.

When Arya was finally done with her tale, Lord Reed sighed. “You’ve been through a lot. No child should have to go through such hardships. I promise you you’re safe here. No enemy of House Stark will ever reach you here. Greywater Watch has never been taken since it was built.”

“Just like Winterfell,” Arya said on a grim tone.

Howland looked down. “I’m sorry for your home. I went to Winterfell once. It was a beautiful place. I did everything to make the Ironmen pay for what they did there by waging war against their garrison at Moat Cailin, though I wish I hadn’t helped Roose Bolton to go north this way. He killed our king, Ned’s son and heir. I’ll never forgive him.”

“Neither will I,” Arya added with a determined voice.

“You don’t have to worry about here. Greywater Watch will never fall as long as I lead my people. Many lords tried to seize it through history and failed because they couldn’t find it. Their men bogged and sank in their armors each time, or were killed by my people when snakes and lizard-lions hadn’t already killed them. No one will find you here. And if this Bolton traitor, or his son, or this Littlefinger traitor, or the Lannisters ever come, we’ll show them how we deal with traitors, turncoats and assassins. They will regret the Red Wedding at this moment.”

Arya saw the determination on the face of the Lord of Greywater Watch. “Lord Reed. I still have members of my family who are alive. Jon is at the Wall, he’s alright. But Sansa is held at Casterly Rock. She’s been forced to marry…”

“Yes, I know.” Howland Reed didn’t let her finish. “You can’t imagine how disgusted I was when I learned about this. Ned’s daughter married to a Lannister.” Venom in his voice was quite obvious. “I wish we could do something, but there’s nothing I can do for her.”

“But we can’t let Sansa in their hands. They are Lannisters. They murdered my father.”
Howland Reed looked down again. “I really want to help your sister, believe me. But we cannot enter Casterly Rock and get your sister out of there without being noticed. My people won’t be able to do it. We’ll get captured, and probably killed. We won’t help your sister by dying. There’s nothing I can do for her right now.”

Arya knew he was right. Sansa was married to the Imp. She would be watched by guards all the time, and Arya couldn’t help Sansa to escape the same way she escaped herself from King’s Landing. They would be lost in the Westerlands afterwards, with everyone looking for them. Sansa would never accept to cut her hair and wear breeches like Arya did to not be noticed. That would never work. And Arya would end between Lannister hands too.

“But we need to do something for her. We have to save her,” she argued.

“If we ever have an opportunity to save your sister, we’ll take it. But right now, the best thing we can do is to keep you here and safe, with no one aware that you’re still alive or in this place. My people still have honor. Those who know you’re here won’t tell anyone, I’ll make them swear. I’ll make the other people believe you’re a niece of me.”

“And if I want to leave and try to save Sansa on my own? You’ll abandon me? You’ll abandon the daughters of your friend? Or will you try to hold me here?” She asked it on a defying tone.

Howland Reed looked at her for a moment with astonishment, then smiled. “No, I won’t. I don’t think I would be able to hold you anyway if I tried. You already escaped from more heavily guarded places. But I won’t be able to help as soon as you’ll leave the Neck. I cannot endanger my people by sending them in the Westerlands.”

Arya knew it was futile. She wouldn’t be able to free Sansa on her own if she was behind closed gates at Casterly Rock. Even less without he crannogmen’s help. She would have to remain here for the time being. But she wouldn’t abandon Sansa. She finished her food.

“You know,” Howland Reed said all of a sudden, “when I noticed your presence right away, I thought someone dead for a long time had come back to haunt me.”

Arya looked at him, intrigued. “What do you mean?”

“You look very much like your aunt, Arya. Lyanna. Your father probably talked to you about her.”

That was something. He was the second person to tell him she looked like her aunt. In fact, her father rarely spoke about her. Arya mainly knew what everyone said about how she died during Robert’s Rebellion and was the cause of this war. “No. He didn’t talk very often of her. But there’s a statue of her in the crypt. I saw it a few times. But she didn’t look much like me when I looked at it.”

“No statue could represent her accurately enough. She was strong willed, headstrong, determined, adventurous, courageous, and she wanted to use swords, and bows and arrows, and ride on a horse. She hated everything the women liked to do in the southern kingdoms. She defended me one day against three other men.”

“Really?”

“Aye. Have you ever heard about the tourney at Harrenhal?”

“Aye. That’s when my aunt was crowned queen of love and beauty by Rhaegar Targaryen. Maester Luwin told me one day that’s what led to the war later.” Arya didn’t understand how putting a crown on a woman’s head could start a war though. For her, the war started because her grandfather and her uncle Brandon were killed by the Mad King.
“Before Rheagar crowned her, she saved me. I came to the tourney. I never saw something like this before. There were so many tents and great lords from every part of the Seven Kingdoms. The Mad King, Robert Baratheon and Mace Tyrell were among the people present for this tourney. Three squires beat me bloody, and your aunt appeared from nowhere to defend me. I still remember her words about twenty years later. That’s my father’s man you’re kicking. She managed to send them away with a tourney sword. That was quite unusual for a woman to fight with a sword. She brought me to the tent she shared with her brothers, and this was the time I met your father and your two uncles. I was their father’s bannerman, so they welcomed me like one of them. That evening, there was a feast in the castle, and your aunt convinced me to eat with all her family.”

Arya listened attentively to Howland Reed’s tale. Her father never talked so much about her aunt. Arya never knew her. And she was curious to learn more about this tourney. The Lord of Greywater Watch continued his story.

“During the feast, I noticed the three squires who had attacked me before. Lyanna saw them as well. Your uncle Benjen offered me to ride in the tourney and to give me an armor so I could get my revenge on them, but I refused. We crannogmen are not very good on a horse. Better on boats. But your aunt was good enough to ride in the tourney however.”

Arya was stunned by this revelation as the man before her chuckled. “She participated to the tourney?”

“Aye, she did. But no one knew it was her, except her brothers and me later. She took a grave voice and hid behind a helmet. She was called the Knight of the Laughing Tree later. She fought the three knights of the squires who beat me and defeated them all. Then she ordered the knights to teach their squires honor to get back their horses and armors. And the Knight of the Laughing Tree disappeared to never be seen again that night. They only managed to find her shield hanging in a tree later.”

Howland Reed’s face lighted up as he told her the story. It fascinated Arya. Why did her father never tell her and her siblings about this? She wondered how Sansa would have reacted to that story. She would have disapproved their aunt’s behavior because she rode in a tourney, but she wouldn’t have dared to say anything in their father’s presence against the actions of his sister. As for Arya, she found it wonderful. Her aunt did exactly what she would have done in her stead. She took part in a tourney. Arya had wanted so much to ride against other knights before. Her aunt had the chance to ride against three at least.

“Two years later, your aunt was kidnapped by Rhaegar Targaryen.” Howland Reed’s voice turned bitter. “I rode in war alongside your father to save her. And we failed her. I failed her. When we finally reached her in the Red Mountains of Dorne, she was already dying. I couldn’t save her like she saved me.” He looked down again for a long moment, then looked up in her eyes once more. “But I won’t fail you as I failed your aunt. I didn’t manage to save Ned’s sister. I won’t let his daughter die.”

For the first time in a very long time, Arya felt she could trust someone. She felt she could really rely on this man. He was one of her father’s oldest friend. She saw nothing untrue in him.

“If we have a chance to save my sister one day, will you help me?” she asked him.

He looked back at her with determination. “On my honor as a Reed, and on my friendship with your father, I promise you. As soon as we will have an opportunity to free Sansa Stark, we’ll take it.”

Arya was satisfied with this answer. Later in the day, Howland Reed accompanied her to her chamber. “My daughter Meera lived here before. She and my son Jojen left for an expedition not long before Winterfell was destroyed. You can occupy her room while she’s away. If you need
anything, don’t hesitate to ask.”

Arya went to sleep on a bed made of leather and straw and fell asleep very quickly. She was in a place where she thought she belonged, among friends of her family. She had seen how crannogmen lived in the last few days, and she was excited to hunt and fight like they did. Women weren’t confined in castles here. They made the same activities than men, without difference. She thought she would like to live here. Before she drifted away into deep sleep, her list came back to her mind.


Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion (we go back to Casterly Rock after a long absence)
Finally, we go back to Casterly Rock. Sorry for the long time without Tyrion and Sansa. They're here again and I hope you'll like this chapter.

We get to see how Tyrion and Sansa rule and the problems they face, though this is nothing compared to how it was in King's Landing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"The mining should begin next month, my lord. The time we reach the vein. Of course, if you send us more men and authorize us to make these people work longer, we could be ready a week before."

The supervisor was talking to him among the sounds of pickaxes and spades against rocks, sand, earth and metal. They were in one of the new tunnels recently dug under Casterly Rock. This one was where the digging was the most advanced. Very soon, they would be able to get gold out of the rock and revenues of House Lannister would increase once again.

Tyrion had decided to come into the tunnels for the first time to see how the digging really advanced. Yroan was the best administrator of mines in the Westerlands. He could dig gold, silver, or any other metal out of any mine quicker than anyone else. But now that Tyrion was inside a mine, with dust all around, a temperature so high you ended up sweating the very moment you entered the tunnel, and seeing how the people here worked miserably about fourteen hours each day, he wondered at what cost came Yroan’s efficiency. However, the other mines he visited today hadn’t been really better. Many of the men working here were criminals, sentenced to work in mines to pay their debts, but some were also free men who were paid for their work. All the same, their working conditions were so horrible that Tyrion couldn’t help but feel pity even for those who were criminals. Anyway, their only crime had been to borrow money they couldn’t give back. That wasn’t as if they murdered or raped someone. They could barely be considered thieves. Tyrion looked around him at this sorry lot. Yroan was asking him to make them work two more hours each day.

“That’s alright, Yroan. I don’t want them to die of exhaustion and to lack workers. Maintain their actual amount of work like it is right now. My family is not going to be ruined for a week delay. We’re not in King's Landing.”

“As you wish, my lord. But I’ll try to see if there is any way to rearrange the schedules to make the work more productive.”

“Of course. Of course. Just don’t make these men work more than they already do.”

Tyrion left the tunnel. He didn’t like this place. His place was in a solar, a library or a hall, verifying accounts, reading reports, holding court and taking decisions. He was never made for manual work. He left the depths of Casterly Rock to go back to his rooms. He had spent the entire morning visiting the mines of Casterly Rock to see how the mining was progressing. He didn’t have to complain, but
He hoped he wouldn’t have to go back in those tunnels before a very long time. He pushed heavily the doors of his apartments after he returned shortly the greeting of Lady Brienne. He was exhausted from his visit and the walk from the base of Casterly Rock.

“Uncle Tyrion! What happened to you?”

Tyrion realized Joy was sitting in the living room he just entered and staring at him. Sansa was with her and also looked at him. Tyrion realized she was holding a laugh. He looked at himself and realized he was covered of dust and soot from head to toe. He needed a bath.

“It seems I experienced firsthand what happens when we actually dig gold. It seems we must soil ourselves to be rich, no matter the way.” Sansa giggled in front of Joy. “Please excuse me, my lady. I’ll go and clean myself before I indispose you anymore.”

Tyrion gave an order to the handmaiden present in the room to bring hot water for a bath, went to the bathroom and closed the door. He thought the girl was Darla Moreland, a daughter of Lord Robin Moreland. Tyrion stripped himself from his doublet and his breeches to only keep a shirt that covered his body from his neck to his thighs. Once the handmaidens were back with the hot water and the bathtub was full, Tyrion got rid of it as well and went to clean himself of all the dirt and filth he caught in the mines.

He should have known Sansa would be there. If Lady Brienne was guarding their rooms, it was because Sansa was there, and probably with another lady like every time in the middle of the day. When the lady knight wasn’t keeping an eye on Sansa, she was polishing her armor, sharpening her sword, or practicing in one of the courtyards against other knights, guards, and soldiers of House Lannister. First, the men of Casterly Rock saw Brienne as some sort of freak, but after she defeated a few of the less talented swords of the castle, the best started to defy her to show a woman couldn’t defeat them, and Brienne of Tarth proved them they were wrong. Now, when people wanted to fight the best warrior in Casterly Rock, they always went to contest against the daughter of Lord Selwyn Tarth. Some of the other knights respected her just like Tyrion’s brother now. In the end, she proved she was worthy to fight with a sword, and a Valyrian steel sword even more.

While in the bathtub, Tyrion thought about the people working in the mines. He had seen misery before. In King’s Landing, in the North, in the Riverlands at the beginning of the war, and even here when he was younger, essentially when he was in charge of the sewers of Casterly Rock. He knew these people worked in horrible conditions. However, the people working in the drains and sewers seemed to have a better life than the miners. Tyrion had known working in a mine didn’t have to be easy since the wages for a miner was about four times those for an agricultural worker. They needed to get their wages up to attract enough workers because the work in mines was very dangerous. Now Tyrion had seen directly why they had to pay them so much. Perhaps he ought to do something to make their lives better. If Jaime had been lowborn, he may have ended in one of these mines. Tyrion and Jaime owed their position to the fact they were born Lannisters of Casterly Rock, and nothing more. Considering how well Tyrion lived, he should do something to make the lives of these men less worse.

Tyrion went out of the bathtub after some time and put on fresh clothes. When he left the bathroom he saw Sansa waiting in a chair in the living room, before a table with some food. Joy was no longer here. She wore a purple gown with lions drawn on the bottom and wolves on the arms. She lifted her eyes to meet his when he entered the living room.

“How was the visit of the mines?”

“You did well to not come,” Tyrion replied. “They’re not pleasant places. No wonder many people among the workers are there because they couldn’t repay debts.”
“Will the mining start soon?”

“The first mine will be operational in a month.” Tyrion sat right before her and took some food for his meal. “Very soon incomes will increase.”

Sansa nodded to show she understood. Thanks to her lessons with Creylen, Sansa understood more and more about financial matters every day, though she still had way to go.

“We have to hold court today, I think.”

“Yes, we have,” Tyrion confirmed. “I’m afraid this may be quite painful. Lord Spicer has come to petition before us.”

Tyrion wanted to spit on the floor while saying the name, and Sansa didn’t seem to like it anymore. Tyrion wondered why Rolph Spicer was there. To complain about the fact he would only have a quarter of the revenues he would get from the mines of Castamere? That was very likely from him. Though he could try something more subtle. The Westerlings and the Spicers fooled Robb Stark, so perhaps Lady Westerling’s brother would try to fool his liege lord as well. Only Tyrion wasn’t Robb Stark, and Sansa wasn’t her brother either.

“Is there no way to send him away? Couldn’t we close the Lion’s Mouth before him and let him freeze outside Casterly Rock?” Sansa was half-serious as she said it, a smile playing on her lips.

“Don’t worry. I’ll let him come in, but I’ll make sure he understands once he’s inside he can’t stay for even a single night. He won’t come back before a long time.”

They exchanged wicked smiles. However, Sansa rose from her seat. “I’m afraid I must leave you, dear husband. I have requests I must answer before we hold court.”

Sansa left their rooms to go to her solar. It left Tyrion alone to finish his meal. That didn’t matter so much. They would be together in the Great Hall while they would hold court, and then there would be dinner, and finally the night. Nights were always the time when they spent the most time together.

When he was done with his frugal meal, Tyrion went to see his aunt Genna. She was in her personal rooms with the other aunts of Tyrion, Dorna and Darlessa. They were engaged in what seemed to be a very lively discussion, one that was dominated by Genna of course. The guard at the door announced Tyrion and the three women rose from their chairs to greet Tyrion, though Genna obviously only did so because the decorum demanded it when she wasn’t alone with him. Dorna and Darlessa always greeted him as their lord however. Even a few months after he came back from Casterly Rock, Tyrion still felt strange that his aunts changed their behaviour around him only because now he had titles.

“My dear aunts. I hope I interrupt nothing.”

“Nothing important,” Genna answered immediately. “I’m sure I’m the one you want to talk to. Ladies, leave me with our lord and nephew.” Dorna and Darlessa executed themselves immediately. Genna’s authority in Casterly Rock hadn’t diminished since Tyrion came back. “So, what do you want from your big aunt?” Genna asked as soon as the others were gone.

“How are going the preparations?”

“It’s still in more than a month.” Her voice wasn’t without reproach, but she answered all the same. “I was just discussing it with Dorna and Darlessa when you came in. Is that so necessary to organize such a big reception for a name day?”
“This is the name day of the Lady of Casterly Rock.” Tyrion took care to specify it. Sansa’s sixteenth name day was coming close, and Tyrion wanted celebrations his wife deserved after everything she supported these last years.

“I think you’re doing too much, Tyrion.” Genna sat back. “Many people still see her as a Stark. And you organize one of the greatest ceremonies ever organized in the Westerlands in the last decade for her name day. I think you should be more careful. You shouldn’t give the impression to your bannermen that you’re ready to do everything for her.”

“Well, my bannermen will have to accept that their lady comes from House Stark, and they’ll have to learn to put their grudges aside and to not see Northerners as foes. After all a Lannister killed Ned Stark, and that’s what started the war.”

“You should only make them angry at you for worthy reasons. When it is of use for House Lannister.”

“I think to have the noble people of the Westerlands respect Sansa as Lady of Casterly Rock is more than useful for House Lannister.”

Genna looked at him with a disapproving face, but she didn’t go further. “The preparations are going well. All invitations will be sent during the week, most of the artists are selected, and the services are nearly all decided. Cerenna is more than pleased to help us in that. After you, she’s the one who knows Sansa the best here.”

“Good. Just make sure with Dorna and Darlessa that everything is ready in time. And that Sansa is unaware of the details.”

“Yes, yes, I know. Everything for the Lady of Casterly Rock. I hope she will enjoy it.”

Tyrion left the rooms of his biggest aunt and told his two other aunts they could get back inside as he left. He then started to climb the stairs to the top of Casterly Rock where Creylen’s study was. Tyrion had asked his aunt to organize Sansa’s name day two weeks ago. She would be sixteen at this moment and it would be her first name day as Lady of House Lannister. Tyrion wanted it to be special. He still barely managed to believe the little girl he saw at Winterfell so long ago had become a woman. And that she was his wife.

Tyrion was exhausted when he finally reached Creylen’s rooms. They were completely at the top of the Rock. His short legs made the climbing a trial every time. As if he needed other trials. He had his fill of trials for the rest of his life. He had been on trial for being a dwarf his entire life. Entering the rooms where Creylen lived and made his studies brought memories back to Tyrion. He had spent most of his childhood in Casterly Rock, his father confining him inside the castle, not wishing to show the family’s embarrassment to the rest of the world. And Tyrion had spent most of his time inside Casterly Rock in Creylen’s rooms or in the library. Learning was all he could do because of his size. He also worked with his mind during this time, writing for the maester who asked him works on many subjects, from dragons to politics. That helped him later when he had to assume power. He regretted this time in some way, but most of all, he regretted how this time ended.

Tyrion was snatched from his books and parchments when he was sixteen. When he reached that age, he asked his father to let him make a tour of the nine Free Cities of Essos, just like his uncles Gerion and Tygett did at the same age. But Lord Tywin Lannister had refused, threatening to not support him anymore if he brought shame upon House Lannister even in Essos. Instead, Tyrion travelled through the Westerlands with his brother Jaime.

Tyrion had liked to visit all the Westerlands. It had been the first time he really left Casterly Rock.
They visited all the castles, all the cities, and probably all the inns as well. Later, when Tyrion had more freedom to travel and when he entered an inn in the Westerlands, he always recognized it. On their way back, he and Jaime met a girl supposedly chased by two rapists. Jaime never thought Tyrion would fall in love with Tysha. He only wanted to give an exciting first time with a woman to his little brother. If Tyrion had known… He should never had married her. So much wouldn’t have happened.

After the tragedy of his first wife, Tywin Lannister decided to give him an appropriate gift for his sixteenth name day. Tyrion was given responsibility over the sewers, drains and cisterns of Casterly Rock. They were never better maintained than during this time. Tyrion had gone to see their state not long after he came back a few months ago. His successors didn’t keep up with the good work he made.

Creylen’s study brought him back to that time when he had managed to find some happiness in books and studies. After that, they only became an occupation to forget about Tysha, just like whores and wine. Tyrion looked at the books on the shelves. He recognized some he read a long time ago, but also others Creylen probably commanded since the last time he was in Casterly Rock. Perhaps he should see if they were of any interest.

“Tyrion.” The dwarf reacted to his name being pronounced. Creylen just came from the rockery where he kept the ravens and advanced before him. Tyrion liked the maester. He had always been kind with him, and they had very interesting and enthusiastic discussions together around various subjects through all his childhood.

“Glad to see you, Creylen. I hope I don’t bother you.”

“No, Tyrion. Not at all. It’s always a pleasure to see you.” The maester would always call him by his name, without any title. He and Tyrion had been close enough for this.

“Are the lessons of my wife going well?”

“Oh, yes. The Lady Sansa is learning quite well. Before long, she’ll know everything she needs to know about finances and figures. She doesn’t learn as quickly as you, but she learns. She’s starting to understand why we must limit the extraction of gold to not lower its value.”

“Good. Did you receive any ravens recently?”

“Yes. In fact, a raven just brought us a message. But I have three messages to give you.”

“Three? Where are they coming from?”

“The first one comes from King’s Landing and has the seal of the Hand of the King.” *Probably Kevan’s reply to the last raven I sent.* “There are also two other ravens from the same place, one for you and one for Lady Sansa.”

Tyrion frowned. “A raven for me, and another for Sansa? Both from the same place?” Why not write a single message for the two of them?

“Yes, my lord.” A smile appeared on Creylen’s face. “From Castleblack.”

Tyrion looked at the three scrolls Creylen handed him. After a moment, he seized the three. “Thank you, Creylen.” The maester bowed, still with a smile on his face. He knew Tyrion and Sansa had been waiting for this for a very long time.

Tyrion went to his solar, the one that wasn’t part of the rooms he shared with Sansa. He unrolled the
scroll coming from Kevan first.

Siege of Dragonstone still going on. Heavy resistance from the small garrison. The Redwyne fleet will need time before it comes home. Prepare for the invasion of the Iron Islands all the same.

Ser Kevan Lannister, Hand of the King

Without surprise, Tyrion would have to wait a long time before he could launch an attack against the Ironmen. What the hell was going on? No one could end a siege quickly, whether at Storm’s End, at Riverrun or at Dragonstone. Most of Stannis’s forces were at the Wall now, and still the Redwynes couldn’t take the island without a long and tiresome siege. The enhanced fleet was entirely built now and it waited in the docks of Lannisport and Casterly Rock for the Redwynes to come west. Tyrion didn’t like it. The war was lingering for far too long. These sieges should end now, before winter settled. Tyrion sighed in resignation and unrolled the second parchment addressed to him. He wondered why the Night’s Watch also sent a raven to him. Perhaps the raven for Sansa was from Jon Snow, and the one for him came from The Lord Commander (if they chose one after Jeor Mormont’s death) or from Maester Aemon. To his surprise, Tyrion discovered the message for him came at the same time from Jon Snow and the new Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch.

To Tyrion Lannister, Lord of Casterly Rock and Warden of the West

I congratulate you on becoming Lord of the Westerlands. We need your help. You visited the Wall, and you know why it was built, and you know what lies beyond. It’s coming for us. I saw one of them. Hundreds of brothers died at the Fist of the First Men fighting them. Dead are marching on the Wall. Send us everything you can. Men, supplies, weapons, even gold. Winter is coming.

Take care of my sister. I considered you a friend at the Wall. I hope I wasn’t wrong.

Jon Snow, Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch

Tyrion smiled at the last sentence before the lad’s signature. That was a hidden threat that if he mistreated Sansa, he would have to deal with her brother. Tyrion didn’t enjoy the prospect to face Jon Snow’s sword someday, so he would make sure he treated Sansa like a princess, just like he already did. He was also surprised and quite pleased to see Jon Snow now led the Night’s Watch. It seemed Westeros’s outcasts were taking power. A dwarf ruled the Westerlands and a bastard ruled the Wall. He would make a good substitute to Jeor Mormont, though Tyrion hoped Sansa’s brother smiled more than the last time he saw him.

However, Tyrion’s attention lingered a long time on the first part of the message, and the largest one. You visited the Wall, and you know why it was built, and you know what lies beyond. Tyrion knew it only too well. The pleas for help from the Night’s Watch started when he was Hand of the King, and ever since he had been the only one to take these requests seriously. No one else believed White Walkers could really exist. Tyrion himself wasn’t really sure he believed in their existence, but he didn’t think Jeor Mormont, Aemon Targaryen or Jon Snow would lie when they said dead men tried to kill them or that they saw the demons with blue eyes. As strange as it may seem, it had to be true. Jon Snow couldn’t have gone crazy at the Wall. Something was really coming. Winter is coming.

Tyrion sat still for a very long time, looking at the words the bastard of Winterfell wrote to him, thinking about what he should do. He finally left his solar and went to the Great Hall where he and Sansa would hold court this afternoon. He knew Sansa would join him very soon, but he used the time he had alone before they opened the doors to think about Jon Snow’s message. He had written to Tyrion in the performance of his duties as Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch, but he also addressed more personal matters at the same time when he told Tyrion to take care of Sansa. Tyrion always took care of his wife and he wouldn’t stop anytime soon. In fact, Jon Snow’s message only
encouraged him to be even more careful for Sansa. He didn’t want the lad to think ill of him, and it may prove difficult after Tyrion’s family slaughtered his own. Tyrion remembered how much it took for Sansa to finally trust him.

Sansa came into the hall with Lady Brienne. She wore a different gown from the one she had two hours ago. This one was red and trimmed with gold, sapphires incrusted in the fine fabric. She had the medallion with the red ruby and the golden necklace with the direwolf hidden under a lion around her neck. As always, she was a true vision of beauty. Tyrion rose from his throne when Sansa entered.

“Sansa.”

“Tyrion.” She returned his greeting. He liked to hear her say his name. Tyrion regained his seat as Sansa took place in her own. “So, except Lord Spicer, who do we have today?”

“The usual share of merchants and commoners who come each time we hold court. But except Lord Spicer, I think there’s only Serion Lannister who will come to petition today.”

“Are there any problems in Lannisport?” Sansa asked.

“I don’t know. All I know is he said he would speak to us today before the court. We’ll discover what he wants very soon.”

Ser Serion Lannister was the eldest son and heir of Lord Reginald, the Lord of House Lannister of Lannisport. They were the cadet branch of House Lannister who ruled the city. They were far less wealthy than Tyrion’s family, but they still ruled the third largest city in the Seven Kingdoms. Most of the time, the administration of Casterly Rock and Lannisport were so close because of family links and the proximity of the city to the Rock that Tyrion spoke directly to Lord Reginald in his solar, or went to Lannisport to deal with matters. Why was Lord Reginald’s son coming to petition before the court? He could have asked for a private audience in Tyrion’s solar, but instead he chose to speak to Tyrion and Sansa before the whole court.

Brienne stood guard before the platform with a few other guards in red when the doors of the Great Hall opened and people poured inside. After a time, the herald hit the floor with his golden stick.

“Here stand before us Lord Tyrion, son of Tywin, of House Lannister, Lord of Casterly Rock, Shield of Lannisport, Lord of the Westerlands and Warden of the West. And his wife, Lady Sansa Lannister of House Stark, Lady of Casterly Rock, Lady of the Westerlands and Lady of Winterfell.”

People bowed their heads in submission. The herald called for the first petitioner. Ser Serion advanced and bowed deeply before Tyrion and Sansa.

“My lord, my lady.”

“Ser Serion,” Sansa greeted him with a smile. “It is a pleasure to see you again.”

“Thank you, my lady. The pleasure and the honor are all mine.” Sansa had met the Lannisters of Lannisport during the first visit she made in Lannisport with Tyrion. The heir of this cadet branch of House Lannister had been very courteous with her. “I come before my lord and my lady today to ask for their intervention in a family matter.”

Tyrion was intrigued by this. “Normally, Ser Serion, I try to not interfere in the family affairs of my bannermen unless it is in the interest of the Westerlands.”

“I come here because of a possible threat for the Westerlands, my lord.”
Why did he come to court to talk about this? He could have simply ask for a private audience with Tyrion. But now Tyrion had no choice but to listen to him. “Very well, Ser Serion. What is this threat?”

Serion Lannister cleared his throat. “I don’t enjoy being forced to do this, my lord and my lady. But I must reveal before the entire court that my lord father, Lord Reginald Lannister, intends to break a marriage that was celebrated before the eyes of gods and men.”

People were obviously surprised by this. Tyrion was as well. “I would need specifics, Ser Serion.”

“Of course, my lord. My younger brother, Ser Lyle Lannister, married last week the Lady Sanna of House Falwell. The ceremony was a discreet one, but it was celebrated by a septon before witnesses. The marriage is entirely legal, and was even approved by Lord Falwell, Lady Sanna’s father, but my father Lord Reginald wants to annul the marriage despite the fact it was consummated. He even bribed the septon who celebrated the marriage to have him tell there was no consummation.” There were shouts of surprise in the Great Hall. “I ask my lord and my lady to acknowledge the marriage between Ser Lyle Lannister and Lady Sanna Falwell and to order my father to welcome my sister-in-law in our family.”

Everyone was muttering in the hall now. Ser Serion Lannister just revealed a great scandal in front of many people from Lannisport and Casterly Rock, not to mention a few noble lords and ladies from all over the Westerlands who were present. But what caused Tyrion to feel there was something awkward was that this scandal was about the family of the man who just revealed it.

Tyrion used the time people were speaking with each other to consult Sansa who sat next to him. Their thrones were very close, so only by leaning their heads on the side, they could converse in whispers without anyone hearing them.

“He’s not telling us the whole truth,” Tyrion told his wife.

“Are you sure?” she asked.

“Would you reveal a scandal about your own family when all the Westerlands are present?”

“No,” Sansa conceded. “Why didn’t he speak with you in private? The Lannisters of Lannisport are close enough of the Casterly Rock for this if I remember.”

“Yes, you do remember well. There’s a reason why he talked about this before the court. We have to discover it.”

Tyrion made a sign to the herald. He hit the floor with his stick again and silence fell in the hall. “Ser Serion, we thank you for bringing this matter to our attention. I will discuss with Lord Reginald as soon as possible to settle this matter.”

“My lord, with all the respect I owe you, we need you to act quickly,” Ser Serion pleaded. “My father intends to send Lady Falwell out of Lannisport this very night and to prohibit her the entry to Lannisport forever. I fear how the gods and the Faith may react to my father’s behaviour. It would shame my house and the Westerlands forever. For the sake of my house, I ask you to order my father to accept Sanna Falwell as his daughter-in-law right now.”

Tyrion now really believed there was something amiss in this story. Ser Serion wanted at all cost Tyrion to acknowledge a marriage his father didn’t want of. And he did it when they were holding court. Tyrion had to discover what was really going on, and he couldn’t know everything only with the things Ser Serion just told.
“Ser Alfos!” Tyrion called. A knight in red armor stood before Tyrion and Sansa. “Go to Lannisport and order Lord Reginald Lannister to come to Casterly Rock for this evening to discuss about pressing matters. Tell him this is an order from his liege lord.”

“Yes, my lord.” The knight left to carry out the order Tyrion just gave him.

At the same time, Tyrion observed very closely Serion Lannister’s reaction. Tyrion could see disappointment, but more than all fear on his face. Tyrion would have to get everything clear from the Lord Lannister of Lannisport. The herald called the next petitioner to speak. Rolph Spicer advanced.

“Rolph Spicer, Lord of Castamere.”

Rolph Spicer spoke with a hesitant voice. “My lord, my lady, I come here in the name of my house to ask for your help. The mines of Castamere have proved to be much more difficult to clear of all the debris. I’m asking you, as your most loyal bannerman, to help us financially to reopen the mines of our castle so we may serve you faithfully like we always did.”

“Lord Spicer,” Tyrion replied with a smug smile. “I think you should be careful to not pretend to be the most loyal among my bannermen. I think there are many great families in the Westerlands who can say they never joined an army who invaded our lands.”

People laughed in the Great Hall, and others looked hatefully at Spicer. House Spicer wasn’t loved in the Westerlands because they were seen as up-jumped merchants by older houses and because they defected to Robb Stark during the war. Lord Rolph’s face turned red on the effect of anger and humiliation.

“Everything we did, we did it for House Lannister, with all our heart,” he yelled. That wouldn’t help his cause.

“Yes, I’m sure you participated to the breaking of the guest rights with all your heart.” People snorted in the hall when hearing about the Red Wedding. The Starks were still hated because they plundered the Westerlands, but now that Sansa was Lady of the Westerlands, lords and ladies weren’t about to speak highly of this event. And anyway, everyone in the Seven Kingdoms saw the breaking of the guest rights the Freys did as horrible, and knew the Spicers played a role in that treachery. “To answer your request, Lord Spicer, I’m afraid we’re already helping you a lot with the loan we granted you, especially since we charge no interest on it. I’m sure you have more than enough to reopen the mines with what we already gave you.”

“But, my lord,” stuttered Rolph Spicer, “I told you the clearing is much more difficult that it was expected. We need your help.”

“We lent you more than enough money without interest and granted you the castle of Castamere and its lands. This is already a lot of help, Lord Spicer. As former castellan of the Crag, I’m sure you have the required competence to clear the mines.”

Tyrion had said the last sentence so it would be obvious he wouldn’t hear anymore about it, but Sansa decided to step in the discussion. “Lord Spicer. May I suggest you ask help from your sister, the Lady of the Crag? After all, she helped you in the past. I’m sure House Westerling will be very happy to give you all the gold you need to reopen the mines. That’s what members of the same family do for each other. And House Westerling being one of the most ancient houses of the Westerlands, they’ll surely prove to be loyal to their kin and have the ways to help you financially.”

Sansa said it on an innocent tone, hiding behind her lady’s behaviour. But what she just said brought
some muffled laughter in the Great Hall. The Westerlings were far too poor to give any help to Rolph Spicer. And he wouldn’t recognize the poverty of his sister’s house before the court. Lord Spicer left without being granted a single gold dragon. Tyrion wondered if he would ever be able to reopen the mines. If he didn’t, Tyrion would seize Castamere as a repayment for the debts Rolph Spicer contracted towards him, and probably grant it to another bannerman who served him well or to one of his cousins. In the meantime, it was funny to make Lord Spicer pay by subtly humiliating him. But Tyrion wondered how he couldn’t reopen the mines. He had borrowed enough gold from Casterly Rock to make them operational. Tyrion would have to investigate all this, and to send ravens to the other houses again to remember them they weren’t to lend any money to House Spicer or House Westerling.

Tyrion and Sansa held the court until sundown. After Serion Lannister and Rolph Spicer, merchants and smallfolk went to present many requests, asking for justice in a dispute with other people, complaining about a tax, asking for help against outlaws. The Guild of the merchants of Lannisport asked for immediate action against the Iron Islands whose ships disturbed their trading activities. Sansa acted like a true lady all this time, smiling at people, showing compassion for everyone who lost something, letting people know she cared for them. If Joffrey hadn’t been a monster, she would have made a great queen. Finally the sun set and Tyrion left the Great Hall with Sansa. On their way, Podrick came to tell him Reginald Lannister had arrived. Tyrion had to excuse himself to meet the Lord of the Lannisters of Lannisport in his solar.

Mostly, Lord Reginald Lannister told Tyrion there had been no marriage between Lyle Lannister and Sanna Falwell. This was only a story his eldest son invented to soil his image and to bring a Falwell inside House Lannister of Lannisport. Serion Lannister was trying to seize the control over his family by discrediting his father, accusing him to destroy a supposed marriage celebrated in the sight of the Seven, and he tried to win House Falwell to his side by marrying a daughter of Lord Falwell to his younger brother. Tyrion listened to everything Lord Reginald said. Considering the reactions and the behaviour of Serion Lannister, Tyrion had to admit all this was quite possible. He knew Ser Serion was a very ambitious man. He could have brought this before Tyrion in the hope he may acknowledge a marriage that never existed. With Tyrion’s support, Lord Reginald could never have stopped this marriage not yet celebrated. Tyrion thanked Lord Reginald for his coming and decided he would investigate more deeply to discover the whole truth. To make sure nothing would make the situation worse than it was, he sent one of his men to bring Sanna Falwell to Casterly Rock where she would stay as a guest until the affair was resolved. He wouldn’t take any chance. If Serion Lannister told the truth, then he couldn’t let Lord Reginald send his daughter-in-law away. However, if Reginald Lannister was the one to tell the truth, then Tyrion wouldn’t take the risk to allow Serion Lannister the opportunity to really marry secretly his brother to the Falwell lady.

Tyrion went to his rooms where Sansa was waiting for him. She seemed to have used her time to read one of his books. When he finally entered the living room where they took their meals, she got up, looking exasperated.

“You took your time,” she said on a reproachful tone.

“I’m sorry. Lord Reginald had very long explanations. You could have started to eat without me.” The dinner was already on the table, waiting for them.

“I’m not going to not wait because it pleases you.” She said it with a playful voice. She used to always say *If it pleases my lord* in the first times of their marriage, before they learned to trust each other. Sansa put the book aside on a little table nearby and went to the dinner. Tyrion looked at the book she was reading. *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* by former Master of Coin David Ricardo.
“It seems Creylen’s lessons have very good results,” he commented.

“I still don’t understand half of what this man is saying. I must read a passage at least five times before I think I begin to understand it.” Sansa sighed.

Tyrion knew what she meant. Ricardo left only a few works, but they were very difficult to read. Tyrion himself had a hard time when he read it for the first time. He remembered something then. He approached Sansa who now sat at the table and put a little scroll before her, smiling. “I think you’ll enjoy this reading much more. It comes from Castleblack.”

Sansa looked at him, eyes wide open and mouth agape. She didn’t move for a moment, but then she seized the scroll and unrolled it with shaking hands. Her mouth was wide open while she read the message. A smile finally appeared on her face.

“He’s alive,” she said lowly. “He’s alive. Jon is alive.” She looked at Tyrion with a wild smile. Tyrion could see tears of joy in her eyes. In a moment she was on her knees and pulling him into an embrace. Tyrion was surprised at first, but then he brought his arms around her shoulders. She was crying and laughing at the same time, her chin on his shoulder. “He’s alive. My brother is alive.”

They remained this way for a good moment, Sansa laughing and crying hysterically, Tyrion wandering his hand in her hair and on her shoulder. But finally she broke their embrace and stood up. “We should eat. Before the food gets too cold.” Tyrion thought she was trying to gain back her composure, but her joy was far too great for this.

“I agree.” Tyrion was hungry. He went to the table and serve himself with pork sausages, chicken legs, mushrooms, peas and potatoes. Sansa took food as well, but she continued to look at the short message her brother sent to her, eating quite slowly. Tyrion was happy for her. Finally some good news about her family reached her. He used the moment to pour himself a generous cup of wine. Better to use the moment to drink more than Sansa let him do usually. The wine was good. It wasn’t Arbor gold, but it was a sweet red from Oldtown and of very high quality all the same. Sansa couldn’t get her eyes out of the parchment, so Tyrion emptied his cup quickly to take another one. An opportunity like this one wouldn’t occur before long.

“He’s Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch now. I can’t believe it,” Sansa said after a long time, a wide smile still spreading on her face.

“We can’t blame the brothers of the Night’s Watch for their choice. Your brother is far from being an idiot. Why wait for him to be older?”

Sansa looked up from the parchment finally. “It took him so long to answer. I feared he may be dead. Why did he need months to answer?”

“Well, they were under the threats of wildlings. Perhaps he just didn’t have the time. And now Stannis Baratheon’s army is at the Wall. He wouldn’t have seen it of a good eye if he had discovered your brother was sending messages to the Lady of Casterly Rock. But now Jon is the Lord Commander. He probably has more freedom. He wrote to me as well.”

“Really?”

“Yes. He told me in a very subtle way that if I didn’t take care of you well enough, then he would ride from the Wall to split me in two himself.”

Sansa seemed to realize after a moment Tyrion was joking. She burst into laughter. “I don’t think Jon would threaten you this way. That’s not his way.”
“No. But he did ask me to take care of you. Do you think I’m making a good job up to now?”

Sansa seemed to consider the question for a moment. “Perhaps I should ask him to come and see by himself. I’ll let him decide if he should split you in half.”

Tyrion chuckled at it. Sansa was smiling sweetly. He liked to hear her telling jokes. “In this case, I should double my efforts.”

They ate in silence for a moment. Sansa turned back her attention again to her brother’s scroll. She reached for the jug of wine, but as she took it, she frowned while still looking at the parchment and looked at the wine for the first time. She then looked at Tyrion with a reproving look.

“You drank wine.”

“Just like at every meal,” Tyrion answered innocently.

“When did you receive the raven?”

“At the beginning of the afternoon.”

“So, you wait to give the message during the dinner so you may get drunk while I don’t notice it.”

“Get drunk? There’s not enough in it for me to get drunk.” That was the truth. The full jug wouldn’t be enough for him to get drunk.

“No more wine for tonight.” She kept the jug out of Tyrion’s reach after she poured some for herself. Anyway, Tyrion had his own store of wine in his solar outside their common rooms. “You were supposed to tell me the moment we got an answer.”

“In fact, I told Creylen to give me the messages from the Wall at the moment they would arrive, nothing more,” he said with a little smile. However, Sansa seemed to really reproach him that. He took a more serious expression. “Sorry. I just thought the evening would be a better time for you to learn it than right before we held court. Judging from the reaction you had, I guess I was right in some way.”

Sansa nodded lightly. She seemed to understand, but Tyrion knew she wished she had known about Jon Snow’s reply sooner. He couldn’t blame her. She waited so long for words from her last brother. All the same, she looked happier than ever. A member of her family was still alive. Since they were talking about Jon Snow, Tyrion decided to introduce a related topic.

“Sansa, I’ve spent time with your brother at the Wall, but all the same you knew him better than me. Do you think your brother could lie?”

Sansa seemed taken aback by this. “Lie? What do you mean?”

Tyrion took the message the Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch sent to him and put on the table. “That’s the raven I received from him.”

Sansa took the message and read it. “You visited the Wall, and you know why it was built, and you know what lies beyond. It’s coming for us. I saw one of them. Dead are marching on the Wall.” She kept her eyes on it for a moment, probably reading it more than once. She finally looked back at Tyrion. “What is he talking about?”

Tyrion put down his fork and his knife and crossed his fingers on the table. “Sansa, have you ever heard stories about White Walkers?”
“Yes, of course. Old Nan used to tell us stories about them at Winterfell. Bran loved these stories because they scared him. I guess I didn’t like them for the same reason. Why?”

Tyrion repeated Jon Snow’s words. “Dead are marching on the Wall, and your brother claims he saw one of them.”

Sansa looked back at the scroll. She finally chuckled a little. “White Walkers and wights are only myths. They are stories to frighten children. Nothing more.”

“That’s what I thought too, before I visited the Wall. But when I was there, I had discussions with your uncle Benjen, Maester Aemon and the Lord Commander at the time, Jeor Mormont. Your uncle seemed to believe there was something beyond the Wall. Something more dangerous than wildlings. When I spoke with Maester Aemon and Mormont, they told me they had captured more wildlings fleeing south these last times. These wildlings claimed they saw White Walkers.”

Sansa was looking at him strangely. “Wait, don’t tell me you believe it. White Walkers don’t exist. Surely these wildlings imagined it, or they lied.”

“That’s what I thought at the moment. There are many fishermen in Lannisport who claim they saw mermaids after all. But apparently a deserter of the Night’s Watch that your father executed swore White Walkers killed his two companions during a ranging north of the Wall, right at the moment he lost his head. And I don’t know, but there was something I felt while I was at the Wall. Something strange. Unusual. And terrible. I don’t know what it was, but it was as if… something was coming. Something north of the Wall.”

Sansa shook her head with a little smile. “The deserter was about to be killed. Surely he was raving.”

“When I was Hand of the King, we received a raven from Jeor Mormont, saying a dead man tried to kill him in his sleep. A former ranger they found dead north of the Wall. And we received words from the Night’s Watch about a year ago that Mormont was killed during an expedition north of the Wall, at a place called the Fist of the First Men, along with three hundred men. The survivors said they were attacked by wights and White Walkers. And now we have this message from your brother. Do you think he would lie about something like this?”

Sansa looked back at the message Jon Snow sent to Tyrion, probably considering what her brother wrote. “Jon was always the one to look the most like our father. He wouldn’t lie, but… I mean, White Walkers cannot exist.”

“I don’t know. According to history, the Wall is eight thousand years old and was built not long after the attack of the White Walkers. We only have myths and legends about them. But on the other side, if dragons exist, why not dead men?” Tyrion shook his head. “There are many strange things that are happening. White Walkers reappearing north of the Wall, dragons in the east… If this continues I’ll believe people who say they saw mermaids in the Sunset Sea.”

“Or Brienne when she says Renly was killed by a shadow.”

Tyrion looked perplexed at Sansa. “What do you mean?”

Sansa waited a moment before she spoke. “You remember the strange circumstances of Renly Baratheon’s death?”

“Yes, of course. We never really knew who killed him. Some say it was Lady Brienne, others that it was your mother, or Stannis, or even that he was killed with dark magic.”

“Brienne told me Lord Renly was killed by a shadow with the face of Stannis Baratheon,” Sansa
said lowly. “I didn’t believe her the first time she told me, but I’ve been thinking about it afterwards, and if she had lied about Renly’s death, she would have given some believable lie, not this. But it seems unlikely just like White Walkers.”

A discussion Tyrion had with Varys came back to his mind. “Varys informed me Stannis had a Red Priestess from Asshai as an advisor and that she practices sorcery. Perhaps that’s her doing. I have to admit your mother doesn’t strike me as an assassin, and I doubt she would have accepted one at her service. When she arrested me, she wanted me to be executed, not murdered. Though with your cousin Robin Arryn execution wasn’t far from assassination for pleasure.”

Sansa looked again at her brother’s message. “We should send him help,” she said suddenly, determination in her voice. “He says he needs us. If he believes there are dead men marching on the Wall, there must at least be some great threat. We have to send him what we can.”

Tyrion sighed. “I wish I could.”

“What do you mean? You said yourself you believed there was something dangerous beyond the Wall, that you received many reports stating White Walkers were back. We cannot abandon Jon.”

“Of course, I know.” Tyrion looked at Sansa in her eyes. “But what do you want me to do? Send men to the Wall, telling them they have to fight dead men? Stannis’s forces occupy most of the Wall. If I send men there he will fight them. His fleet is anchored at Eastwatch-by-the-Sea, so we cannot send any ship there. And Kevan will never agree to send supplies or weapons to the Wall while Stannis is there. And he won’t believe stories about White Walkers either. The war is not over yet. We have three great sieges going on at Riverrun, Storm’s End and Dragonstone, and still the Greyjoys to deal with afterwards. For now, I’m afraid there’s nothing we can do.”

It was sad to say, but it was the truth. As long as Stannis stayed at the Wall, Tyrion couldn’t send help under any form to the Night’s Watch. Stannis had to leave the Wall. And even if he left, the Northerners wouldn’t easily suffer Lannister troops marching through their territory and people wouldn’t go willingly to fight against dead men in the middle of winter. Sansa seemed to understand him.

“Is there really nothing we can do?”

Tyrion swung his arms in powerlessness. “If Stannis left the Wall and his fleet was no longer blocking Eastwatch-by-the-Sea, I could probably send supplies and weapons through the Goldroad and King’s Landing, and perhaps prisoners as well to fill their ranks, but I’m afraid we’ll need a very good reason to send an army to the Wall. My bannermen will not follow me into a war against the dead during winter after they suffered so many casualties during the War of the Five Kings, unless they feel the dead are a real threat. I hope they’ll realize it before it’s too late.” Tyrion sighed again. “We should eat the rest of the dinner before it gets too cold.” Tyrion picked a sausage with his fork and bit in it. “It got cold.”

He tried to lighten the mood, but it was obvious it didn’t work. They finished to eat in silence, both lost in their thoughts. Tyrion wondered if the wildlings’ attack on the Wall was a consequence of the reappearance of White Walkers. The threat of the dead may have convinced them to unite and get south of the Wall. When they were done, Sansa went to her desk and started to write something.

“Already answering to your brother?” he asked.

“Yes. I’ll tell him we can’t send any help for now.”

“You can let me take care of that. After all, he wrote about this to me.”
“He may believe it more if it comes from me. And he’ll know I trust you.”

Tyrion had to concede it was true. “Very well. Tell him we could send supplies as soon as Stannis leaves the Wall. For now, we can’t.”

“I’ll tell him,” nodding with her head as she continued to write. Tyrion went to his solar to change his clothes for the night. They had dined late because of his meeting with Reginald Lannister. He went to bed as Sansa was changing for her own nightclothes in the dressing room. She joined him not long after, wearing a white nightgown made of Myrish silk. She laid her head against his arm and placed her hand in his own. After a long time, Sansa was still not sleeping.

“You cannot sleep?” he asked her.

“No. You neither, it seems.”

“No. Perhaps I’ll go reading.” He started to raise, but Sansa stopped him, leaning closer on him. After deciding how much he could drink, she decided if he could leave their bed or not. Anyway, Sansa was a better mean for Tyrion to fall asleep than books, so he couldn’t really complain to her. He rubbed her back with one of his hand and felt better this way. He felt Sansa relaxing as well, her head resting under his chin.

“Tyrion, what you said about the dragons in the east, is that true? Or are they only rumors?”

Tyrion waited a moment before he answered. “I’m afraid it’s more than rumors. You know there were two children of the Mad King who escaped Robert Baratheon when he took the Iron Throne?”

“Yes. Joffrey told me at his name day that Viserys Targaryen was dead.”

Tyrion remembered this name day. It had been the first time he spoke with Sansa. “Viserys is dead, but his sister, Daenerys, is still alive. She was married to some warlord of the Dothraki not long before the war started. Dothraki are a people who spend most of their lives on horses and travel through an area called the Dothraki Sea in Essos. They mainly plunder cities and lands from what I know. But she ended up in Qarth later and that’s where her dragons were seen for the first time. Ever since, they’ve been growing up and she conquered the three cities of Slavor’s Bay, Astapor, Yunkai and Meereen, abolishing slavery everywhere she went. Now she rules in Meereen as queen and tries to keep her hold on Slavor’s Bay. Her three dragons have reached the size of carriages according to the last reports Varys gave to the small council and she has about ten thousand soldiers under her orders, former slaves and sellswords. She’s real, and her dragons as well.”

They remained silent for a moment. “Do you think she may come to Westeros one day?”

“Perhaps. Unless she stays in Meereen. She had more than one chance to come to Westeros. Meereen has a fleet strong enough to carry all her army across the Narrow Sea, and she could have found allies. Many people would think twice before fighting dragons. Last time a Targaryen came to Westeros with three dragons, an alliance between the Westerlands and the Reach was defeated by the dragons. House Gardener was destroyed and the last King of the Rock surrendered to Aegon the day after the battle.”

“And Torrhen Stark knelt without a fight,” Sansa completed. Another silence followed. “If she comes, we won’t stand a chance.”

Tyrion knew that only too well. No one had been able to stop the dragons, except the Martells in Dorne, and with great losses. They needed a marriage between Princess Daenerys Targaryen, the sister of King Daeron II, and Prince Maron Martell to bring Dorne inside the Seven Kingdoms. If
dragons came again, the Lannister-Tyrell alliance wouldn’t stand a chance against the second Daenerys Targaryen. Dragons in the east, White Walkers in the north, shadows assassinating kings… The world was getting crazier than it ever was and threats who were unimaginable a few years ago emerged from everywhere.

Tyrion resumed the rubbing of his wife’s back. “Try to sleep. Let’s enjoy some peace while we have it. With some hope, dead men, dragons and shadows will never reach us.”

They didn’t speak afterwards. Tyrion didn’t know if Sansa fell asleep afterwards, but he did. He was walking slowly in a dark room, holding a torch, trying to be as silent as possible. He could hear grumbles before him. He heard chains rattling on the stone floor and saw two huge forms moving in the dark before him. First he only saw their eyes, but as he approached he could glimpse their muzzles, then their teeth, their throats, their tummies, and finally their whole bodies. Two dragons stood before him, one green with bronze eyes, the other, smaller, was white with golden eyes. One of them opened his mouth and Tyrion saw flames coming out of his throat.

Tyrion awoke in darkness without a torch. The moon was high in the skies. There were no clouds. And he wasn’t standing before two dragons, but lying in a bed in Casterly Rock with his wife resting her head on him, sleeping peacefully. He still had his hand on her back. Tyrion buried his face into his wife’s red hair, and fell asleep again, this time without any dream troubling his rest.

Chapter End Notes

There isn't much action in this chapter, I concede it. Mostly, it introduces elements that will be vital to what will happen later in the fic.

Also, I'm very sorry, but Tyrion and Sansa will have another extended absence. The next four chapters will be out of Casterly Rock. The story is expending more and more. But afterwards, they come back on a very regular basis and will have many interesting chapters.

Please review

Next chapter: Kevan
The place was stinking and crowded. Dozens of people were stuck in a very small space behind a deplorable alley. The smell was horrible, almost as much as the one on a battlefield after a great battle. Kevan had Ser Alyn Stackspear, one of the two new members of the Kingsguard replacing Ser Osmund and Ser Meryn, to protect him. And before Kevan here he stood, the man people called the High Sparrow.

The man was old, with a half bald head and many wrinkles. He wore worn clothes that were completely grey and had no shoes at his feet. What few hair he had left were grey. They would probably have been white if properly washed, but his old body was entirely covered with dust and mud. He was stinking just like everyone else here. The man was serving soup and bread to the people coming before him, all skinny people who could barely eat. If he was honest with himself, Kevan didn’t really expect that from the High Sparrow, but considering these people were fanatics he should have been prepared for this possibility.

“The name High Sparrow sounds ridiculous, doesn’t it?” the old man said as he continued to give food to the people forming a line before him and his cooking pot. He was smiling and laughing as he said that. “Like Lord Duckling or King Turtle. Still, it’s meant to. We’re often stuck with the names our enemies give to us. The notion that we’re all equal in the eyes of the Seven doesn’t sit well with some, so they belittle me. It’s only a name. Quite an easy burden to bear. Far easier than theirs.”

The High Sparrow looked around him to show the bunch of people all over the place. Kevan decided to ignore the remark. “Why did you come to King’s Landing?”

“To remind everyone who we really are. Who we all are. It’s already a hard job reminding myself. I tell them no one’s special and they think I’m special for telling them so. But enough talking about it. I assume you’re here to arrest me for that incident with the High Septon.”

The High Sparrow didn’t show any fear. He talked about serious matters as if they were talking
about weather. But he didn’t know what the High Septon had asked to the small council this morning. The High Septon had come after being beaten and forced to walk naked through the streets of King’s Landing by the Sparrows, religious fanatics who arrived in the capital not long after Tywin’s death. They would never have dared to enter the city when Tywin was still alive, but now they were spreading everywhere. A small group had left the High Septon bleeding without clothes on the cobblestones. The fact the High Septon was found in a brothel didn’t matter in this. Kevan couldn’t allow the High Septon to be humiliated and beaten this way by people without reacting. Though he may have to take measures if the High Septon visited brothels without hiding it. At least Pycelle didn’t show to the entire world he paid for time with whores.

“This is quite an unacceptable way to treat the chosen representative of the gods in this world,” Kevan said.

“Hyprocrisy is a boil. Lancing a boil is never pleasant. Although they could have been more careful with the blade.” The High Sparrow said it while he broke a loaf of bread in several pieces. Kevan started to be impatient with the way this man answered as if nothing happened.

“The High Septon came to the small council today. And he didn’t ask us to arrest you. He wanted us to execute you. And considering the way he was treated by your men, this is no surprise.”

“They aren’t my men. We are all brothers, and no one gives orders to the other. I wouldn’t presume to know your thoughts about this matter though. Are you going to kill me? If that’s the case, just say it and get over with it. I won’t oppose any resistance. No one needs to die except me if that is your wish.”

“The king doesn’t believe it would be appropriate to kill you,” Kevan explained. “You’re not the one who beat the High Septon, but some of your brothers did beat him and forced him to walk naked in the streets. The Crown has sworn to protect the Faith, and an attack against the High Septon is an attack on the Faith. The king cannot remain idle before this. Can you tell me who mistreated the High Septon?”

The High Sparrow opened his arms in powerlessness, still smiling. “If only I knew who they were. We are so many. I don’t remember all their names. And anyway I don’t know which ones did this.”

“And if you knew?”

The old man shrugged. “Perhaps I would tell you. But that wouldn’t help you very much. We are a lot of people, and our numbers increase every day. Kill one of us, and two of us will rise again.”

Kevan remained impassive. “I have nothing against you and your followers, and the king neither. Peace has just returned, and the king doesn’t want to shed blood when the war has just ended. Keep feeding the poor and helping those who have nothing. We have nothing against it. But we won’t stay still while you have people being beaten and walking into the streets without clothes. If another incident like this one happens, we’ll have no choice but to expel you from the city to guarantee the king’s peace. And we may have no choice but to grant the High Septon his request as well.” Kevan turned on his heels to leave this place, his threat in the air.

“A lifetime of wealth and power has left you blind in one eye, Ser Kevan Lannister. You are the few. We are the many.”

Kevan stopped and turned to the other people who were present. They didn’t seem to notice the discussion Kevan had had with the High Sparrow. They hadn’t talked loudly and this sorry lot were occupied to eat. “People. Know that tomorrow Queen Margaery organizes distributions of bread and soup near the Iron Gate. Everyone who wants a hot meal is welcome.”
Kevan left as someone shouted. “Queen Margaery!” and others started to shout their queen’s name as well.

Kevan went back to the Red Keep on a horse with his own guards and Ser Alyn Stackspear. The Sparrows could prove to be a danger eventually, but they couldn’t send the army or the City Watch against them. That would cause too many deaths. Maintaining peace was a priority when they just got out of war. And luckily, they had a queen who cared about the needy. They could have the people on their side with her and Tommen, and without a certain support from the people, the Sparrows couldn’t hope to represent any real threat to the Crown. However, they were religious fanatics who didn’t listen to reason. Kevan feared Lancel may have ended with these men if he hadn’t sent him to Quiet Isle. But perhaps the High Sparrow would understand they couldn’t threaten people of the government or the Faith without facing dire consequences, and that would be enough to stop them from doing anything wrong. The last thing they needed was a war with religious fanatics inside the walls of King’s Landing.

Kevan arrived to his solar in the Tower of the Hand where Jaime was waiting for him, wearing his armor and white cloak. He had asked his nephew to meet him. He had something very important to tell him.

“You asked for my presence, Kevan?”

“I did,” Kevan confirmed. “We received something from Dorne.” Kevan took the necklace from his pocket and handed it to Jaime. It was a silver necklace representing the head of a lion with its mane. Jaime looked at it for a moment.

“This is Cersei’s medallion.”

“No. Cersei’s medallion is with her at Stokeworth. This one is the second one. The original. It belonged to your mother, and Cersei gave it to Myrcella when she was five.”

Jaime looked back at his uncle in astonishment. “How does it come to be here?”

“As I just told you, we received it from Dorne. In a box, wrapped around the mouth of a dead viper.”

Jaime seemed to realize what it meant. “It’s a threat.”

“Yes. It’s a threat. Oberyn Martell is dead, killed by one of our bannermen, the same man who killed Elia Martell and her children. No wonder they hold us responsible for this.”

“She’s in danger,” Jaime said weakly.

“Maybe.”

“Maybe?” Jaime didn’t seem to understand what Kevan just told him. “My niece, your grandniece, is in Dorne, surrounded by people who hate our family. People who threaten us. People who threaten to kill her. And you say she may be in danger?”

“Yes. Your niece may be in danger.” Kevan emphasized the word niece. “That’s why I’m telling you.” Jaime remained silent, his eyes hollow. “Doran Martell is a cautious man. Princess Myrcella is betrothed to his son Trystane, and he knows he cannot face the united mights of Casterly Rock and Highgarden alone. There was no message with the box. It may come from someone else than him. I’m planning to send him a raven to warn him that anything that would happen to the princess would put in great danger our alliance with Dorne.”

Jaime looked at the medallion he still held in his hands. “We should get her out of here.”
“No. Myrcella is what guarantees our alliance with House Martell.”

“You can’t let her there.” Kevan’s nephew was angry now. “She risks to be killed. We must get her back.”

“What do you want me to do? To ask Prince Doran to send her back? That could jeopardize our alliance with Dorne if Myrcella is no longer there. To kidnap her? That could start a war if we take Prince Trystane’s betrothed away.”

“The Martells are threatening to kill Myrcella and you talk about maintaining an alliance with them.” Jaime said it with astonishment.

“What would you have me do? Start a war against Dorne when we’re just about to end the actual one? Our forces still have to take Dragonstone, Storm’s End and Riverrun. Another war would be a catastrophe, even more so in the middle of winter.”

“Cersei would never abandon her daughter. She would do everything to free her and get her back to safety.”

“Yes. And we both know Cersei’s decisions tend to have very dire consequences for our family. I told you this out of respect for you, because she’s your niece.” Again he emphasized on the last word. “Myrcella will remain in Dorne, Prince Doran will be informed he has all good reasons to protect her, and Dorne will remain into the fold. Now go and do your duty as Lord Commander of the Kingsguard.”

Kevan opened his hand to make Jaime understand he wanted Myrcella’s necklace back. Jaime put it abruptly in his hand and left, obviously disapproving Kevan’s decision. Kevan knew there were risks to let Myrcella in Dorne, but the alliance with Prince Doran was too important to be cancelled because of a threat they couldn’t be sure from who it came. The box could come from everywhere in Dorne. Honestly, Kevan didn’t think the threat was from Doran Martell. The man was too cautious. It probably came from someone else who wanted to avenge Oberyn Martell. Or if it came from the Lord of Sunspear, then it was an empty threat. The right message along with the medallion of Princess Myrcella would be enough to make sure the Prince of Dorne wouldn’t do anything against Kevan’s grandniece and would ensure no one else did anything against her. That’s what Tywin would have done. He would never risk a war against Dorne at this moment.

Kevan used the afternoon to write messages, including the one to Prince Doran, and to read various reports. Sieges were going on everywhere. Tyrion had written to him more than once to press the siege of Dragonstone to end. Kevan was just as tired as his nephew and lord about this. The Iron Islands were a real danger, much more than Dragonstone now that Stannis Baratheon was at the Wall. Now House Bolton would have to deal with the usurper if he ever invaded the North, and Kevan expected Stannis to do it. He couldn’t try to take back King’s Landing again, nor any other region of the Seven Kingdoms with the few troops he had left. Once the siege of Dragonstone was over, the Redwyne fleet would have to set sail immediately for the Iron Islands and join the Lannister fleet at Lannisport. Then they would crush the Ironmen forever. This time, Balon Greyjoy wouldn’t be spared. He rebelled twice. There would be no possibility for him to escape execution.

However, Kevan was deceived that Tyrion didn’t send more troops to end the siege of Riverrun immediately. When Kevan asked him to do so, Tyrion replied the Freys could die besieging Riverrun as far as he was concerned. It was a chance the Freys didn’t read this. Kevan couldn’t say he had any love for the Freys, but they were allies all the same, and they had to seize Riverrun for Genna and her sons. Kevan suspected Tyrion’s marriage with Sansa Stark was the main reason of his refusal to help the Freys. Did Lady Sansa convince him to not help them, or did Tyrion take the decision himself? Kevan had no way to find an answer to this question, but the result was the same. The siege
of Riverrun was lingering, the Blackfish still holding it with the last Tully forces. And the Tyrell forces took all their time to take the Baratheon’s fortress in the Stormlands, just like during Robert’s Rebellion.

The last report from Dragonstone wasn’t encouraging either. The last attempt by the Redwyne forces to storm the castle ended up with two hundred men dead, none of them were Stannis’s. Kevan may be forced to send some of his own forces who remained behind at King’s Landing. With the possible threat of the Sparrows, that wasn’t something he looked forward. Varys’s report about Slavor’s Bay was more encouraging. Daenerys Targaryen had locked two of her dragons in a cave, and the third one was nowhere to be found. She also had problems with the Sons of the Harpy, assassins wearing masks who murdered her soldiers and allies all over Meereen and who weakened her rule. Her hold on Astapor and Yunkai wasn’t certain anymore, and she banished Ser Jorah Mormont. She received a copy of the royal pardon Robert Baratheon once wrote to him and that Kevan sent months ago. Apparently the population of Slavor’s Bay was no longer totally with her after she executed a free man for assassinating a Son of the Harpy. This young queen made several mistakes, and didn’t seem about to come to Westeros. Perhaps Kevan should support the resistance against her rule, though they didn’t have enough money left in the Crown’s chests to finance the Sons of the Harpy or the slavers. For now it seemed all he could do was watch and see. He had no way to weaken Daenerys Targaryen even more. No way to make her doubt Barristan Selmy and exile him as well. For now, she was no immediate threat and Kevan hoped it would stay that way. He had no wish to face dragons in battle. The last King of the Rock, Loren the Last, surrendered to Aegon the Conqueror after his dragons alone defeated his army at the Field of Fire. Dragons wouldn’t reach Westeros. He couldn’t allow it.

Lord Tyrell’s report complained again about the bad quality of ironwood the Whitehills sent, but also stated the new fleet would be ready very soon. Probably as soon as the siege of Storm’s End would be over. Kevan had the idea to keep Mace Tyrell only as an advisor while naming Lord Paxter Redwyne Master of Ships. Lord Tyrell would have no way to complain since he kept his seat on the small council and was being replaced by one of his own bannermen. But for that, Kevan would wait for the siege of Dragonstone to be over.

Finally Kevan went to the Grand Maester’s rooms and gave him the messages to send. The one for Prince Doran was sent along with Princess Myrcella’s medallion wrapped around one of the raven’s legs. He also sent a raven to Tyrion, ordering him on the king’s order to send reinforcements to Riverrun. Then Kevan went to the king’s apartments. He needed Tommen to sign some official documents. The king liked to stamp them.

When Kevan came into the king’s rooms, he found him speaking and laughing with the queen. Kevan bowed before each of them. “Your Grace. Your Grace.”

“Ser Kevan. What a pleasure to see you.” Queen Margaery got up from her chair to welcome him. “You look tired. May I offer you some wine?”

“No, thank you, your Grace. I’m afraid my day of work is not over yet.” Kevan turned to the son of his niece… and of his nephew too. “Your Grace, I have a few decrees to make you sign.”

“Of course, Uncle.”

Tommen left the table where he had been eating some fruits in his wife’s company to sit at his desk. The boy didn’t complain about working, which was good. He would need this compliance and disposition to work hard as the years would go by. Tommen signed the documents one by one, taking great pleasure in stamping them at the end. It seemed to be the part of his work as king he loved the most. The queen stood away, caressing one of Tommen’s cat absentely while she looked
outside the window. While the king was stamping the last decree, Kevan noticed a letter with the royal seal and the name of Lord Leyton Hightower on it.

“What is this?” Kevan asked. The king lifted his eyes from the decree he just stamped and looked at Kevan. After a moment, he saw what Kevan was looking at on the desk.

“Oh, I almost forgot. Thank you, Uncle.” He took the letter and went to his wife. “Margaery, it’s done. This is the decree you asked me for.”

Margaery Tyrell smiled sweetly at her king and took the piece of paper he was handing to her. “Thank you, my love. You’re so gallant.”

Even if Tommen’s back was turned on him, Kevan could see the king was reddening. He really took a liking for his wife, just like Tyrion took one for his own. At least, unlike Jaime, they fell in love with the woman they wed. However, Kevan was intrigued by this decree. It was the queen who asked Tommen for this. The Hightowers were among the most important bannermen of House Tyrell. What did she ask for them?

“My love,” the queen said before the king could answer. “Could we go and take a walk in the gardens? Just you and me?”

Tommen seemed to consider for a moment, then agreed with a nod. But before he and the queen could go through the doors, Kevan stopped them. “Your Grace, House Hightower is among the most powerful houses in the Seven Kingdoms. As Hand of the King, it is my duty to ensure we keep good relationships with the other houses, especially the powerful ones. And for that, I must know everything I can about your decisions concerning them.”

Tommen stopped in his walk to the doors. The queen seemed impatient to go, and Kevan thought he knew why. “Come, my love. Politics can wait a little.”

Tommen hesitated a moment, his gaze switching from Kevan to Margaery Tyrell. Finally, he settled his eyes on his wife. “Excuse me, Margaery. But Ser Kevan is right. My duties come before pleasures.”

Margaery looked disappointed, perhaps even frustrated for a spark of time, but she smiled sweetly to Tommen in the end. “Of course, you’re right. Tell him. Then we can go for our walk.”

Tommen smiled at his wife, happy. He then turned to Kevan who finally got an answer. “I should have told you before, ser, you’re right. But it’s nothing very important or of concern. I just gave my consent to a marriage between a friend of the queen and Ser Gerold Hightower.”

That caused quite a surprise to Kevan. “Ser Gerold Hightower died twenty years ago during your father’s war, your Grace.”
“Oh no, this is not the same Gerold Hightower. He is the third son of Ser Baelor Hightower, Lord Leyton’s heir. He was named after Lord Leyton’s uncle,” the queen explained. That made more sense.

“Well, in this case, I’m very happy for your friend, my queen. Who’s this blessed lady?”

It was Tommen who answered. “It’s Mira. I mean, Lady Mira Forrester. Margaery thought it was time for her to marry.”

Kevan looked at the queen. She shrugged her shoulders. “Mira will make a very good wife for Lord Leyton’s grandson.” She hid very well her discomfort, but Kevan could catch a glimpse of it. She didn’t want him to discover it. Kevan smiled lightly at his grandnephew and his wife.

“You’ll give my congratulations to your handmaiden from me, your Grace. I wish you a good evening.” Kevan took the decrees Tommen just signed. “Your Grace. Your Grace.” He left after a final bow for each of them.

Kevan brought back the decrees to the Tower of the Hand, then went to visit Pycelle. When he entered the rooms of the Grand Maester, he found a young woman taking out her clothes. She quickly put them back on her when she realized Kevan was behind her.

“Leave.” The girl obeyed the order immediately. Kevan stared at the Grand Maester who wore a tunic for the night. It seemed he didn’t expect the Hand of the King at this hour. The sun was lowering at the horizon and night was about to fall. Tommen and his queen would take a nocturnal walk if they ever took one.

“My lord Hand… I’m very sorry. Usually, you don’t come that late.”

“After what happened to the High Septon earlier today, I thought you would be wise enough to keep a low profile on this kind of things for some time. Especially after you were revealed to frequent this type of girls during my nephew’s trial.”

“This…This…This was a horrible lie…”

“I won’t hear anything else about this, Pycelle. I know what was revealed about you was true. I want you to explain how it comes you didn’t inform me about the ravens the queen sent to Oldtown.”

“I… The queen sent no raven to Oldtown.”

Kevan got closer to the Grand Maester. “My nephew sent you to the black cells because you betrayed him, Pycelle. My brother would have been much less merciful in his stead, and he let you keep your charge as Grand Maester because you were loyal to him. And I let you at your office for the same reason. So whether you tell me the truth, or I ask the Citadel to choose another Grand Maester because you disappeared in unknown circumstances.”

Fear was obvious in the old man. Kevan had no time to lose with him. “I really don’t know, my lord Hand. She… The queen probably gave the message to the other maester who assists me now, Vallis. He’s from the Reach. Sometimes he takes care of ravens in my stead.”

“And you saw nothing of an answer from Lord Hightower to the queen? Not at all?”

“No, I swear. I must admit… I let Vallis take care of the ravens most of the time to focus on other more important duties.”

“Like receiving common whores? Let me be clear with you, Pycelle. I want you to tell me about the
contents of ravens the queen is sending and receiving, and I want you to perform your duties as Grand Maester. If you don’t, I’ll have you replaced and use the excuse you failed to uphold your vows of celibacy and to serve the Crown. Is that clear?"

“Yes… Yes. I swear I’ll serve you faithfully,” the old man stammered.

“Then start now, and try to not get caught by these Sparrows. Send this girl away.”

Kevan left the room and went back to the Tower of the Hand. Things weren’t going well. The queen married the key to Ironrath to a son of the heir to Hightower. That would cause problems. A marriage between Mira Forrester and Torrhen Whitehill would have put an end to the conflict between the Whitehills and the Forresters forever, but now, this marriage of Lady Mira to a Hightower could start a war later. The Hightowers were a powerful and rich house with strong military forces who could claim Ironrath in the name of Mira Forrester. And that’s what they would do. They wouldn’t give up a chance to control the ironwood, and to give an important castle to a third born son.

Kevan shouldn’t have warned Lady Mira about this. It had been obvious when he told her about a marriage prospect with Lord Whitehill’s son that she didn’t want it. He told her out of respect for her, but it seemed it was a mistake. The young woman surely went to the queen and asked her to organize another wedding for her. Kevan made a mistake. A mistake Tywin would never have done. House Lannister needed him more than ever, and he wasn’t here. Kevan couldn’t rely on his brother like he did in the past. He was alone.

Kevan thought how House Lannister seemed to crumble despite Tywin’s efforts to make them powerful. Kevan lost Lancel to the Faith, and Martyn and Willem to the war. Genna lost a son as well, and Tygett’s only son, Tyrek, still couldn’t be found and was most likely dead. Cersei was shamed before all King’s Landing, her eldest son poisoned, and Jaime never became the heir Tywin wanted. Worse, the two twins Tywin had, the two children he was so proud of when they were born, committed incest. And now Tommen was going under the Tyrells’ influence. When Kevan would die, the Tyrells would rule the Seven Kingdoms through Margaery’s influence on the king. Almost all Tywin’s legacy for now was a lie and failing. Everything he built seemed to be destroyed.

The only part of Tywin’s heritage that wasn’t destroyed yet was his second son. How strange it was. Tywin never wanted Tyron to have any part in House Lannister, and yet Tyron proved to be the only one of Tywin’s children worthy to be his child and heir. From what he knew, Tyron was ruling the Westerlands very well and his wife, the Lady Sansa, was quite well accepted in the west. However, Kevan feared Tyron might be falling under the influence of his wife just like Tommen. It was obvious Tyron loved her. Kevan feared she had an influence on his nephew and lord that might bring Tyron to make things following his wife’s interests instead of House Lannister’s interests. And for now, they still had no child. Genna told him in a recent message that their marriage was still unconsummated. If Tyron remained without children, then House Lannister could disappear, and they would never get any hold on the North.

Kevan wished Tyron had accepted the offer of Lady Olenna Tyrell to marry Lady Margaery. It had happened not long after Ser Meryn Trant was arrested. Kevan had invited Lady Olenna in his solar to apologize for the troubles that followed Joffrey’s death. But quickly, the Queen of Thorns had engaged them in the matters why they met.

“No need to apologize, ser. The king died, and it was quite normal for you to suspect my granddaughter since she was the only one present when he died. But enough of courtesies. They’re useless. So, I guess you want to offer us a marriage between Margaery and the new king.”

The woman was straight like always. “We’ll need a period of mourning, but I think a few months
should be enough before we unite your granddaughter and my grandnephew.”

“I agree. But perhaps we don’t have to wait so long to marry our rose.”

Kevan had been puzzled by this. “Could you explain yourself, my lady?”

Lady Olenna had put aside her cup of wine. “I didn’t trust your brother, Ser Kevan. I didn’t particularly like him. But I respected him. He was no fool. He understood that sometimes we must work with our rivals rather than destroy them. We are rivals, Ser Kevan. You are no fool, just like your brother, so don’t try to deny it. But right now we have every reason to work together. And we have every reason to maintain our alliance. But I think this alliance could take a shape of much more interest for us.”

Kevan had peered at the Queen of Thorns, trying to decipher her intentions. “What do you suggest, Lady Olenna?”

“I suggest we join our houses in another way than through Margaery and Tommen. A crown doesn’t give much power. It probably doesn’t give any power at all. So, I suggest another arrangement to make our alliance last.”

“You’re known for being straight, Lady Olenna. I didn’t expect you to turn around like this.”

The Queen of Thorns had smiled at this. “You’re right. I’m forgetting myself. Very well, I propose that our rose marry Lord Tyrion and becomes the Lady of Casterly Rock.” Kevan had barely managed to contain his surprise. It was the last thing he expected. “His marriage with Sansa Stark, we all know she is a Stark and not a Lannister, is still un consummated. Everyone knows it. You only need to ask the High Septon to grant an annulment and to wed your nephew to my granddaughter soon after. The wedding can take place in the capital, or in Casterly Rock, or even in Higharden if you want, though I doubt that is your wish. House Lannister and House Tyrell will be linked through a very strong marriage that will prevent any conflict between us, and we’ll be able to control the Seven Kingdoms together. Margaery will give children named Lannister to your lord. She won’t refuse to do her duty as wife like the Stark girl. And if Loras was to never have children, the Imp’s children will have a claim on Highgarden.”

Kevan was quite skeptical about all this. “Why would you give up the chance to have Lady Margaery as Queen of Westeros?”

“Because Margaery will wield much more power with the Lord of Casterly Rock that with Tommen. The king is only a boy when Lord Tyrion is a man. I think Margaery would like much more a man of experience in her bed.”

Kevan had pursed his lips, trying to decide what to do. He finally gave a safe answer. “We’ll think about it. I’ll talk with my lord about this proposal.”

“Good. I’m sure he will prefer a rose to a wolf to share his bed.”

Lady Olenna had left the solar and Kevan had remained in his thoughts for a very long time after she left. This proposal was very strange. The Tyrells were ready to give up a Tyrell queen for a Tyrell Lady of the Rock. Why? Because Lady Margaery would have more power with a marriage to Tyrion? Or for something else? Were they hoping to get Sansa Stark as a bride for their heir, Ser Loras? In this case, they couldn’t hope for this. She was the key to the North. Kevan could organize her marriage with a member of House Lannister or a Lannister bannerman, like Ser Addam Marbrand. She would be the king’s ward, so the Tyrells wouldn’t be able to ask for her hand if her marriage with Tyrion was annulled. Still, the proposition was very intriguing.
But Kevan had thought it was a good offer all the same. They didn’t know what game the Tyrells were playing with that, but Margaery Tyrell would make a much better match for Tyrion than Sansa Stark. Their alliance with House Tyrell would be much stronger this way, and their rivals would lose their influence on Tommen. Kevan wished Tyrion had accepted the offer. But his nephew refused, for the same reason Tywin would have refused to cast aside Joanna, or Kevan would have refused to set aside Dorna.

Kevan had to admit he wasn’t unhappy of Tyrion’s decision. Not entirely. Lady Sansa proved to be quite capable as Lady of Casterly Rock, and she made Tyrion happy. Though Kevan thought Tyrion would have been more careful with the Rose of Highgarden than with the sister of the Young Wolf. Tyrion loved his wife, while he would have been able to keep more rational thoughts with Lady Margaery. He would have known she couldn’t be entirely trusted, which wasn’t the case with Lady Sansa.

To see Tyrion and his wife together always brought back to Kevan the memory of his brother and his wife. Tywin had loved Joanna more than anything. He had been heartbroken when she had died. But through the marriage Tyrion had with the Lady Sansa, Kevan saw this love again. Tyrion respected and loved his wife the same way Tywin loved Joanna. And Sansa Stark wasn’t without common points with Kevan’s sister-in-law. This could be dangerous. Kevan had tried to make understand to Lady Sansa that they had everything to gain from working together as allies, but Kevan doubted she would really consider the Lannisters as full allies. After all, they murdered her family. That wasn’t something you could erase with apologies and words. Kevan was afraid the young lady may try to bring down House Lannister one day. He still thought that for family, Tyrion would have been better to disavow Lady Sansa and marry Lady Margaery. But Kevan knew very well that as soon that a Lannister loved a woman, there was nothing to do. He would do anything for the woman he loved, no matter the consequences, even if it could bring his family down forever. It had been true for Kevan’s father, for his three brothers, and now sadly it was true for Tyrion as well, and even more sadly for Jaime too.

Anyway, there was nothing Kevan could do for Tyrion now. He was his lord, and it was Kevan’s duty to serve him, just like he served Tywin before. Lady Sansa seemed to appreciate Tyrion, and to appreciate him a lot, when they left King’s Landing for Casterly Rock. Their marriage would probably be consummated very soon, and Tyrion would have children to hold both the Westerlands and the North. As for Mira Forrester, there was nothing Kevan could do about it. Tommen signed a decree to arrange this marriage, and Kevan couldn’t risk to change Tommen’s mind on the matter. To cancel the betrothal after it was just concluded would have terrible consequences for the relations between the Crown and House Hightower. Anyway, Kevan couldn’t oppose any marriage prospect against this. He had received Lord Whitehill’s answer not long ago, and Lady Mira’s words had proved to be true. He will probably refuse to organize such a marriage. He will want to destroy my house to the roots and will never accept a Forrester in his family. Lord Whitehill responded to the offer to marry his son to Lady Mira as if it was an insult. After a Forrester tried to kill him, that wasn’t such a surprise after all. Ludd Whitehill seemed to be a man who followed his hatred more than his reason. He really wanted to destroy House Forrester forever, and to let no trace of it behind. In this sense, the marriage between Mira Forrester and Gerold Hightower could allow a real Forrester to eventually take back Ironrath and resume ironwood’s harvesting of good quality. Only Kevan wished he had married the young woman to a Lannister bannerman instead of a Tyrell one.

Kevan took a quick supper this evening. He wasn’t very hungry. He went back to his work as Hand of the King and got to bed only very late in the night, just like every other night.

Chapter End Notes
To resume, the Sparrows have come, the Lannisters and the Tyrells fight for influence over Tommen, Myrcella is in danger, and Kevan tries to do what he believes Tywin would do if he was alive. And Mira is betrothed to a Hightower. With Cersei away, it can't be worse than in the show.

Please review

Next chapter: new POV (at Winterfell)

Also, "A Rose and a Lion" will be updated in a few days, at the same time than "A Shadow and a Wolf". Prepare to discover who is the rose.
Okay, that may surprise as a choice for a POV. Roose Bolton is not the first person we think of when time comes to choose whose mind we will enter. But I needed to show what was happening at Winterfell, and since Roose Bolton is the one ruling it, it seemed like the best choice to have an overall view of the situation in the North. Theon could have been chosen, but he won't have a very great role to play in this story and he doesn't see enough how the political affairs of the North are faring. And his thoughts would have been very dark and desperate. And it was out of a question that I would write from Ramsay or Myranda point of view. I don't want to imagine what's going on in their heads.

Roose Bolton is somewhat a northern version of Tywin Lannister. I think his coldness and his rational thinking make it more bearable to read from his perspective.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Bear Island knows only one Warden of the North and Lord of Winterfell, and his name is Stark.”

The message was written by the exercised hand of a maester, but it was dictated by a girl of ten. Lyanna Mormont, Lady of Bear Island. Such were the kind of answers the new Warden of the North received most of the time when he asked the other houses of the North to pledge their fealty to him as their new liege lord. There were answers bitter than the one from Bear Island.

“Boltons are turncloaks and traitors. True Northerners will never kneel before you scum.”

Jon Humber, called the Greatjon, Lord of the Last Hearth, had been the staunchest supporter of Robb Stark when he was alive, and still supported him after his death. His reply was quite clear about it. Lord Bolton couldn’t do much about it. He knew very well the difficulties ahead of him once Tywin Lannister named him Warden of the North. The Lord of Casterly Rock gave him the North, but the Lord of the Dreadfort had to keep it on his own. The Lannisters wouldn’t send him any help.

They arrived at Winterfell about two months ago. Things hadn’t been easy from the start. The castle was in ruins thanks to Ramsay. He should have taken it and kept it in good state instead of burning it, and now Roose Bolton had to rebuild it. The works advanced well, but it was work they could have avoided, especially with the hostility of the other lords. The only houses who really supported House Bolton as Wardens of the North were the Dustins, the Ryswells and the Karstarks. The other houses opposed them, or refused to obey and to pay their taxes. That’s why he had sent Ramsay to Castle Cerwyn three weeks ago to collect taxes they refused to pay. They occupied a strategic position on the Kingsroad and House Bolton couldn’t afford to let them rebel.

Maester Wolkan entered at this moment. Of all people here at Winterfell, he was the only one who could enter Roose Bolton’s solar or rooms without asking. Even Ramsay, especially Ramsay,
couldn’t enter his rooms without asking first. “Lord Bolton.”

“What do you have to say?” Roose continued to write as he asked the question. That was a very important letter for House Glover that his army was helping freeing Deepwood Motte from the Ironmen.

“Your son is back.”

Roose Bolton continued to write, not leaving his eyes from the sheet a single second. “Thank you. You’re dismissed, Wolkan.”

“Yes, my lord.”

The maester left with no other word. It was useless to say anything more. The Warden of the North finished the letter, then left his solar and went into the courtyard. Reparations were going at the expected they expected. Soon Winterfell would be fully fit to live in again and fit to defend. Ramsay was dismounting, a wide and sadistic smile across his face like always. His father knew what it meant. There was a cart with three skinned bodies in it. Soon they would be hung before the portcullis to show what House Bolton did to those who opposed them. Perhaps that would do some good, though Roose Bolton doubted the usefulness of doing it repeatedly.

Ramsay walked in his direction, still a mad smile on his face. “Father.”

Roose didn’t show any emotion before his son’s return. Wherever he went, his madness often unleashed useless terror. “You must be weary after such a long travel. Come in the Great Hall. We need to talk.”

“Thank you, Father. Reek!” What had been Theon Greyjoy arrived before them within a few seconds. “Kill a chicken, and bring it to me. Quickly.”

“Yes, my lord.” Reek left, his stench persisting in the air where he was a moment ago.

Roose went to the Great Hall while his son went to get rid of his travel clothing, and probably to see if his dogs were well fed in his absence. His creature would probably lose another part if he found out he didn’t take care well enough of his beasts. Ramsay entered the Hall a few minutes later, as Reek was bringing plates of food, including the chicken he just killed. Roose sat at the head of the grand table, eating nothing of what was before him, while Ramsay started to devour the plates before him.

“Who were the bodies inside that cart?”

“Lord Cerwyn, his wife and his brother,” his son answered.

“I hope you have a good explanation for this. We don’t kill lords and ladies without good reasons. We can’t hold the North with terror alone.”

“You can’t hold the North if you let these lesser lords insult us.”

“I sent you there to collect taxes, not bodies.” Roose Bolton waited for an explanation. Ramsay kept eating while he talked.

“Lord Cerwyn refused to pay. Said the Warden of the North would always be a Stark and he’d be damned if he kiss a traitor’s boot.”

Rose took a gulp of wine. “He left you no choice.” It was a statement, not a question.
“I flayed him living along with his wife and brother. Made his son watch.”

“And?”

“The new Lord Cerwyn paid his taxes.”

At least something would come out of it. Ramsay skinned people for pleasure, but this time it would have some use. Though not enough use. Roose Bolton looked at his son, eating as if nothing was amiss. That wasn’t the son he needed, but it was the only one he had. He lost all the others in the cradle or to Ramsay. House Bolton would probably not survive Ramsay if he was allowed to act freely. For now, all they had were taxes and not enough to keep their hold on the North.

“I’ve something important to tell you.” Ramsay didn’t lift his attention from the food before him. “Stop eating and listen.”

Roose kept a calm voice, but put enough threat and firmness in it. His son looked at him and slowly put his fork and knife on the table, folding his hands before him just like Roose did. Perhaps there was indeed some of him in this son. Sometimes he doubted it.

“We don’t have enough men to hold the North if the other houses rise up against us. Do you understand that?”

“Our pact with the Lannisters protects…”

Roose didn’t allow his son to finish. “I had a pact with Tywin Lannister. And Tywin Lannister is dead. The remaining Lannisters are a thousand miles away dealing with that fact. They’ve never once in the history of the Seven Kingdoms sent their army this far north. If you think they will for us, you’re a fool. If they ever are to send their army in the North, it will be to take back Winterfell from us and to claim the North for themselves.”

“Then the North will fight alongside us. The other houses will never allow the Lannisters to take the North.” His son said it with a pout.

“If you believe so, then you’re a fool as well. The Imp rules Casterly Rock and he’s married to the last known surviving daughter of Eddard Stark. As soon as he gets a son from Sansa Stark, he can march on the North and claim the entire kingdom for his son. Who do you think the northern houses will fight for? The people who murdered their king, or the grandson of Eddard Stark?”

Roose’s son looked at him, still uninterested. “Let’s show them what happens when they fight against us. I can repeat what I did at Cerwyn everywhere.”

Roose would have sighed at his son’s stupidity. Ramsay only understood cruelty, but he saw it as a way to play, not to maintain the other houses in line. “Do you know how many men we have?”

“No.”

“Five thousand. With the allies we’re sure of, that’s the number of soldiers we can deploy in battle. The Lannisters can muster much more men. And if the Imp was to promise the other lords our heads all the while threatening them, the other houses will fight for them. Tywin Lannister may have been the mind behind the Red Wedding, but he wasn’t the one to stab Robb Stark in the heart. I was.”

“You fear a noseless dwarf, father?”

“Yes, I fear him.” Roose let no sign of fear piercing his voice, but he feared the Lannisters for real. “Fear is what keeps a man alive in this world of treachery and deceit. If the Imp decided to take the
North right now, we would be doomed. What would you do if Tyrion Lannister was to march on the North tomorrow?"

“I would be waiting for him with our men and my dogs, and I would let them feast on him after I flawed him. And then I would hunt his wife.”

“Do you think your dogs will be able to defeat an army of ten thousand men? He will most likely kill them, then chop our heads from our bodies and let them rot on spikes at the top of the Dreadfort’s gates for years.” Ramsay was about to reply to this, but Roose didn’t let him. His son only understood cruelty because he took joy from it, and only from it. Cruelty could be useful, but came a time when it was useless. “We need to inspire loyalty among the northern houses and to reinforce our own house. We’ve become a great house by entering into alliances with other houses and parlaying those alliances into greater power. The best way to forge a lasting alliance isn’t by peeling a man’s skin off. The best way is marriage.” The Warden of the North rose from his seat. “Now that you’re a Bolton by royal decree, it’s high time you married a suitable bride. And as it happens, I’ve found the perfect girl to solidify our hold on the North.”

Ramsay had his mouth wide open when his father looked back at him. “Which girl?”

“Arya Stark. Daughter of Eddard Stark.”

Ramsay frowned, something that happened quite rarely. “Arya Stark is dead.”

“It seems she’s not. Officially she’s still dead, and for now she must remain dead for the people outside the North, but in truth it appears she still lives. She’s riding for Winterfell at this very moment and will arrive in a few weeks. You will wed her, you will share her bed, and put a son in her. More than one son, hopefully. This way, you’ll have an heir whose grandfather will be Eddard Stark, the last Warden of the North of House Stark. Our hold on the North will be quite strengthened by this.”

Ramsay was looking at him stupidly, Roose had no difficulty to see it. “In this case, I only have to fuck her and that will be enough.”

“It must be a marriage,” Roose corrected on a calm firm tone. “Or else her children will be bastards, just like you were before. You will marry Arya Stark not long after she arrives and have legitimate children with her, and ensure House Bolton remains powerful much more than by skinning lesser lords.” Roose looked at the plates before his son. “I think you had your share. Now go.”

Ramsay stood up. “Come, Reek.”

“This creature stays with me.” Roose took back his place.

“Stay with you? Why? He’s mine. You cannot have him.”

Roose nearly smiled at this. Only nearly. “All you have I gave you, even your name. You would do well to remember that, bastard. As for this… Reek… if you have not ruined him beyond redemption, he may yet be of some use to us.”

After a long time when his son looked at him like a mad child, something he was, Ramsay left. “Take him. He’s not even a man. The way he smells disgusts me.”

_You’re not far to disgust me you too, bastard._ Roose turned his attention to what once was Theon Greyjoy. Ramsay’s pet was staring at the floor, his back bent, shaking.

“Look at me,” Roose ordered him with a sweet and calm voice. The creature didn’t react. “I don’t like my orders to be disobeyed, or ignored. You already went through terrible sufferings by my son’s
hand. So look at me if you don’t want it to get worse.”

Slowly, hesitantly, his son’s pet looked at him, afraid. Roose waved his hand to the chair Ramsay just left. “Sit.” The eyes wandered to the seat. The head shook violently.

“I prefer to stand.”

“I just told you I don’t like to be disobeyed. Sit.”

Reluctantly, Reek walked in a very odd way to the chair and sat. He seemed unable to find a good posture when he sat. Ramsay played his game with the heir of the Iron Islands, and the result sat at Roose’s left now.

“Eat.” What may have been a man once shook his head compulsively again. The food before him was the one Ramsay left. “I commanded you to eat. I didn’t offer. Eat.”

With clumsy hands, the creature took a fork and started to pick some food with it. He didn’t touch the knife. Roose thought he had an idea why. Reek ate very slowly, looking repeatedly at the doors of the Hall, surely fearing Ramsay may enter any time and punish him for eating from his plates.

“Your stench is quite appalling.” The remark made Reek stop to eat.

“Yes, my lord. I beg your pardon, my lord.”

“Why? The way you smell is my son’s doing, not your own. I am well aware of that. I knew the first Reek. He stank, though not for want of washing. I have never known a cleaner creature, truth be told. He bathed thrice a day and wore flowers in his hair as if he were a maiden. Once, when my second wife was still alive, he was caught stealing scent from her bedchamber. I had him whipped for that, a dozen lashes. Even his blood smelled wrong. When Ramsay’s mother, the miller’s wife, came before my gate with a baby, pretending he was mine, I sent her away and wanted to throw the baby into the river. But then I looked at him, and saw he was my son. A few years later I gave her Reek so Ramsay could have a servant. It was meant to be amusing, but he and Ramsay became inseparable. I do wonder though… Was it Ramsay who corrupted Reek, or Reek Ramsay?”

The new Reek didn’t answer. Not that Roose really expected him to answer. That was a question he would probably never get an answer for, and an answer wouldn’t really make any difference.

“Ramsay has very particular tastes. There are times he makes me wonder if he is truly my seed. My forebears were many things, but never fools. Ramsay’s amusements are his own. I won’t chide him on that count, but he must be more discreet. A peaceful land, a quiet people, that has always been my rule.”

“A fine rule, my lord.” Finally the creature said something. Perhaps Ramsay left something human in him.

“Do you really think Ramsay can rule the North?” Roose asked after a moment. What was left of the man took time to answer, stopping again to eat.

“He fights for you, my lord. He’s strong.”

“Bulls and bears are strong. I have seen my bastard fight. He is not entirely to blame. The first Reek was his tutor, and Reek was never trained at arms. Ramsay is ferocious, I will grant you, but he swings that sword like a butcher hacking meat.”

“He’s not afraid of anyone, my lord.”
“He should be. Fear of death is what can keep us alive in this world, like I just told him. Even here at Winterfell, the smallfolk want us dead. He should fear them as well.” A moment passed before Roose Bolton asked another question to the second Reek. “You were at Winterfell when the royal party visited it, weren’t you?” His interlocutor nodded. “You saw the Imp. Tyrion Lannister. What can you tell me of him?”

The more information Roose would have on Tyrion Lannister the better. Theon Greyjoy may have known some things about him from his stay at Winterfell, and with some luck Reek would remember what Theon Greyjoy knew.

“He spent most of his time with whores in the winter town, or drinking wine, or reading.”

“That’s all?”

The creature gulped heavily, and many seconds passed before everything went out. “Theon Greyjoy spoke with him when he came from the Wall, right before he left Winterfell for the last time. He gave a special saddle to Bran Stark, the cripple boy, so he may ride again. Even if he wasn’t pleased by the cold welcome Robb Stark gave him. Robb Stark believed the Lannisters had tried to get his brother killed by an assassin. Theon Greyjoy spoke to the Imp before he left for the brothel in the winter town. He went to spend time with Ros. She was a girl with red hair Theon Greyjoy appreciated very much. The Imp mocked Theon for being the servant of the Starks because his father rebelled against them. He said his loyalty to his captors was touching. He mocked the attempt of the Ironmen to rebel against the Crown, saying it was a stupid rebellion. He said…”


“He said he was himself a constant disappointment for his own father and had learned to live with it. I think… I think he tried to be kind with Theon. That perhaps he understood the way he was torn between his loyalty to the Starks and to his family.”

Roose remained silent for a moment, peering the young man his son destroyed who sat near to him, a hollow look on his face. He could still remember who he had been, though he didn’t want to be that man again, for fear of what Ramsay may do to him. But what he told about the Imp was interesting. The Imp had fought at King’s Landing against Stannis Baratheon, and even though Tywin Lannister was credited for the victory, the Imp may have had a role to play in that victory. He was intelligent enough to know the Greyjoy rebellion had been foolish, just like the actual one was, and to realize how Theon Greyjoy had been torn apart between two loyalties. And the Imp read a lot. That was indeed quite interesting. Someone who read very much couldn’t be taken for a fool. Roose would have to be careful with the new Lord of Casterly Rock. The love for books brought back to Roose some memories.

“I had another son once. Perhaps Ramsay mentioned him to you. Did he?”

Shaking after everything he said, the creature nodded. “Domeric.”

“Domeric. A quiet boy, but most accomplished. He served four years as Lady Dustin’s page, and three in the Vale as a squire to Lord Redfort. He played the high harp, read histories, and rode like the wind. The boy was mad for horses, Lady Dustin would tell you. Not even Lord Rickard’s daughter could outrace him, and that one was half a horse herself. Redfort said he showed great promise in the list. A great jouster must be a great horseman first. He would have made a perfect Lord of the Dreafort one day. He would have followed my rule. But Ramsay killed him. A sickness in the bowels, Maester Wolkan says, but I say poison. In the Vale, Domeric had enjoyed the company of Redfort’s sons. He wanted a brother by his side, so he began to spend time with Ramsay. I forbade it, but Domeric was a man grown and thought that he knew better than his father.
Now his bones lie beneath the Dreadfort with the bones of his brothers, who died still in the cradle, and I am left with Ramsay. Tell me… If the kinslayer is accursed, what is a father to do when one son slays another?"

The second Reek didn’t seem able to answer. Roose himself had no answer to this. It was probably time now to find if there was really some of Theon Greyjoy left in it.

“That must have been difficult for you to live most of your life with the Starks. I remember you when you were still a boy. I saw you when your father was forced to hand you to Eddard Stark. The Imp was right saying your rebellion was stupid. Both your rebellions were and are stupid. You cannot hope to win against the Seven Kingdoms united. We must adapt to our situation if we want to survive, something your people don’t seem to understand. That’s what I did when I stabbed Robb Stark in the heart. I was never really ambitious enough to wish to become the Warden of the North, but when it became obvious that the war was lost for us against the Lannisters, I decided to make sure my house would survive, and the best way for that was to do Tywin Lannister’s will. I regret the Young Wolf didn’t listen to my advice. We wouldn’t be there then. The most I hoped not long ago was to marry my son to the Lady Sansa. First I hoped Domeric would marry her, then Ramsay once Domeric was gone. But now it’s impossible. And here we are, in a difficult position, with enemies everywhere, something Ramsay ignores or doesn’t care about. In both cases this is dangerous. But I have no choice. I did it. If Robb Stark had listened to my advices, perhaps we wouldn’t be there.”

What had been Theon Greyjoy didn’t react to his words and continued to stare blankly before him. Roose continued. “It must have been difficult for you. To choose between Robb Stark and your true family. You were loyal to him, I saw it. Did you choose to turn against him in order to survive? Or did you do it for your family?”

After a moment, an answer came, very low. “For my pride. I wanted to show my father and my sister I was a true Ironborn. I wanted to prove I could make great things. I wanted to prove I was a Greyjoy, and to hold Winterfell.”

“Then you were a fool,” Roose stated. For the first time, the man turned his head abruptly toward him. “You had no hope to hold Winterfell. You took unnecessary and foolish risks. You could have just pillaged the coasts, but you tried to be more than you could be. And you betrayed a man you grew up with. A man you considered like your brother. How do you feel about it?”

Roose thought he saw some anger for a very short moment in the man’s eyes, but then there was only regret. He was shaking again. “I deserve what happened to me. I betrayed Robb. I killed Ser Rodrik. I burned those boys. I took Winterfell. I deserve everything that happened to me.”

Roose nodded slowly. “There is still some of Theon Greyjoy left in you.”

“My name is Reek. I am Reek, it rhymes with freak.”

“Yes, that’s what Ramsay wants you to say, and you do well in saying it, or else he would cut from you more than what he already cut. But that doesn’t change the truth. There is still some part of you that is Theon Greyjoy, and that’s what we need. Arya Stark is coming here to marry Ramsay. Her brothers are either dead or will be dead soon, except Jon Snow who’s a member of the Night’s Watch, and I don’t want him here when his sister will wed my son. He would probably try to kill me, or Ramsay. You’re the closest thing to a man she has for a family. You will give her to my son during the wedding ceremony, and act as Theon Greyjoy during this time, just like you did at Moat Cailin. You can do that?”

Another long moment passed. “Yes, my lord.”
“Good. Now leave. Go and do what you can, or what my bastard wants.”

What was in part Theon Greyjoy and in part Reek left the room immediately, obviously afraid. Roose finished his frugal meal without really tasting the food. Then he left it there for the servants to take care of the left-overs his son and his creature left behind them. He went to one of the courtyards where he saw a line of carts with men bearing the sigil of a white hill and star over a blue field. The carts Ludd Whitehill’s men brought were filled with ironwood shields. Finally they brought what they were supposed to bring weeks ago. The Warden of the North walked in their direction. When Roose went to the men, they bowed their heads before him. Their captain stepped forward to meet him.

“Lord Bolton. The ironwood Lord Whitehill promised you.”

“Ironwood that should have arrived two months ago.”

The captain was scared, and he ought to be. “My lord, we had problems with the Forresters. It took us more time…”

“I don’t care about the problems you had. Show me the merchandise.”

The captain made a sign to his men who started to unload the content of the carts. Roose picked a shield. It was all cracked and roughly made, not at all like the ironwood weapons Robb Stark had for his army. Roose ordered a Whitehill man to hold the shield before him. He unsheathed his dagger and hit the shield with its point as hard as he could. The shield split in two and the dagger sank into the soldier’s heart. The man fell on the ground, still holding a half of the shield in each hand. Roose took back his dagger, washed it and put it back at his belt.

“I asked for ironwood weapons, not for useless ironwood. Bring back that scrap to Lord Whitehill and tell him to send me good work the next time, or else I’ll find someone else to work ironwood and to possess it.”

The other Whitehill men were staring at him in shock, but knew better than to argue. “Yes, my lord.” They all said it together while they took their companion’s body away.

Roose Bolton walked away to a room in the Great Keep. The room was locked and a guard was standing before it all the time. He unlocked the door and opened it when he saw his lord arriving. He closed the door behind him when Lord Bolton was inside with his guest.

The man before him wore many furs and was warming his hands over the fire in the hearth. This man had arrived two months ago clad in rich clothes. He had brown hair and green eyes, was thin of skin and of average height. He wasn’t used to cold. Where he had lived before in Lannisport, it was always much warmer than in the North. He was only the son of a rich merchant. Such was the man Tyrion Lannister sent here to represent his interests and the interests of his wife. Roose knew he wasn’t the only one. There were representatives of House Lannister in each great house, city and castle of the North now. They were watched everywhere.

“I guess you like these accommodations better than the previous ones,” Roose said after the door closed.

The young man left his chair near the hearth to face Roose Bolton. He was barely twenty. “You left me rot into a cell for a month.”

“I did. And you’re lucky I didn’t let Ramsay play with you.” The man shivered in fear. He knew what Ramsay was capable of. He had seen the skinned bodies. “These rooms have been yours for a
few weeks now. They will be yours as long as you stay in Winterfell, which means for a very long
time. Just like when you were in your cell, you’ll write reports to Lord Tyrion that I approve, and
only write what I tell you to write. I will allow you to visit some parts of the castle at certain periods
of the day. You’ll be a prisoner, but you’ll be well taken care of. I swear. In your interest, I would
make sure to give me every reason to not make you suffer in case you would try to cause any trouble
in any way.” The young man nodded in approval. “Now, I want you to write your monthly report to
Lord Tyrion about what’s happening in Winterfell. Tell him the rebuilding is going well, that
everything is quiet, and that you saw sometimes peeled bodies hanging from the gates. Bodies of
people who refused to obey House Bolton. Tell him you don’t know their identity, that some people
say they are noble people, others say they are just peasants, or Bolton soldiers. Nothing more,
nothing less.”

The young man complied to the order and wrote the report. Roose read it once it was over.
Everything was fine. Lord Tyrion would hear rumors about skinned people through his other
representatives, but this would cast doubts in his mind about who flawed people and which people
were flawed. Roose left the room.

Since this representative arrived, they made sure he wouldn’t tell anything that could bring the Iron
Throne to take the title of Wardens of the North from House Bolton. They already lost the title of
Lord of Winterfell to the Lady of Casterly Rock. If House Bolton was to survive, they needed to
remain the Wardens of the North. And for that, no one was to know Arya Stark would come to
Winterfell, except the closest allies of House Bolton like the Ryswells and the Dustins. They would
only reveal it to the rest of the North when time would be appropriate. Perhaps never.

Roose Bolton entered his solar and asked his squire, Elmar, to fetch a man he needed to speak with.
Elmar once was betrothed to Arya Stark, but it didn’t matter now. Walder Frey annulled the betrothal
when Robb Stark broke his word by marrying a foreign woman. He should have kept her as a
mistress and marry a Frey girl instead, but he chose to marry the foreigner, signing his defeat.

Torrhen Whitehill entered in the solar a few minutes later. He was a man at the end of the thirties,
with blond hair and a weak beard along his chin. He had a threatening look usually, but in the
presence of his liege lord, his face was more respectable.

“Lord Bolton.”

“Lord Torrhen. Please sit.” The heir of Highpoint sat before the Warden of the North. For now, he
was serving his liege lord at Winterfell, but Roose had an idea to send him somewhere he could be
more useful. “Your family doesn’t send me what I’m asking. I need ironwood weapons, not birch
quality ironwood.”

“My house will give you what you need, my lord,” the man assured him.

“You should have given it to me a long time ago.”

“We had an important deal to honor with the Crown and House Forrester to deal with,” Torrhen
Whitehill offered as an excuse.

“My son dealt with House Forrester when I sent him to Ironrath. You allowed the Forresters to rebel
against you. You pushed them to rebel. We gave you half the ironwood forests, and you decided to
seize all the forests instead. Your father sent a troublesome son who burned houses for pleasure to
occupy Ironrath. That brought war between your family and the Forresters.”

“Your own son skins people alive, my lord.”
“This son is my heir. Your brother wasn’t.” Anger rose in the heir of Highpoint. Roose could see that. But the heir maintained his calm all the same.

“We lost all the craftsmen of the Forresters in the Battle of Ironrath, and our own workers in the forests are constantly attacked by outlaws.”

“Then it means your family fails not only to work and exploit ironwood, but also to maintain the peace in the North. In this case, Ironrath and its forests may be in better hands with another family.”

This was an indirect threat to strip the Whitehills form the ironwood they lusted for so long. If they couldn’t work it, then Roose Bolton would have no choice but to call someone else to do it.

“My lord,” Torrhen Whitehill said, “another family won’t be able to exploit ironwood any better. The Forresters were the ones who could work it, and no one else could.”

“Then perhaps your father should have kept some of them alive, instead of killing them all during the battle.”

“Not all of them. I can give you ironwood of good quality, my lord, but for that I’ll need your help. Otherwise you won’t ever get what you want. This no threat, my lord. Only a fact.”

Torrhen Whitehill was brave to speak this way to Roose. He knew what it meant. There was something Torrhen Whitehill could personally get from this. “Explain yourself.”

“Lord Gregor Forrester and his wife, Elissa Branfield, had six children together. Lord Gregor died at the Twins, and one of his sons died when… when Lord Ramsay visited Ironrath.”

“I’m well aware of that, just like your father who was present when it happened. No need to give me details.”

“His three other sons died during the short war between my family and House Forrester,” Torrhen Whitehill resumed. “Lady Elissa died as well during the battle, and their youngest daughter too. But there was a Forrester who wasn’t at Ironrath when my father’s army took it. The firstborn daughter of Lord Gregor. Lady Mira Forrester. She’s in King’s Landing right now, serving as a handmaiden for the queen. If you could persuade the king and his Hand to arrange a marriage between me and her, then we could bring back peace in the Forrester lands and start to craft ironwood of good quality.”

Roose thought about it for a moment. “You want me to ask the queen to give the hand of her handmaiden to you?”

“Aye, my lord. My father wouldn’t approve. He hates all Forresters, and wants them all dead, to the last child. But this marriage could give us all what we want.”

Roose Bolton nodded slightly after a moment. “Very well. I’ll send a raven to Kevan Lannister about this. Make sure the next provision of ironwood will be of better quality. You’re dismissed.”

They didn’t need to say anything else. Torrhen Whitehill left Lord Bolton’s solar. Kevan Lannister had been his brother’s advisor for a very long time. He would understand the advantage to marry this handmaiden to the heir of Highpoint. Lord Bolton called Elmar and told him to prepare the leeches. Thirty minutes later, after a few messages written and a visit to Maester Wolkan in the maester’s turret, the Warden of the North was lying in his chair with leeches all over his naked body.
Please review

Next chapter: Mira

The new chapter of "A Rose and a Lion" is released. Discover who the rose is.
I've been trying to go deeper into Mira's mind in this chapter. Mira and Sansa have many things in common the way I made this fic. Both think all their family is dead, their only relative they know to be probably still alive is at the Wall (we can consider Gared Tuttle is some sort of family for Mira and she doesn't know he disappeared north of the Wall), both are married/about to be married to someone from another family because of their claim on their family's seat, they come from the North and spent the last years in the south away from those they love. All this had an effect on their ways of thinking, and this is something I'm going to explore in the next chapters for both of them.

I hope you enjoy this chapter.
Sera sat on the bed, her eyes staring at the floor. “He was a good man. He wanted to marry me. It was my chance. My chance to be someone. To have a real life.” Mira sat at her friend’s side, laying her hand on hers. “I want to be happy for you Mira. Really, I want. But it’s just… I just find it so unfair. You’re getting married to a knight, the son of a great lord, and I’m stuck with a bastard name.”

Mira patted Sera’s hand. “You’ll find someone else. I’m sure.”

Sera shook her head. “No, I won’t. Not after I was suspected to poison the king. I have no great name, no castle, nothing to give to anyone. I don’t have any right on any land or place like you. I am a bastard. A Flowers. That’s what I’m going to be all my life.”

Sera started to sob. Mira guided the face of her friend to her own shoulder, wrapping her head with her arms. They remained in this position for some time. Mira knew she was more than sad. She had been overjoyed about her marriage with Garibald Tarwick. It had been an opportunity for her to not be Sera Flowers anymore, and it was taken from her by Joffrey’s death. Mira wanted to strangle Margaery’s grandmother for that. She was responsible for all this. She understood why she killed Joffrey, but still, she could have devised a plan that wouldn’t have involved Sera to be suspected. Like always, lower people where the ones to suffer from the game of thrones. Mira visited enough orphanages, hospices and shelters with her mistress to know the more lowborn you were, the more you suffered from the wars.

Sera’s sobs only stopped after a long moment and she stared at the floor again. Mira pressed a hand on her arm. “We should continue to prepare. We leave tomorrow in the morning. We must be ready.”

Sera nodded and they resumed their work. They were at the end of the afternoon. Sera’s bags were all ready in her chamber. Mira had a few things to arrange with Ser Kevan concerning the ironwood business before she left and it took most of the day. So now she prepared everything for tomorrow. She would leave King’s Landing and travel on the Roseroad to Oldtown. The queen allowed Sera to follow her and stay at Oldtown for a few months since Mira knew no one there. Mira was glad her friend would accompany her. She wished the queen could come as well, but she had to stay with the king in the capital. All her clothes were soon in the box. Only personal effects were left on the table. Sera looked at them and took a broach.

“The Rose of Highgarden,” she remarked. “I miss this place now.”

“Me too.” Mira remembered the happy time she spent walking, or sewing, or reading a book in the gardens of Highgarden so long ago. Everything looked so peaceful back then. “Queen Margaery wants me to wear it at Oldtown. It once belonged to Lady Olenna.” Sera looked back at her, perhaps with a hint of jealousy again, but she looked to regret it immediately. She put down the broach. Mira tried to explain. “I didn’t want this, Sera. I asked Margaery to arrange me a marriage only to escape another. I couldn’t marry a Whitehill. They murdered my family.” Mira took a golden coin near the broach and showed it to her friend. “Do you know what it is?”

Sera looked closely at it. “That’s not a golden dragon?”

“No. It’s a golden coin from Yunkai. My brother Asher sent it to me from Essos so I wouldn’t forget him. He came back to fight for my family when the Whitehills declared war upon us. And he died trying to protect our home.”

Mira looked directly in her friend’s eyes to make her understand why she really did this. She had no
choice. Sera looked away at the table again. She touched something and Mira followed her hand.

“It’s ironwood?” Sera asked.

“Yes. My brother Ethan made it for me before I left Ironrath. He was only a boy back then. And he was killed by Ramsay Snow, a dagger piercing his throat.”

Mira knew Ramsay Snow had been legitimized and was now a Bolton, but she refused to call him a Bolton. He didn’t deserve a name. If someone deserved to be shamed by a bastard name, it was this man. She took all the things left on the table and put them in the huge box. The last thing she put was a leather package that contained the last letters her family sent to her. Their last words to me. Mira closed the box. They were done.

Mira went back to her bed and sat on it again. Sera didn’t leave. Mira looked at her, but as soon as she did, Sera averted her eyes again. Mira looked at the wall. She decided there was more to say. “You really think I’m eager to get married? I am to marry a man the queen assured me who was a good man, but I know nothing of him all the same. He may be marrying me only for my claim on Ironrath as far as I know. And once I’ll be married, I will become Mira Hightower. I won’t be a Forrester any longer. My family name will disappear forever. My family will become a page in history books, nothing more.”

Mira continued to stare at the wall right before her, waiting for her friend to react. Finally she spoke. “I’m sorry, Mira. I don’t know what it is to lose a family. They all seemed to be good people the way you speak of them. I wish I could do something.”

They stayed in an awkward silence for a very long time. None of them moved or looked at the other. “I’ll see you tomorrow.” Sera left on these words and silently closed the door behind her. Mira was alone in her nearly empty chamber. It wouldn’t be her chamber for very long. Tonight would her last night in King’s Landing before a very long time, if not forever.

Mira remembered when she asked the queen to organize her a wedding. She asked Margaery to find her a suitable husband to escape a marriage with Torrhen Whitehill, one from a family who could have the means to take back Ironrath someday. The queen had been very surprised by her request. But Mira explained to her what would happen if Ser Kevan managed to arrange the marriage he wanted and Mira convinced her mistress it was an opportunity to make the Reach stronger. After all, there were many second or third sons in great families who could be interested to own Ironrath through her one day, and the Tyrells could fortify their links with one of their bannermen as well as reinforce the power of a house of the Reach. So Margaery wrote to the Hightowers and managed to get a marriage for Mira with a grandson of Lord Leyton. Mira would leave tomorrow for Oldtown where she would meet and wed her betrothed. She preferred to give Ironrath to the Hightowers than to hand it to the Whitehills.

Mira looked through the window. The sun was setting at the horizon. It was time. The queen invited her to dine with her and the king this evening. Mira arranged her hair and smoothed her dress before she left her room. The corridors of Maegor’s Holdfast were very quiet at this hour. They were a lot quieter than a few months ago, before the royal weddings. But now that Margaery and Tommen were married, the city had emptied from most of the lords and ladies of the Reach, the Stormlands, Dorne and the Westerlands. Only a few noble people were left, Mira wasn’t upset about the new situation, far from it. She liked silence and peace, and there hadn’t been much peace to find ever since they left Highgarden. The gardens were much less crowded than before. She could spend time among bushes and flowers with far less noises around her.

Mira arrived before the doors of the royal apartments. Ser Orys Leygood was standing guard before them. He was a new member of the Kingsguard and came from a minor house of the Reach. He
knew Mira since she was the queen’s handmaiden and let her enter. The queen was waiting for her at a table. She smiled immediately when she noticed Mira had entered.

“So, finally you’re here. You’re late.”

“Sorry, your Grace.” Mira curtsied. Margaery rose from her chair and went before her.

“No need to be sorry, Mira. I know you’re very busy today. I suppose the small council took a lot of your time.”

“Yes. Especially the Master of Coin.”

Margaery chuckled a little. “Just like my grandmother says, he’s an oaf. But he’s my father all the same. Come.” She led Mira to the table with a hand on her back. Mira waited for the queen to sit before she did it as well. You only sat once the queen was already sit.

Mira realized something wasn’t right. “The king isn’t with us?”

“No. He’s sparring in the courtyard with my brother.”

“At this hour?” Mira found it strange to train with sword in the dark.

The queen shrugged. “I convinced him he had to get used to fight during the night just like in the light of day. And Loras was kind enough to give me that favor. Normally he wouldn’t be with Tommen right now, but with someone else.” Margaery didn’t need to tell her with who Ser Loras Tyrell would be in normal times at this hour. Mira was fully aware of the knight’s preferences. “I thought we could have a private dinner between women before you leave.”

“Thank you, your Grace.”

“You may call me Margaery. We’re alone, and I always considered you more like a friend than a handmaiden.”

“It wouldn’t be appropriate to call you by your name now that you’re queen.”

Margaery smiled at her. “No. But for this evening, I give you the order to call me by my name. No titles. After all, you saved my family with finding about Ser Meryn.”

Mira smiled faintly. “I didn’t do it alone.” Mira had come with the idea to blame Meryn Trant for Joffrey’s death, but it was Sansa who made it possible with Lord Varys’s help who put a vial of the strangler in Ser Meryn’s room.

“It’s true,” the queen conceded. “All the same, without you, I may not be sitting here as queen.”

Servants entered to bring dinner. It was a very fine dinner and Mira doubted she would be able to eat everything. Even less considering she ate less than the other people in Margaery’s entourage. All the same, the food was good, though it was strange for Mira to be served. She was the one serving usually, and now roles were reversed. She would have to get used to it. She didn’t expect she would have to serve meals once she would be at Hightower. She wondered what Sera would do there. She realized Sera hadn’t been among the girls who brought the food.

“Sera didn’t come?”

“No,” the queen confirmed. “I gave her her leave for tonight. You both have a long journey to Oldtown. And I don’t think she would have appreciated to serve your food.” Margaery said it sadly.
She knew Sera was bitter in some way after Mira for getting married to a knight of a great house while she remained a simple handmaiden.

“No. She wouldn’t have.” Mira gulped some wine. She thought it was Arbor gold. “Do you really think you can’t arrange her another marriage?”

The queen pursed his lips, her eyes showing regrets. “I wish I could. She has been rejected by Lord Tarwick, and suspected of killing Joffrey. I’ll have to wait before I find her a new match. I just hope I won’t have to wait too long, or else almost all men will consider her too old to marry.” Mira nodded to show she understood. If a woman reached an age too great, then men wouldn’t consider her as a suitable match, except if marrying them would bring them armies, gold, a castle or lands. Sera had none of these. If they had to wait a few years, it might be too late for Sera. There was really nothing they could both do for her on this matter. “Try to make her time pleasant in Oldtown. She needs to change her ideas and to see something else than King’s Landing. And convince her to not be angry at you anymore.”

“She’s not angry at me. I think she understands why I asked for a marriage. You know why I did it.”

“Of course.” Margaery’s face showed very clearly she knew. “My grandmother killed a beast to protect me, so how could I blame you to run away from a marriage in the family who slaughtered yours? Especially after you helped me. And your marriage with Gerold Hightower will really be good for the relations between the Crown, House Tyrell and House Hightower. Lord Leyton is very happy about it. He gets a fine wife for one of his grandchildren, and the young man will have a castle and lands when time will come to take Ironrath from the Whitehills. Lord Tyron and Sansa will not allow the Boltons to hold the North forever. And as soon as the Boltons will be put aside, then the Whitehills will be sent out of Ironrath and your family’s lands. If they refuse to leave, then they’ll have to face a Hightower army supported by the Crown, Highgarden and Casterly Rock.”

“Let’s just hope there will be ironwood left. Or else Ser Kevan won’t be happy.”

“He’s already not happy with what I did. I outraced him.” Margaery looked around her and lowered her voice, though not much. “He received a raven two days ago from Lord Bolton.”

Mira lifted her eyes from a chicken wing she was cutting. “Roose Bolton? What did it say?”

Margaery sighed. “The Warden of the North asked Ser Kevan to give your hand to Torrhen Whitehill.”

Mira let her fork fall in the plate. “But Lord Whitehill refused the arrangement when Ser Kevan proposed him!”

“Yes. That’s what Vallis told me when he received the answer from Highpoint. But it seems Lord Bolton didn’t approve Ludd Whitehill’s decision and asked Ser Kevan for the same marriage. But you don’t have to worry. Tommen won’t revoke his decree. You’ll soon be far from the capital and about to marry a handsome and gentle knight of the Reach.”

Mira was uncertain. “Are you really sure? I don’t know him.”

Margaery gave an empathic smile and laid her hand on Mira’s. “Do you really think I would marry you to a monster?” Mira didn’t answer. Not intentionally, but who knows how my betrothed is? “I met Gerold Hightower some time ago. He’s a very comely and kind young man with good manners. You won’t be marrying anybody.”

“When did you see him for the last time, your Grace?”
“Margaery,” the queen corrected. “About five years ago. He was about fifteen at this time, so now he should be about twenty.”

Mira was still unsure. Many things could change in five years. Mira herself changed a lot during the last five years. She sighed again. “I have no choice anyway.”

“No, you don’t,” Margaery confirmed with another compassionate smile. “No more than me. I’m married with the king until death set us apart. Even an annulment is impossible between us, which is not the case for Sansa.”

All the girls of Highgarden knew very well, and in details, that the marriage between Tommen and Margaery was consummated. But Mira was intrigued by the comment about Sansa’s marriage. “You mean her marriage is still unconsummated?”

“Oh, she didn’t tell me they didn’t consummate yet, but she didn’t say the opposite either in her letters. I fear she’s still a virgin. In her stead, I would consummate and quickly before someone tries to annul her marriage with Lord Tyrion.” Just like Lady Olenna tried? Mira didn’t think Lord Tyrion would ever set Sansa aside. But she agreed with Margaery they should consummate their marriage as soon as possible. “Don’t make the same mistake than her, Mira. Don’t remain a maid during your wedding night.”

“I don’t expect my future husband to give me the choice. And I know better than to ask him.”

Margaery smiled again at her, more wickedly this time. “You learn quickly.”

Soon they were done with the main course. They spoke about Highgarden, Oldtown, the Citadel, the ironwood business, the problems in the North and the Reach and in King’s Landing too. Religious fanatics who called themselves Sparrows appeared recently, preaching the cleansing of the city from all its sins. Mira never saw such people who lived with nearly nothing on a voluntary will. Well, in fact there were brothers and sisters who lived with simple means in the Faith of the Seven, and Mira met some since she left the North, but the Sparrows didn’t live in simplicity. They lived in misery. Mira crossed the path of some of them when she accompanied Margaery in the streets and some looked really mad. She didn’t like it. There had already been a few altercations between some Sparrows and the gold cloaks, though they never came to violence up to now. Mira gave the most information she could to Margaery about ironwood so she may try to handle negotiations with the Whitehills. Servants brought sweets and pastries.

“I will miss you Mira. I won’t know who to rely on for advice when you’ll be gone.”

“I’m sure you’ll be able to rule without my help.” Mira didn’t think herself essential to the queen.

“Probably. But still, you were the only one I could really confide in when it came to political matters after my grandmother left. I’ll have no one when you’ll be at Hightower. My brother doesn’t care for politics, and my father can be too easily manipulated by Ser Kevan. And he’s an oaf, like my grandmother says. As for Tommen, he’s kind and well intentioned, but he needs more to receive advice than to give it. I’ll really be alone when you’ll leave. Just like you’ll be alone in Oldtown.”

Margaery really looked sad as she said it. Mira was sad as well to leave. They had finished their dessert. “I’m sorry to leave, Margaery.” She remembered she was to not call the queen by her title. “I really regret it.”

“You do what you must. Just like me. Women in our position must make the best of our circumstances. You’ll succeed in that, I have no doubt.” Margaery left her seat and went before Mira, putting a hand on her shoulder. “I want you to know that I don’t hold any grudge against you, Mira.
You put me into trouble for some time, but you always remained loyal to me. I’ll never forget that. I
know I would have done what you did if I had been at your place. You’ve been a great friend ever
since the moment you arrived at Highgarden, and you’ll remain my friend forever. Go to Hightower,
get married, and take back your home from the thieves who stole it. Make the Whitehills pay for
what they did to your family. And the Boltons as well. I’ll help you to do that.”

Nothing could have touched Mira more than this. She rose from her seat as well. “I’ll never forget
your support to me, Margaery.” They hugged each other. Mira thought she would cry, but she held
her tears. She was good at it now. They separated after a while. “I guess this is farewell.”

“No.” Margaery shook her head with a smile. “We’ll see each other again. I know that. Safe travel
Mira.”

Mira curtsied before she left. She met no one on her way back to her chamber. She fell asleep not
long after she lied down in her bed, the moon already high in the sky. Her discussion with Lady
Margaery had lasted a very long time. She looked at the moon for a very long time. She wondered if
they could see it at Ironrath right now. No, they couldn’t. Her family was no longer at Ironrath if any
of them were still alive. Mira closed her eyes and let the silence of the Red Keep bring her into sleep.

On the morning, guards and servants helped her and Sera to carry their belongings. Queen Margaery
had organized a carriage for them. The road would be long and they would have an escort with
them. As they approached, Mira heard a familiar voice behind her.

“Lady Mira.”

She turned to find the Hand of the King walking in her direction. “Ser Kevan.”

“May I have a moment with you. Alone.” Mira had an idea why. She turned to Sera and the others.

“Continue to prepare. It won’t be long.”

She followed Ser Kevan in a nearby corridor where they stopped. “I wanted to wish you well at
Oldtown, Lady Mira.”

“It’s very kind of you, ser.”

“After the help you gave us with the royal fleet, it was the least I could do.” His face was serious.
There was no smile on it. Mira knew why he was upset. “I’m sure you’ll be happy at Hightower.
Though I believed you would be happier at Ironrath. At home.”

“Not if I was married to a Whitehill,” Mira retorted.

Ser Kevan pursed his lips. “I arranged something for you to get back your home, to re-establish
peace in your family’s lands, and to revive the ironwood business. To save it, properly speaking.”

Mira made a step in Ser Kevan’s direction. “Ser Kevan, we both know Ironrath wouldn’t have been
mine if I was married to a Whitehill. And I think we both know now that Ludd Whitehill wasn’t well
disposed to marry me to his heir.”

The Hand of the King looked at her for a moment. “You were right. Lord Whitehill refused my
proposition. However, Roose Bolton and Torrhen Whitehill found it much more acceptable.”

Another silence lingered between them, each of them not leaving the eyes of the other. “I told you
about the proposition because I respected you, Lady Mira. Not to have you sabotage it by having the
queen arrange another marriage for you.”
“Did you really expect me to accept a marriage within the family who murdered my family?”

“This marriage would have brought peace to the lands the Whitehills occupy.”

Mira looked at the floor, then back at the knight. “Ser Kevan, we both know that even if it was true, the North wouldn’t have been at peace for long. The Boltons are despised by most of the northern houses, and they are the Wardens of the North only until Lady Sansa and Lord Tyrion have a son. When they will have a son, do you expect the Boltons to give up the North so easily? There will be war. The Boltons and their bannermen will fight to keep the North. When this time comes, I think Lord Tyrion and you will appreciate to have the Hightowers fighting to take Ironrath from Bolton’s bannermen, instead to have strong Whitehills to oppose you.”

Ser Kevan didn’t react very much to her words. Perhaps he already knew they were true before she said them. “I could have arranged another marriage for you, with a house of the Westerlands.”

“You might have won Baelish to arrange such a marriage, but Bolton’s bannermen would not have had this. I could have arranged another marriage for you, with a house of the Westerlands.”

“Then the Whitehills would have complained you stole the heir to Ironrath from them eventually. Or at least Lord Bolton would have done so. He could have said the Lannisters turned against him. Instead you only have to tell him the queen arranged another marriage for her handmaiden and they have nothing to blame House Lannister for. And you get one of the greatest houses of the Reach to fight alongside your nephew’s army when he’ll try to take the North. That could help to enhance the relations between the Westerlands and the Reach.”

“Perhaps,” the knight conceded. “All the same, I hope you know what you’re doing. I hope for you the Whitehills won’t have destroyed all the ironwood forests when you’ll come with a Hightower army.”

“Then we have a common interest, and a common enemy. If the Whitehills remain at Ironrath, ironwood will disappear. We both have an interest to see them removed from my family’s land.”

“Indeed,” Ser Kevan agreed. “Good luck, Lady Mira. I wish you good fortune in your marriage, and hope it will serve the Crown’s interests.” Ser Kevan bowed lightly and left. The last sentence wasn’t entirely without threat. Mira went to the carriage. All luggage was placed now. Sera was saying goodbye to Margaery who was present along with her husband. Mira went in their direction and curtsied before Tommen.

“Your Grace.”

“Lady Mira. I’m sad to see you leave. Margaery too.”

“I know. I thank you, your Grace. But sooner or later, we must take different paths. Princess Myrcella had to leave one day too.”

The king nodded. “Yes, I know. I cried when she left. I miss her. I’ll miss you too. And the queen will miss you. You have all our good wishes for your marriage.”

“Thank you, your Grace.”

Sera was done saying her farewells to her Grace, so Mira took a step forward. Margaery pulled her into an embrace. “Take care of yourself, my friend.”

“Yes, your Grace.”

She released Mira from her arms. “Take care of each other, both of you.”

The order was addressed to Mira and Sera. They both curtsied one last time for the king and the
queen and walked into the carriage. They followed the River Row, escorted by about twenty gold cloaks. Mira noticed people of every sort on their way, including Sparrows. They stayed quiet. They went through the King’s Gate where the gold cloaks left them. Only about ten guards of the Reach followed them from there.

Once they were out of King’s Landing, Sera, who sat at the opposite side of the carriage, said something. “Mira, I want you to know, I’m happy for your marriage. Really I am. I just… It’s difficult for me to not feel a little angry. I wanted to get married, you didn’t want, and you’re the one who ends up married. It’s unfair, for both of us. I think you’ll have a good husband, a husband you deserve. Margaery told me Ser Gerold Hightower was a good man. I’m happy for what’s happening to you. I just wish that could happen to me too.”

Mira smiled empathically at her friend. “I’m sure it will happen to you too, Sera. People have a short memory, and there are not many people who loved Joffrey. Soon they’ll forget you were involved in his death, or they won’t care. Margaery will be able to arrange you a marriage. I’m sure of that. It will take some time, but it will come.”

Sera smiled at her in return, grateful. They remained like this for a minute, silent. Suddenly, Mira realized Sera was breathing deeply. “Mira, smell the air. Can you feel the difference?” Mira breathed deeply as well, and she understood what her friend meant. “It doesn’t stink. We’re far from King’s Landing.”

Sera was right. Looking through the curtains, Mira saw the huge city getting smaller and smaller behind them. She and Sera had remained more than a year and a half in the capital. And now they left it. In a few weeks, they would reach Oldtown, and Mira would start her new life as a wife.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Davos (after, we go back to Casterly Rock with Tyrion and Sansa)

In the meantime, since Mira left for Oldtown and you'll have to wait a few chapters before seeing her again, here's the beginning of her next chapter:

“You’ll be more beautiful than you’ve ever been. I can’t wait to see how Ser Gerold will react when he’ll see you walking in his direction.”

Sera didn’t stop to talk ever since she started to help Mira getting prepared. Mira on her side stood silent as Sera helped her to put on her gown and arranged her hair. Mira wore a white gown with black regions where was the girdle, on her shoulders and on the sides of her tummy and her chest. The gown was quite lightweight and remembered her of the one Queen Margaery wore at her own wedding, though this one was less richly decorated and displayed much less her body. Her back was entirely covered, but she had a generous triangular neckline that plunged deeply. Mira was used to gowns lighter than the ones she wore in the North after her years in the south, but she didn’t feel quite comfortable with this neckline. She had the impression to be naked from time to time. There were silver lines that followed the neckline and the hem. She also wore a silver necklace that her betrothed gave her this morning through his sister during the breakfast.
The gown outlined her thin figure very well. As for her hair, flowers held a few braids that would fall on her shoulders and her sides in normal times to only let a trail of smooth black hair fall on her back. Sera was completing the arrangement of her hair as Mira stood still.
Second chapter from Davos's perspective. Davos will have an important role to play when the time comes. I like to write his character. Entirely loyal to Stannis, and the only to stop him from doing atrocities.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

DAVOS II

- He cut a chunk from the piece of wood he worked on. He started it about fifteen minutes ago and it was very slowly taking shape. It would take some time before someone could distinguish the stag Davos was carving. It was destined to Princess Shireen, a small thanking for teaching him how to read. She succeeded where his son Matthos failed for years. Davos was so stubborn that he never listened to his son about this. It was a chance the princess brought him to read, or else he would never have been able to convince Stannis to save the Wall against the wildlings. The wooden stag would be his gift for the princess. It wasn’t much, but it would be a gift nonetheless.

Davos hoped he could finish it before they left Castleblack. There were more hospitable places in the Seven Kingdoms than the castle, but it was far more hospitable than most of the places where Davos spent his life. But he knew the king would soon leave the castle. He wanted to march on Winterfell and take the North from Roose Bolton. With Tywin Lannister and Joffrey Baratheon dead, they had a chance to succeed. But Davos was afraid. No northern lord had declared for Stannis. A girl of ten answered to his call saying they knew only the King in the North, and his name was Stark. If only Jon Snow accepted the offer of the king, many Northerners would have joined Stannis’s cause. The boy was Eddard Stark’s son. Northerners would prefer to have a legitimized son of the last Warden of the North instead of the Boltons who stabbed their king in the heart. Instead, Jon Snow chose to stay in the Night’s Watch and became their Lord Commander.

Davos had to give it to Jon Snow, he was honorable. Stannis himself acknowledged it, and the boy wasn’t stupid. He decided to rescue the wildlings at Hardhome and bring them south of the Wall, in the lands of the Gift. As Jon Snow said to his brothers, it was better to live with the wildlings than to give them to the army of the dead. If only the other members of the Night’s Watch agreed with him. The fat boy, Randyll Tarly’s son, was among the few who seemed to really agree with Jon Snow, and probably because he loved a wildling. Davos had seen the girl. Gilly was her name. Shireen was teaching her to read. Jon Snow took the right decision, but he alienated his sworn brothers against him at the same time. Most of them hated him, though it wasn’t a great change compared to before. At least, if he succeeded, Stannis could integrate the thousands of wildlings who would pass south to his army. If Jon Snow succeeded.

Davos regretted the lad refused to join Stannis. On the other hand, if he hadn’t been elected Lord Commander, there would be no chance of survival for the wildlings at Hardhome. Perhaps there was some blessing in Jon Snow’s refusal. No other Lord Commander would choose to rescue the wildlings, even if it was obviously the right thing to do. And as long as Jon Snow ruled at Castleblack, Stannis had an ally at the Wall. Both men respected each other. Davos suspected the
king might regret Jon Snow wasn’t his son instead of Eddard Stark’s bastard. Jon Snow was skilled
in battle, a natural leader people were ready to follow, honorable, firm, brave, intelligent, fair and
ready to do what was necessary. He was worthier than most of Stannis’s generals. What was a gain
for the Night’s Watch was a loss for Stannis.

Davos was so focused on his work and lost in his thoughts at the same time that he didn’t realize the
king had entered the common hall. He realized it had gotten colder because of the door that just
opened.

“It’s time,” the king said, gritting his teeth as always. Davos knew what it meant. He wanted to leave
Castleblack now.

“Uh, your Grace,” Davos began as he rose from his seat. “Wouldn’t it be better to wait? When Jon
Snow returns with the wildlings, we could have thousands more men.”

“If Jon Snow returns with the wildlings. We can’t wait that long. We have the advantage. More men,
more horses, all fed and rested. But every day we wait, the odds shift in Bolton’s favor. This could
turn to winter at any moment. We have to act now. Give the order. We march at sunrise.”

Davos didn’t agree with his king. They needed allies if they hoped to take Winterfell and then to
hold it. Even if they took Winterfell, there were high chances only a few northern houses would
support Stannis afterwards, and the wildlings would be of great help then. But Stannis was his king
and he had to obey. He would give the order.

“I’ll choose a dozen men to stay and guard the queen and the princess.”

Stannis was going out of the hall when Davos said this and stopped in his movement. “No need.
They’re coming with us.”

Davos couldn’t stop his fears to come out. “It’s a tough road ahead, your Grace. Won’t they be
safer…”

“Here?” the king cut Davos’s words. “Half these watchmen are killers and rapists. No, they march
with us.”

Again, Davos knew there was nothing he could do. With a dozen men, the queen and Shireen would
be safe enough here, but he knew it was futile to try to convince the king once his mind was settled.
The king walked out of the hall and Davos followed him outside. “As you wish, your Grace.”

At the other side of the courtyard, Davos spotted the Red Woman staring at them. The wind was
howling around them, and it was cold. Very cold. As always, the Starks were right. Davos decided
to follow the king. He didn’t like what was going on. He followed Stannis to his solar in the King’s
Tower. Stannis made his way without glancing back and Davos entered at the same time than him in
the solar. Stannis walked to his desk and stood beside it, turning to face Davos.

“I gave you your orders, Ser Davos. Do you have anything else to tell me?”

Davos gathered his courage. It would be better to tell him the truth now than when it would be too
late. “I have, your Grace. I think the march on Winterfell in our current situation is a great mistake.”

“I already told you why we must do it.”

Davos insisted. “Your Grace, all the northern lords refused to rally you. When we’ll walk on
Winterfell, it will be just like King’s Landing. When we march on the castle, they’ll see strangers
coming to take the castle of their liege lord and their king.”
“I am the only king. Robb Stark was an usurper.”

“Not in the eyes of the Northerners. We offer them nothing except the destruction of the Boltons, and that’s not enough. We don’t even have a Stark to offer them a new Warden of the North.”

“You should tell that to Jon Snow. If you convinced him, we wouldn’t have this problem.” The king was growing impatient. Davos said everything.

“Your Grace, I don’t think we’ll be able to take Winterfell. We have a greater army, but the Boltons have the advantage of the defensive position. Winterfell was never taken when fully garrisoned. And we have no allies. And we’ll get none if we take the castle. Northerners will only see us as southern invaders taking the place of turncloaks. This may even lead the Lannisters to march on the North, and Northerners will join Sansa Lannister quicker than us. She is the last trueborn child of their Warden of the North. Many good men will die during the siege. I really think we ought to wait for the wildlings to have allies we could rely on, or else we’ll have no one to support us.”

“Allies we could rely on?” The king’s voice was full of scorn. “We’re talking about wildlings. Do you really think we can trust them? We cannot stay here a single more day. If we wait too long, we will spend winter here, and when it will be over, my claim will be long forgotten. We march at sunrise. You’re dismissed.”

Davos was defeated. He couldn’t convince Stannis. But at least he spoke truthfully to his king. He bowed and left the King’s Tower. He travelled the courtyard, snow creaking under his boots and flakes falling on his head and hair. It was cold outside, and it would only get colder. How many men would die of the cold on their walk to Winterfell. He went to see each general and relayed the king’s order to prepare for tomorrow. When it was done, he walked to the armory.

Davos entered the armory and went to the room behind it. He knocked on the door. No one answered. He knocked again. Still no answer. Finally he pushed the door and it opened. There was no one inside. The Lord Commander’s quarters were smaller and more humble than those Stannis had in the King’s Tower. That was a lot to say when people knew Stannis was the starkest man there was, even starkest than the Starks. Davos heard the former Lord Commander’s rooms in the Lord Commander’s Tower were burned with the entire tower when a dead man tried to kill the former Lord Commander. Apparently it was Jon Snow who saved him and burned his hand in the process. He saved his Lord Commander and lost his comfortable future rooms at the same time.

Jon Snow wasn’t there. Davos had to talk with him before they left. But for now, neither Jon Snow nor his steward was there. Davos looked around. There were scrolls, ink, parchments, seals, pens, shelves, chairs, candles, but nothing that wasn’t necessary. Not even a jug of wine. No wonder Stannis liked the Lord Commander, and that made Jon Snow’s refusal even worse and more painful for the king. Davos waited for the Lord Commander to come. He couldn’t search for him through all Castleblack. He needed to talk to Jon Snow in private.

While he turned around the room, Davos’s eyes caught a glint of red on the desk. He noticed an unsealed scroll with a red lion on it. A message from House Lannister. Davos knew he shouldn’t spy on people while he was their guest, but he was the Hand of the one true king. It was his duty to know what the king’s enemies might be preparing. He looked at the door and listened very carefully. There were no sounds and no sign that anyone was coming. If Jon Snow didn’t know he looked at it, then nothing wrong would come out of it. He took the scroll and unrolled it carefully, reading very slowly the message.

Everything is alright at Casterly Rock, Jon. Lannisters are not all monsters, far from it. I get along very well with Joy Hill, a cousin of Tyrion. No need to cut my husband in two, he treats me better than you could imagine.
We still can’t send you anything. The war is not over, and sending something while Stannis is at the Wall is impossible. Tyrion knows White Walkers are a threat. We’re looking for a solution.

Sansa

Davos was intrigued by this message. It came from Sansa Lannister, the Lady of Casterly Rock and the half-sister of Jon Snow. Davos knew now they were exchanging messages. This scroll seemed to prove Jon Snow asked for help from his sister and her husband, but they answered they couldn’t give him any help as long as Stannis remained at Castleblack. Could it be why the Lord Commander wanted them to leave? He wanted Stannis and his men to go so he could receive men from Casterly Rock? Davos heard during these last weeks men of the Watch talking about how they would soon receive help from their Lord Commander’s sister. They seemed eager to receive it. Could the men have chosen Jon Snow because they hoped for help from the Westerlands? It was true that Ser Alliser Thorne didn’t offer much in comparison. The choice of the brothers of the Night’s Watch was very logical when we thought about it.

But there was something that Davos feared. If Jon Snow exchanged ravens with his sister, then maybe the Lannisters were informed of Stannis’s movements. Everything Jon Snow would tell his sister would be known by her husband. That was a real danger. Davos fought the Imp at Blackwater, and his fleet was mostly destroyed by his trick with wildfire. Tyrion Lannister wasn’t someone to underestimate. He knew at least that Stannis was at Castleblack. Though it didn’t really matter. All the Seven Kingdoms surely knew it by now. But what other information did he get from Jon Snow?

Could Jon Snow be informing the Lord of Casterly Rock? Could he be spying on Stannis? After thinking about it for a moment, Davos pushed the thought aside. Jon Snow was far too honorable for this kind of things. From his discussions with his sworn brothers, Davos knew he was far too honorable to betray Stannis. Even those who said he was a traitor to the Watch because of his affection for the wildlings recognized his sometimes foolish honor. However, his correspondence with Sansa Lannister may have sent critical information to Casterly Rock even if that wasn’t his intention. He was asking for help. He would inform the Lannisters of Stannis’s departure as soon as it happened, even if he didn’t say what Stannis would do. If the Imp planned to take the North for himself and his wife, then this could put Davos’s king in great trouble.

Davos started to search the other documents on the desk and anywhere else in the solar to find any proof of the information the Lord Commander might have sent, not only to Casterly Rock but to the rest of Westeros. He didn’t find anything. There were reports and messages from the Shadow Tower and Eastwatch-by-the-Sea, a few negative answers from houses who were asked for help to man the Wall, reports about stocks and supplies at Castleblack and the other two castles, scrolls about White Walkers and wights probably coming from the library of the castle, but nothing to show Jon Snow revealed sensitive information about Stannis. Though that was no proof he didn’t.

Davos took care to put back into place every scroll, document, parchment and object he moved. Jon Snow couldn’t know he searched his solar. Finally the Lord Commander arrived. He seemed a little startled to find Davos in his room. Perhaps Davos should have waited for him before the door. Jon Snow could find it suspicious he waited for him inside.

Davos tried to hide his uneasiness. “Forgive me, Lord Commander. I needed to speak with you about the ships you need for your journey to Hardhome.”

Jon Snow relaxed almost immediately. He went to his desk. “Yes. How many ships do you have? Stannis told me about sixty.”

“Fifty-eight, to be accurate. Including our own ships and those of Salladhor Saan. They can carry about a hundred men each of them plus their crew.”
“There may be tens of thousands wildlings at Hardhome.”

Davos tipped the side of his head and pursed his lips. “You could squeeze them a little or reduce the crew, but the more you’ll do it and the more dangerous the journey will be. Especially with this weather. You’ll have to make more than one trip.”

Jon Snow nodded to show he understood, though he wasn’t pleased by this. Davos knew he needed more ships, but that was all he could give him. He was less furious or exasperated than Stannis when he couldn’t get what he wanted. Davos took two letters from his doublet. He handed them to Jon Snow.

“Give these to the commander of Stannis’s fleet and to Salladhor Saan. They will obey your orders.”

“Thank you, Ser Davos.” Jon Snow took the letters, sat and went to the scrolls on his desk. Davos didn’t leave and remained there. After a moment, Jon Snow raised his eyes again. “Is there something else, ser?”

“Aye. I would like you to reconsider the king’s offer.”

Jon Snow crossed his fingers on the desk. “I already gave him my answer. I won’t come back on it. You can tell Stannis I won’t join him. I’m the Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch now. I won’t break my vows.”

“The king didn’t send me to make you reconsider. I come here from my own will because I think you should accept his offer.”

“Because it would serve the interests of the king you serve?”

“Because it would serve the interests of the Seven Kingdoms. The boy who sits on the Iron Throne is a bastard born of incest. The Iron Islands have rebelled. The Boltons occupy Winterfell and rule the North, skinning people alive. Your father was executed because he fought against an usurper, your brother and his mother were butchered at a wedding, your two other brothers were burned by the Ironborn, one of your sister is dead and the other one was forced to marry a Lannister, to marry someone of the very family who murdered yours. The Lannisters, the Boltons, the Freys, the Greyjoys, they took everything you had and stole the North from those to who it belonged by right, your family, your own blood. Your father died because he warned Stannis about his rightful claim. He wanted Stannis to sit on the Iron Throne. He is the only true king. He offers you to avenge your family, to take back your home, and still you refuse.” Davos’s voice was accusing in some way.

“I swore a vow to the Night’s Watch.”

Davos sighed. He was really stubborn. “Do you think your father would have wanted you to stay at the Wall, doing nothing while your kin was slaughtered?”

Jon Snow rose from his seat, angry now. “You didn’t know my father, Ser Davos. He would have wanted me to do what was just and fair. You told me the other day that I swore to be the shield that guards the realms of men. The realms of men, not the Realm. You were right. For eight thousand years, the Night’s Watch fought against the wildlings. For eight thousand years, we didn’t fulfill our vows. This is what I’ll change. I’m going to Hardhome to save the people who are there before the White Walkers take them for their army. And I think that if my father was alive, he would agree with what I do.”

“You forget that your father fought to put Stannis on the throne. He wanted him on the throne. Because it was the right thing to do.”
“I know that very well, and I hope he will succeed. But that is not what matters now. The dead are coming for all of us. For them it doesn’t matter if we are with Stannis, the Lannisters, the Greyjoys or the Boltons. We are all meat for their army. Tell me honestly, Ser Davos. I’ve seen you, you’re a good man. Do you think Stannis’s war is more important than the one against the dead?”

Davos answered after some hesitation. “No.”

“When dead men and worse come hunting for us in the night, do you think it matters who sits on the Iron Throne?” To that Davos couldn’t answer. Before his refusal to answer, Jon Snow resumed. “The Lord Commander Mormont asked me these questions after I tried to ride away from Castleblack to join my brother, not long after my father was killed. I chose to stay, and to fight for what was the most important. I saw a White Walker north of the Wall. They are real. I decided to be the shield that guards the realms of men. I haven’t changed my mind. My answer to these two questions is still no, because it’s the right thing to do. And I know this is not the right thing to do to fight my own sister, because that’s what I would have to do if I ever was to accept Stannis’s offer.”

Davos tried his last possibility. “Without you, I fear Stannis won’t be able to take Winterfell, and that even if he succeeded then the northern lords wouldn’t help him. They wouldn’t accept him as their king. And without their help, the Wall cannot be defended. You know that.”

Jon Snow looked back at him with a sorry look. “I hope Stannis will succeed. That’s all I have to say. I know you’re riding for Winterfell tomorrow. Good luck.”

The lad extended his hand. Davos shook it after a moment. “Good luck at Hardhome.”

Davos left. He failed. He didn’t believe their chances to take Winterfell were very high. They would need the wildlings, or Jon Snow, or both. But they wouldn’t get any of them. Stannis wouldn’t delay his march, and Jon Snow wouldn’t join them. Both Stannis and Jon Snow were stubborn and wouldn’t reconsider. He feared they were all doomed. Davos went to see the men were ready for tomorrow then went to sleep.

They woke up early in the morning. Davos made sure the men were ready with their bags and armors. After he was sure the most important preparations were done, he went to Shireen. He hadn’t finished the wooden stag yet. He would have to do it on the road. She was already mounted on her horse and saw him coming from afar.

“Onion Knight.” She smiled at him.

“Princess.” He smiled at her as well.

“Mother told me we were riding for Winterfell.”

“Your mother was right.”

“Do you think Father will let me go down into the crypt?”

“Beg your pardon?”

“At Winterfell. All the Kings in the North are buried there. Bran the Builder and King Dorren and…”

“First things first,” Davos interrupted her kindly. He didn’t know there was such a great crypt under Winterfell, but he couldn’t let the hopes of the princess get too high. “It’s a long march ahead. And then we have to take the castle.”
“Is there going to be a battle?” Shireen was smiling at the prospect, but Davos wasn’t.

“Aye, princess, but you won’t be anywhere near…”

“That’s enough talk of battle, Ser Davos. You’ll scare the child.” The queen’s presence was never appreciated, and it wasn’t more appreciated now than before. *At least you could call the princess by her name, your Grace. She’s your daughter.* But Davos chose to not let his true feelings show up.

“Yes, my queen,” Davos answered shortly. He noticed Shireen’s gloom before the way her mother acted with her. Immediately after Queen Selyse went away, Shireen was back to smiling.

“I’m not scared.”

“Well, I am,” Davos replied. “When the battle comes, promise you’ll protect me.”

“I promise.”

They were both smiling as Davos left Shireen to climb on his own horse. He saw the girl Gilly made a sign of farewell to Shireen. Then Davos realized Stannis and Jon Snow were talking together. They were too far from him so he couldn’t understand what they were saying. For a moment, Davos foolishly hoped Jon Snow would change his mind at the last minute and accompany them, but finally Stannis went to mount his own horse and the Lord Commander stayed behind. Stannis took place at the head of the column with Melisandre at his side. And they moved forward.

Before long, Castleblack was barely visible behind them. It took more time before the Wall disappeared. They were marching on Winterfell, and even if Davos didn’t believe their chances to take the castle were very high, he had faith in Stannis Baratheon, King of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm. He would follow his king to the end, no matter the odds. He was his king. His god.

Chapter End Notes

It's a lot like in the TV show, I know. Not very exciting. This chapter is mostly an intrusion in Davos's mind to better understand him and the decisions he will take later, and also to see how Stannis's situation is desperate.

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa's name day
OK, I don't know how I ended up with a chapter of 20,000 words, but I did. IT IS THE LONGEST CHAPTER I HAVE EVER WRITTEN. There are many things happening in this chapter. New plots, new characters, many songs, emotional developments... It is nearly without end. I really worked a lot on this chapter and I really hope you'll enjoy it. Please review at the end.

Reminder: Sansa often dreamed about a wedding with Loras Tyrell at the beginning of her marriage. To refresh your mind about it, you can go to the end of Sansa I.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sansa XIX

The stars, forever unchanging,
they guide us on paths unseen
and you were written in my story,
destined to collide with me

They say you stole me in moonlight,
but Love, I was already yours,
for we were written in the starlight,
as the wolf belongs to the moon

Like the rain meets the river,
like the trees meet the sky,
we were born to be together,
you and I

Like the fish need he water,
like the birds need the sky,
we were made to need each other,

you and I

The stars, forever unchanging,
	hey sent your love to me

but cruel, how late in my story,

you came to collide with me

Like the rain loves the thunder,

like the waves kiss the sky,

we were born to love each other,

you and I

Like the fire consumes the timber,

like the flames kiss the sky,

were made to be together,

you and I

The stars, forever unchanging,

they guide us on paths unseen

and you were written in my story,

destined to collide with me

destined to collide with me

Sansa woke up from her sleep with the song in her mind. Her head rested on Tyrion’s chest like she always did now. Ever since the trial ended, they always slept in the same bed. There had been times in the beginning when she would curl on Tyrion this way, but for the last month she did it every night. No nightmare troubled her sleep during this period, and Tyrion didn’t seem to be bothered by nightmares either. The sun just began to rise. Sansa closed her eyes and let peace flood her. Tyrion had a hand on her back and the other in her hair. The song continued to play in her head. It was a song her personal singer, a young woman who performed at Joffrey’s wedding, sang to her and her friends a few days ago. Sansa had hired her permanently after she sang the Rains of Castamere for Lord Spicer at the ceremony she and Tyrion were acknowledged Lord and Lady of the Westerlands.
by their bannermen.

Sansa felt good, at peace. There were mornings she just didn’t want to get out of bed. But in the end, she always did. When she didn’t want to leave it, her husband always did sooner or later, and she lost the main reason why she didn’t want to get up. She took the habit to grunt each time he left their bed, to show how unhappy she was about it. That caused Tyrion to mock her because a perfect lady wouldn’t grunt. There was nothing evil in the mockery. Tyrion was never evil with her. Only he was right to say it was very unusual for her to grumble. That became some sort of a daily joke between them each morning.

After some time, Sansa felt Tyrion’s hand running through her hair. She smiled. She liked it. She thought sometimes he did it while he believed she was asleep. She didn’t try to deceive him and remained still, enjoying the situation. Surely he enjoyed it as well. His fingers were stroking her locks one after one, and when he was probably done with every lock, he repeated it once more. She liked it much more than the way Janei was always trying to pull her hair between her little hands.

After a time that looked too short, Tyrion stopped the movement. “Perhaps you should stop pretending you’re asleep, my lady.”

Sansa let a light giggle escape her throat. “Does it bother you?” she said with a very sweet voice.

“It may bother me to have a lazy wife who can’t get out of bed,” he answered on a playing tone.

Sansa took a false offended voice. “Lazy? You’re the one who’s lazy. I know sometimes you go into your solar in the evening only to drink when you pretend to work.”

“I’m afraid you’re half-wrong. I do work at these times. But you’re also half-right because I do drink at the same time. It’s the only way for me to drink since you prevent me from doing so at dinner. Perhaps if you allowed me to drink like I want I wouldn’t leave so often late in the day.”

Sansa smiled more at the suggestion. She turned her head to face him. “Good try. You won’t get drunk again so easily.”

Tyrion gave an exaggerated sigh. “Then I’m afraid I’ll continue to spend time in the solar during the evening.”

Sansa took a menacing voice and face while she raised a little to look down at her husband. “Each minute you spend there every evening, I force you to spend it in this bed on the next morning.”

She let her head fall heavily on Tyrion’s chest. Her husband expelled air at the force of the impact. Sansa smiled wickedly for herself. If Tyrion wanted to drink, she would find a way to turn it to her advantage. She would gain something whatever choice Tyrion made.

Tyrion needed a few seconds to recover his breath. “You are cruel and unfair, Sansa. Cruelly unfair.”

“I don’t care.”

“What a terrible wife I have.”

He said it very softly and started to caress her left arm with his right hand. Sansa sighed in relief. She hoped he would do it. Her mind grew numb again as his hand made its way to her shoulder and her cheek. Perhaps she didn’t want Tyrion to stop drinking in supposed secret finally. This moment lasted some time, but still not long enough for Sansa. Tyrion stopped and tried to get out of the bed, but Sansa pushed him on his back again before he rose enough.
Tyrion chuckled. “Sansa, if the celebrations are to take place, we both have to get up.”

Tyrion tried again to rise and this time Sansa didn’t stop him. He was right. Today was her sixteenth name day and the Lannisters organized a tourney and other celebrations for the occasion. They were supposed to be a secret for Sansa, but it was difficult to keep a tourney secret and preparations couldn’t really remain discreet in the last days. Furthermore, Sansa managed since she arrived at Casterly Rock to gain the trust of many people in the household and among Tyrion’s family. There were servants who revealed details to her through the last weeks, voluntarily or involuntarily. And Joy told Sansa everything she knew about the coming celebrations during their times in the godswood, to Cerenna’s great despair. Sansa mostly knew what was planned for the day now, though there were some details she still ignored.

Sansa did like she always did when Tyrion left their bed, but he only smiled and went to take a bath. Sansa stayed in the bed among blankets and sheets. She had the right to rest for today after all. She was supposed to break her fast with Cerenna this morning. Sansa knew it was meant as a way to distract her during the final preparations, but she would like to spend some time alone with her friend before she had to sit through a whole tourney. Tyrion would leave early to make sure everything was ready and to take care of some matters his duties of lord commanded him to fulfill for the day. Sansa rested her head on the pillows, enjoying the calm.

She took the necklace on the little table next to the bed and looked at it in the palm of her hand with her head still on the pillows. She looked at the symbol on it. The lion of House Lannister was carved very well in gold. She knew there was a direwolf carved in silver under it, but she didn’t open the medallion to look at it. Instead, she kept her eyes fixed on the lion. Lady Sansa Lannister of House Stark, Lady of Casterly Rock, Lady of the Westerlands and Lady of Winterfell. Sansa Lannister. Even when she wrote to her brother Jon the first time, she used her whole title as a signature. In the messages that followed, she only wrote her first name, but still. She had written this because she believed her brother might understand better this way that she was alright and Tyrion treated her very well. But was there more to it? Was she a Lannister now?

Never forget what you are. These were Tyrion’s words for her. She was a Stark. Wasn’t she? Sansa had some doubts about it. She was the Lady of Casterly Rock, the seat of House Lannister. She was the Lady of this family. She lived among Lannisters, ate with Lannisters, spent her time with Lannisters. She prayed to the Old Gods with a Lannister bastard. Her best friend, Cerenna, was a Lannister. The people she asked for advice were Lannisters. And more than anything else, she was married to a Lannister, a man she had come to rely on and to appreciate more than anyone else in this world. A man who was taking his bath behind a closed door right now when a part of her wanted him to let it open. A man who had become everything for her through the last months.

What was left of Stark in her? It was about three years now she didn’t see Winterfell, or the North. She had grown attached to Casterly Rock since she arrived. It was the biggest and most luxurious castle she ever saw, and it was her castle now. It was the sort of castle she dreamed of when she was a child. Most of the people were kind with her, and really kind. After initial difficulties, most of them appreciated her for real. Sansa Lannister of House Stark. That only meant she came from House Stark, not that she belonged to it. Sansa had the impression she was getting away from her origins, losing her northern roots. And the worse was she wasn’t really bothered by this. She was happy at Casterly Rock with Tyrion and his family. They weren’t bad people. They were not responsible for the misfortunes her family suffered, and they liked her. It was as if they replaced her family. Her only close relative still alive was thousands of miles away at the Wall and she only received news from him from time to time. Sansa stared at the golden lion. It didn’t disgust her like before. She had learned to accept it. It was a gift Tyrion gave her a year ago. She closed her hand around it and brought it to her heart. She didn’t tighten her grip around it. The medallion didn’t open.
Tyrion went out of the bathroom with fresh clothes for the day, all washed and clean. He looked at her, still laying in the bed. He said nothing for a time, but seemed to regain his senses in the end.

“You should get up, Sansa. Unless you want to spend your name day in the bed. I ordered so many people to work day and night for this day that I fear they may kill me if you don’t come.”

They both laughed and Sansa finally decided to leave the comfort of the mattress. “Alright. I didn’t save you to have you murdered for such a stupid reason.”

“I’ll see you at the tourney.” Tyrion left.

Sansa took a bath, then after putting trivial clothes, she went to the living room where Cerenna was waiting for her.

“You took your time,” she said, not without rebuke.

“This will give you more time to prepare the so-called surprise festivities,” Sansa replied with feigned indifference.

Cerenna reddened in anger. “I’m going to kill Joy.” She took some bread and bit furiously in it. “We worked on it for weeks, and Joy had to spoil everything.”

“She’s not the only responsible one. Servants can be very talkative. And by the way, Cerenna, a lady doesn’t speak with food in her mouth.” Sansa took a gulp of lemon water. Cerenna sighed in despair. Sansa loved to remember her good manners sometimes. Cerenna knew the good behavior of a lady, but sometimes she didn’t follow it. “Anyway, did you really think you could hide a tourney?”

Cerenna shook her head. “I don’t know how I thought we could, but we should have tried to hide it better. Next time, I won’t tell anything to Joy.”

Joy had become the scapegoat for everyone who participated to the organization of the name day’s festivities. Sansa knew everything thanks to her to hear many people talk. Joy didn’t help, it was true, but most of what Sansa knew she got it from the household’s staff. Sansa remembered she had to speak with Joy before she went to the tourney. It was a conversation she wasn’t eager to have.

“Let’s talk about something else,” Cerenna said on a tired tone. “Many people will come for this tourney. Knights and lords from all the Westerlands.”

“Yes, I know. This means we’ll see again all those people who came months ago to kneel before me and Tyrion.” There were some Sansa wasn’t very pleased to meet again.

“And more. This time knights and lords will compete for the prizes. We should see many interesting people. They’ll be fighting for you.” Sansa’s friend said the last words with a mischievous smile.

“Good for you, Cerenna. But I’m done with swooning before handsome knights and lords. I used to. Now I’m married.”

Cerenna laughed inaudibly. “Yes, you’re married. Too bad. I’ll keep the handsome knights for myself then.”

Just like everyone else in Casterly Rock, Cerenna knew her marriage with Tyrion was still unconsummated. It was never mentioned before her or Tyrion, but people talked about it all the same. A few times, Sansa surprised people, whether they were Tyrion’s cousins or servants, talking about it. Why were they so interested in that? What happened between her and her husband in the bedroom was their private affairs. For a moment, Sansa thought about how Tyrion sometimes ran his fingers and his hands on her body and how she liked it. She wondered how it would feel if he passed
his hands under her clothes.

“You know Sansa, there’s something strange I heard yesterday,” Cerenna declared. “Apparently, a young knight of the Vale arrived to participate to the tournament a few days ago.”

That information surprised Sansa. “I thought only the Westermen were invited to the tourney.”

“You’re right, Sansa. All the noblemen of the Westerlands were invited, but no other invitation was sent to anyone outside. However, anyone can participate to the tourney as long they have the armor and the lance for that.” Cerenna shrugged. “Perhaps he was in the Westerlands for some other matter and heard about the tourney. After all, the prizes are quite high for the winners.”

Sansa was a little afraid by this. A knight of the Vale in the Westerlands? What good could come out of it? Her aunt Lysa died a few months ago. Apparently she committed suicide and jumped through the Moon Door of the Eyrie. Sansa never saw it, but Tyrion told her about it and how her aunt madly accused him of murdering her husband Jon Arryn. Her cousin wanted to make Tyrion fly. Sansa didn’t really feel anything when she learnt her aunt died. She married Petyr Baelish and remained hidden in the Vale while her family fought. She didn’t come to the help of her own blood and let them die. With the things Tyrion told her about her aunt and her son Lord Robin Arryn, Sansa didn’t feel any interest for them.

When Sansa thought about it, they still didn’t know who killed Jon Arryn. Tyrion told her once that her father’s friend died in strange circumstances and quite suddenly. In fact, when Tyrion arrived in King’s Landing to serve as Hand of the King, he tried to discover who killed Jon Arryn. He confronted Cersei about it, but she claimed she had nothing to do with it. Thanks to Tyrion’s trial, they knew that the Grand Maester made sure Jon Arryn wouldn’t survive to the poisoning he was a victim of, but they still didn’t know who actually poisoned him. Who did this? Why? Cersei seemed an excellent candidate. Sansa had no difficulty to imagine her poisoning people, but Tyrion didn’t think she did it. The mystery was complete.

Between Jon Arryn’s death, and the fact that now Petyr Baelish ruled the Vale as Regent until Robin Arryn came of age, Sansa didn’t like the presence of this knight. He might cause trouble. What if Baelish was the one to send him? Was he a spy? Or did he come for something else? Sansa remembered the failed attempt of Ser Dontos to kidnap her. She didn’t want to experience it a second time. She wouldn’t take any chance.

“Apparently, this knight is very handsome,” Cerenna resumed as if nothing was amiss. “I’m eager to see him. No one knows who he is, but that would be wonderful if he was some landed knight or even the heir of some great lord of the Vale.”

“Handsomeness doesn’t decide if you’ll win a tourney. Or if you’re a decent man.” Sansa answered on a bitter voice. She thought about Joffrey, or Ser Loras. Physical appearance and titles didn’t have much value for her now. Her husband was a dwarf, her sworn shield was a woman, her husband’s squire was a timid boy, and the Lannister she got along with the better after Cerenna was a bastard. They were all worth much more than many knights in shining armor and charming princes.

“No,” Cerenna conceded. “But that doesn’t mean the man cannot be interesting.” She drank some water. “Have you received any news from your friend? What was her name? Mira?”

Sansa shook her head. “Not for some time now. She’s probably still on her way to Oldtown as far as I know.” Margaery wrote to Sansa last month to tell her Mira Forrester left King’s Landing to marry Ser Gerold Hightower, the third son of Ser Baelor Hightower. Ser Baelor was the heir to Hightower. Sansa had been surprised by this. She didn’t expect Mira to marry anytime soon. From what the queen told her, Mira asked her for a marriage to escape another one. Sansa wondered what marriage
pushed Mira to ask Margaery to arrange her another wedding. She would have to write to her friend in Oldtown.

“I hope she’s alright. But at Hightower, I doubt she’ll be able to complain about her new situation.” Sansa didn’t know if Mira would really be better at Oldtown, but she hoped she would. She didn’t know the Hightowers.

Cerenna left when their breakfast was over and Sansa put on clothes for the day. Her hair were arranged for cascading behind her shoulders, with little braids among them. She put on a green gown with sapphires on the collar. Of course she kept the necklace on. She also had two rings at each hand, plus her wedding ring at her left hand. It was made of gold with a lion on it. Sansa smiled at the ring and the lion on it. It was the proof she was Tyrion’s wife. The other rings didn’t mean very much for her. She only wore so many jewels for public appearances. The rest of the time, her clothes and fineries were less refined.

Sansa went to Joy’s rooms after she gave orders to prepare her carriage and to warn the other ladies who would accompany her. However, she discovered the girl had gone to the Stone Garden again. It seemed the godswood of Casterly Rock was Joy’s home as much as her personal quarters now. Sansa went to the garden and found the girl of twelve on her knees, praying like she so often did. She prayed more than Sansa prayed herself when she was held in King’s Landing. They still had some time before they were to leave for the tourney, so Sansa decided to kneel as well to pray with her.

She prayed for Jon at the Wall. For Tyrion, her husband. For Joy, right beside her. For Cerenna. For Dorna. For Genna. For all the Lannisters she knew here. For Margaery in King’s Landing. For Mira in Oldtown. For her uncle Edmure, and her granduncle Brynden, both at Riverrun. She also prayed for Ser Kevan. She also asked the Old Gods in the end who she was. Was she a Lannister? A Stark? Both of them? Or someone else?

When Sansa opened her eyes, Joy was still praying. Sansa rose and placed a hand on Joy’s shoulder. The girl opened her eyes and smiled widely at her.

“Sansa.”

“I’m glad to see you Joy. The tourney will begin soon. You should prepare.”

The dress Joy wore wasn’t really fit for such an event. Being a bastard, Joy never had the same privileges than the other members of House Lannister. She lived at Casterly Rock, had her own handmaiden and was with the rest of the family in private events, but in public events she was always set aside. As a consequence, she wasn’t given as much as the other Lannisters. Tyrion and Sansa had changed that not long after they arrived. Joy began to sit with all the other Lannisters in public events. She also took some dinners with them. Sansa prayed with her in the Stone Garden. Joy now had two handmaidens in her service like the other cousins of Tyrion, and her wardrobe expanded considerably. Sansa herself saw to that.

Sansa followed Joy to her personal chamber. It was a comfortable chamber, better provided than her own chamber at Winterfell, but far less than the rooms she shared with Tyrion. Her two handmaidens took care to make her wear a lavish red gown with golden strings and a necklace with amethysts. When they were done Sansa looked at the result. Joy was very lovely this way. No one who would see her for the first time would suspect she was a bastard. That wouldn’t be the first question to come to their mind.

“Please, leave us,” Sansa ordered to the two servants. They left.
Sansa and Joy were alone now. Joy was looking at her gown in wonderment. She never wore something so expansive or beautiful. It was made two months ago, but she never had an opportunity to wear it up to now.

“You’re very beautiful, Joy.”

The little girl smiled at her. “Thank you, Sansa.” That was the kind of little sister she had wanted when she lived at Winterfell. She always wished Arya was sweet and lovely like her, though now she would give anything for her little sister to put sheep’s shit inside the mattress of her bed. She knew it was shit and not shift now. Joy ran to hug her a moment. Sansa returned the hug.

“Sit, Joy. I need to tell you something.” Sansa sat in a chair and Joy did the same before her. “Joy, there will be a boy at the tourney. His name is Rollam. Rollam Westerling. He’s the son of Lord Westerling. I would like you to spend some time with him today.”

Joy didn’t seem to understand. “Why?”

Sansa smiled sadly at Joy. She couldn’t tell her the truth. Tyrion was very clear about it. “His brother died during the Red Wedding. The Westerlings fought for the Starks during the last war, and his brother died at the Twins, just like my brother and my mother. His sisters couldn’t come with him and he’ll be alone. I thought you could give him some company. Does it bother you?”

Joy’s face turned a little sad when Sansa had told everything. She nodded. “No. I’ll spend time with him.”

Sansa smiled kindly at the little girl. “Thank you, Joy. Come now. I can’t be late for my own name day.”

Joy’s face turned happy again. She followed Sansa to the Lion’s Mouth where the carriage was waiting for them. Sansa chose three other women to accompany her in the carriage a few days ago. The three women in question were Joy, already with her, Cerenna and Myrielle. Cerenna’s sister changed her behavior towards Sansa in the months following her arrival. She didn’t seem to hate Sansa anymore, though she still remained more distant to her than the others. Sansa chose her because she was Cerenna’s sister, but also in the hope it would show Myrielle she had absolutely nothing against her.

The tourney was to take place outside the walls of Lannisport. Tyrion was already there and everything was ready by now if nothing went wrong. Sansa noticed grey clouds covered all the sky. She hoped rain wouldn’t start during the tourney. On the way, Sansa discussed with the three other girls who shared the carriage with her. Myrielle spoke less to Sansa than Joy and Cerenna, but she talked to Sansa all the same. Joy talked a lot about her embroidery lessons with Sansa. Sansa regretted she lied to Joy previously. She used the fact Joy felt very sorry for what happened to Sansa’s family at the Red Wedding to bring her to spend time with the heir of the Crag. Joy felt sorry for the boy who lost someone in this butchery. But how could Sansa tell Joy the truth? Anyway, if Rollam Westerling proved to not be someone good, then they wouldn’t talk about it again. Tyrion swore it to her, and he always kept his promises. Despite this, she felt bad for using Joy’s feelings. She was only a child, just like Sansa was not long ago.

After a short trip, they arrived at the site where the joust was to take place. Cerenna and Myrielle left them to reach their own places among the lords and ladies. Joy followed Sansa to the platform where they would take place, at the place of honor. There were some people in Casterly Rock who were jealous of Joy because she had the privilege to appear very close to Tyrion and Sansa despite the fact she was a bastard. Sansa felt all eyes on her as she walked to the platform where Tyrion was waiting for her with Genna and Ser Damion. Tyrion rose from his seat to welcome her when she arrived, just
like Genna and Ser Damion.

“My lady,” Tyrion said as a greeting along with the smile she had come to love.

“My lord.”

Sansa sat at his left. Damion Lannister was on Tyrion’s right while Genna was on her own left. Joy took place at Genna’s left. People kept gathering around the grounds to attend the joust.

Sansa couldn’t stop smiling. She assisted to a tourney a long time ago, in King’s Landing. It was the Hand’s tourney Robert Baratheon ordered to celebrate the appointment of her father as Hand of the King. Sansa had been amazed by the tourney at the time. But this tourney was entirely different. It was prepared for her, and knights would fight for her. She was touched by this. Tywin Lannister murdered her family, Joffrey killed her father and Cersei tried to murder her husband, but the Lannisters weren’t an evil family. Not even Genna. She had helped Sansa to become the true Lady of Casterly Rock. She was their lady now, and no one could deny it.

The herald came forth and the silence fell. With his powerful voice, he announced the beginning of the tourney, speaking to Tyrion and her first, then to the crowd. “My lord, my lady, my lords, my ladies, people of Lannisport, of the Westerlands and of the Seven Kingdoms, welcome to the tourney of Lannisport in the honor of our lady, Sansa Lannister.”

People cheered and clapped their hands. A year ago, Sansa would probably have been insulted by the crowd of King’s Landing before such a declaration. But after a few months, the people of the Westerlands seemed to appreciate her now. The herald commanded the silence.

“Our first contenders. On the left, Ser Melwyn Sarsfield.” A man on a black stallion with a sigil representing a green arrow on a white bend and a green field advanced and bowed before them. “On the right, Ser Bronn of Blackwater.”

Sansa couldn’t have been more surprised. The former sellsword advanced on a brown mount and bowed deeply and mockingly as he always did, a grin on his lips. He wore his usual black chainmail, no more armor than that, and a very basic helmet. The two knights rode separate ways for their first confrontation.

“I wonder what will be the result,” Tyrion said on her right. “I would bet on Bronn anytime for a duel to the death, but for a joust? I didn’t think this kind of things was for him.”

Perhaps he’s attracted by the prize,” Sansa suggested.

“For sure, he’s attracted by the prize. For enough money, Bronn could do anything. He’ll always be a sellsword, no matter the titles and lands he received.”

It seemed Bronn wasn’t only good at killing (and drinking and fucking as he said so often). Ser Melwyn fell from his horse at the first passage. Bronn celebrated his victory by brandishing his lance in the air and people cheered him. As the recent landed knight went to his squire and dismounted, Sansa recognized the girl who was waiting for him, smiling euphorically. It was the whore, Daisy. She saw her discussing with Tyrion during the ceremony at Casterly Rock where their bannermen pledged themselves to their liege lord and lady. That had made Sansa angry back then to see Tyrion discuss with this girl who was a whore. It had brought back memories of Shae to her mind, but more than everything memories she knew now were times when Tyrion loved Shae in secret. She looked at Tyrion from the corner of her eyes, trying to decipher anything that could show he loved or spent time with another woman. There was no way to know it for sure by only looking at him this way. Sansa returned her attention to the joust.
Hedge knights, landed knights, sons of lords and even a few lords participated to the joust. Some of
them wore the favor of a woman or another. The best moment was when the herald announced a
jouster most of the people didn’t expect.

“Lady Brienne of Tarth.” There were many gasps when the woman removed her helmet to reveal
who she was. If many people at Casterly Rock knew her at least of view, people of the Westerlands
only heard about her at most. To hear about the female warrior who protected the Lady of Casterly
Rock and to actually see her with your own eyes were two entirely different things. Sansa told her to
participate to the tourney instead of protecting her for today.

Brienne raised her lance. “I fight for the Lady Sansa,” she shouted loudly for everyone to hear. There
were new cries of surprise. Sansa smiled hearing this. Most of the knights would just not believe it.
She gave her favor to a woman. She shared an amused look with Tyrion. Brienne defeated her first
opponent very easily.

Many jousters followed before Sansa saw a knight with a shield bearing a sigil she never saw. The
shield was divided in four. The two parts of the bottom presented symbols she didn’t know, but she
recognized the symbol on the top. It was the moon-and-falcon sigil of House Arryn. He was the
knight of the Vale Cerenna told her about. Sansa eyed him suspiciously. He advanced his horse
before her and Tyrion and removed his helmet.

“Ser Harrold Hardyng of the Vale,” the herald declared. The young man had sandy hair, deep blue
eyes and an aquiline nose. Sansa realized many young girls in the crowd were looking at him with
desire. He bowed deeply. His opponent came forth. Sansa noticed he didn’t lift his eyes from her.
Even after he rode to prepare for the first charge, Sansa noticed he always had an eye on her. She
didn’t like this. He came from the Vale, the kingdom actually ruled by Lord Petyr Baelish. He
looked too much at her for her taste. He defeated his first opponent at the second charge and sent a
mysterious smile to Sansa as he rode before her to leave. She really didn’t like it.

The joust carried on for all the morning. They served them wine and pastries all the time, and Sansa
enjoyed it a lot. Between two duels, lords and landed knights came to pay their respects to her.
Bronn visited them with Daisy, and Sansa noticed Genna wasn’t pleased by the girl’s presence.
Sansa wasn’t either very pleased to see her there, especially considering how she smiled fondly at
Tyrion when she curtsied. Her curtsy wasn’t very well done, but it was better than the one Shae
made during the Battle of Blackwater. The former sellsword didn’t bother to take some of their wine
for the occasion.

Eventually, Lord Gawen Westerling and his son came to pay their respects as well. It was time to act.
“My lord. My lady.” Lord Westerling bowed to each of them. “My lady, you have all my good
wishes for your sixteenth name day.”

“Thank you, Lord Gawen,” Sansa answered very courteously. “Lady Sybell isn’t with you?”

“No, I’m afraid she couldn’t come. She didn’t feel well and had to stay in Lannisport. But I have
great hope she will feel good enough in the evening to be present at the feast.”

*I’ll have something to reproach to her then,* Sansa thought not without pleasure. But she hid it. She
noticed Lord Westerling’s face grew dark as he spoke of his wife. “We’ll be happy to receive you. Is
it your son, my lord?”

“Yes.” The boy accompanying Lord Gawen advanced timidly. He looked sad, perhaps because of
his brother’s recent death. “My son and heir, Rollam.” Rollam Westerling bowed awkwardly before
them. He was thirteen according to Tyrion.
“My lady, I wish you all the happiness and the health in the world,” Rollam said.

“Thank you, Lord Rollam. I appreciate it a lot.”

“I… I met your brother, Robb Stark, when he stayed at the Crag. He seemed to be a good man.”

Sansa nodded. “He was,” she answered with a low voice. Sansa turned her head on her left. “Joy, Lord Rollam looks alone. I’m sure he would be pleased to enjoy your company.”

“Yes, San… my lady.” Joy left her seat and went before Rollam, curtsying. “My lord.”

“My lady,” he said as he bowed his head to Joy.

“Thank you, my lady.” Lord Westerling left them on these words with Rollam and Joy. Both of them didn’t say a word as they went away.

Bronn and Brienne both went through two other opponents. Without the Mountain, no one died. Sansa was relieved by this. She didn’t want deaths for her name day. When midday arrived, the tourney was interrupted for two hours to let people eat and rest. Long tables were set in the fields to allow all the noblemen and noblewomen who were present to take part to it.

This was the moment for everyone who was present to give their presents for her name day. For almost the entire meal, Sansa had to receive gifts from everyone. The poorest lords and knights gave her capes, gloves, boots, horses, engravings. Sansa showed her appreciation to everyone with her smiles and her words. The richest houses brought much more refined and costly presents. A huge cup made of gold in the form of Casterly Rock was given by Lady Alysanne Lefford. Lord Lyman Serett of Silverhill gave her a dozen silver brooches. There was also Ser Harrold Hardyng who came to offer her a blue cape with an eagle brooch to attach it. Sansa accepted the gift and thanked him with grace, but she still didn’t like the way he looked and smiled at her. It reminded her of someone dead, someone Sansa didn’t regret to be dead.

The gifts she appreciated the most were those from the Lannisters. Joy gave her a simple wooden figurine of a direwolf she carved herself. Sansa kissed the little girl on her forehead before everyone. Dorna gave her a copy of the Book of the Mother. Ironically, Genna and Darlessa gave her copies of the Book of the Maiden and the Book of the Crone. The books had bindings in gold and silver and were richly drawn. Ser Damion and his wife gave her a ring that belonged to Ser Damion’s mother. There were also gifts from Lanna, Margot who came from Starpike, Ser Emmon and all his sons. Cerenna and Myrielle brought their gifts together. Each had a cup. Cerenna presented first a cup made of gold with four faces of lions on the outside. Then Myrielle brought a cup made of silver with four faces as well, but faces of wolves. When Sansa thanked her, for the first time, Myrielle seemed to smile sincerely at her.

They went back to the jousting ground when the meal was over. On their way, Sansa realized something. “You gave me nothing,” she said to Tyrion who was walking alongside her.

“Don’t worry. I’ll show it to you tonight, after the feast. That’s not something I can give to you during dinner.”

Sansa was confused by the enigmatic smile Tyrion had while he said it. She wondered what he prepared for her that couldn’t be given during the day. But considering the previous times he gave her presents, she guessed she could expect something very good as a gift.

The jousting resumed. The number of contenders decreased as people got eliminated. In the end of the day, only four competitors were left: Ser Harrold Hardyng, Ser Bronn of Blackwater, Ser Lyle
Crakehall and Lady Brienne of Tarth. In the semi-finals, Bronn faced Brienne first. The Maid of Tarth defeated Tyrion’s friend at the second charge. Bronn managed to get on his feet and removed his helmet. He grinned widely.

“Everyone who doesn’t want to end worse than me, don’t try to fuck her!”

Sansa blushed at the improper banter, but so many people, including Bronn and Tyrion laughed that in the end she couldn’t resist but join everyone who was present. Even Genna was smiling and barely retained laughs. Brienne still wore her helmet, so Sansa couldn’t know how she reacted to it. Bronn left the jousting ground and Brienne stayed aside, preparing for the final.

“It’s a chance I didn’t place a bet,” Tyrion told her. “If I had, I would have lost a lot of money.”

“You would have bet on Bronn?” Sansa asked incredulously. “You were the one this morning to say you weren’t sure about his skills in jousting.”

“I never bet against my brother. Do you think I would bet against a friend?”

He took a faked insulted air that made her chuckle. “Then you did well to not bet. I should watch you over gambling as well.”

“What have I done to deserve this? My wife will soon spy me over everything I’m doing.”

Their short discussion was interrupted by the second semi-final. Harrold Hardyng and Lyle Crakehall, the Strongboar, faced each other. Sansa felt the eyes of the knight of the Eyrie on her before they confronted and between the charges. They needed four charges before Ser Lyle was unhorsed. People shouted after Ser Harrold, obviously unhappy a knight of the Vale defeated one of the fiercest warriors of the Westerlands. He kept looking at Sansa all the time he received the crowd’s outcries. Sansa hated it more and more. Couldn’t he look somewhere else?

It was odd for a tourney originally meant to be only between knights and lords of the Westerlands to have a final between a knight from the Vale and a lady from the Stormlands. Sansa wondered who the assistance would favor. Ser Harrold only received outcries when he was presented for the final, except for a few girls, while Brienne received many cheers. Probably people realized she was closest to the Westerlands than the handsome knight in shining armor since she wore Sansa’s favor. Perhaps people started to know that she was in Sansa’s personal service now, hence a much better contender to support than the stranger from the Vale of Arryn. Sansa hoped Brienne would defeat this man. She didn’t like at all the way he looked at her.

Brienne and her opponent went to opposite sides of the jousting ground. They both seized their lance and prepared for the first charge. The horn sounded and the two people charged at full speed. The first confrontation was without result as it often happened. The second and third charges were fruitless as well. Sansa tried to maintain her composure, but it was difficult. She wanted Brienne to win. Between the third and fourth charges, Sansa noticed the knight didn’t look at her for the first time. At the fifth charge, he nearly fell from his horse but managed to hold the reins and gained back his position on his saddle. At the seventh charge, Brienne was struck by his lance quite strongly, but she only pushed back her shoulder behind for a moment, barely moving on her saddle. Charges continued, none being able to unhorse the other. Brienne broke two lances, the knight of the Vale broke three. The knight of the Vale didn’t give any attention to Sansa now. Perhaps he didn’t expect such an opponent. Sansa couldn’t deny he was good with all the jousters he defeated, some among the best in the Westerlands. But now he showed signs of impatience. They were now at the fifteenth charge. Sansa was sitting at the tip of her chair. The two horses ran at full speed. Sansa saw Ser Harrold’s lance pointed toward Brienne’s head. Brienne’s lance didn’t target anything particularly. At the moment the lance was about to hit her helmet, Brienne tilted her head on the side and brought
her own lance on the knight’s leg. Any knight who would have made such a movement would have killed the horse of his opponent and would have been disqualified for this reason, but Brienne was far better than any knight. Her lance went directly between the saddle and Ser Harrold’s leg and the knight was lifted from his saddle by the lance who came up in the blink of an eye. Ser Harrold Hardyng of the Vale flew in the air for a few feet and landed heavily on the earth.

There was a huge silence only broken by Ser Harrold’s cries of pain. Brienne came back close to the fallen knight and dismounted, removing her helmet on the way. She extended her hand to help the young man to get on his feet, but he only turned away and got up without Brienne’s help, dropping his helmet on the ground once on his feet and walking away without a single glance to the woman who defeated him or to anyone else. Another heavy silence followed, until finally someone shouted.

“BRIENNE OF TARTH!” And soon people were shouting her name everywhere. “BRIENNE! BRIENNE! BRIENNE! BRIENNE!” Brienne was reddening. She could only take Sansa’s favor from her lance and lift it up in the air. People only cheered her even more. Brienne just won twenty thousand gold dragons and the admiration of most of the people of the west.

Brienne was sacred champion of the tourney, but since she was a woman, no one was chosen as queen of love and beauty. A woman couldn’t choose another woman for this. As the tourney ended, the light of the day was beginning to fade. The smallfolk went back to their homes and their fields while the highborn people went back to Casterly Rock for the feast that would follow, Sansa’s carriage and Tyrion’s litter leading the procession. Sansa noticed scrolls and books were piled in Tyrion’s litter as she entered her carriage with Myrielle, Cerenna and Joy. Even on his wife’s name day, the Lord of Casterly Rock had to work. Sansa thought with dread about the large amount of work she would have to catch up tomorrow. She would be better to enjoy this day as much as she could.

Once they were inside the Rock, Sansa and Tyrion went back to their rooms to change their clothes for the feast, just like everyone else. Sansa noticed with regret that clouds covered skies so well that she wouldn’t be able to see the sunset before the feast. She liked to look at it in the evening when she could. Sometimes Tyrion joined her to contemplate it. Sansa went to the dressing room to put her gown for the evening while Tyrion used his solar to change his own clothes. Sansa decided to wear the gown Tyrion offered her for the royal wedding when they were in King’s Landing. When she thought about it, she didn’t wear it since that time, perhaps because there weren’t many occasions to wear it. Her handmaidens helped her to don the gown and to arrange her hair in braids that a golden hairnet held in place. She also put the medallion with the red ruby around her neck, over her lion-direwolf necklace, and she changed the rings at her fingers, except for her wedding ring.

Sansa looked at herself in the glass. Her body wasn’t done growing. She grew even more since the royal wedding. Her handmaidens had to adjust her gown in comparison to how Mira adjusted it the last time. How much time passed since she wore this gown for the first time? Many months. She was sixteen now. No one could say she was a child anymore. She left the dressing room and saw Tyrion reading in the living room. He lifted his eyes from his book when she approached to look at her. She recognized the admiration he showed to her in all circumstances like this one.

“How do I look?” she asked.

“Breathtaking, as always.”

Sansa flushed a little. “You still didn’t give me your present.”

“After the feast.” Tyrion put his book aside. He looked at her for another moment, then rose and offered his hand. “Shall we?”
Sansa took his hand and followed him to the feast that would take place in the Great Hall. Many people had already arrived when they entered and took place on the dais. They were warmly welcomed. Other members of House Lannister were the ones who shared the dais with them, including Genna, her husband Ser Emmon, her eldest son Cleos and his wife Jeyne, Joy, Ser Damion, his wife Shiera and their daughter Lanna. The feast consisted in seven courses of the finest and plumiest plates. Wine also seemed sweeter than everything she tasted in her memory. But she made sure all the same that Tyrion didn’t drink too much. Her name day was no excuse to let him get drunk.

Jugglers, singers, bards, acrobats, musicians and fools entertained them as they ate. Many songs were performed, but to her great surprise, Sansa realized musicians played northern music. She heard music she didn’t hear since she left Winterfell. She recognized some of the musicians to be Northerners by their looks. The last artist to perform was Sansa’s personal singer. She sang five songs, including the *Mother’s Hymn* and *My featherbed*. Sansa recognized two other songs since she sang it to her before, *False Love* and *The Wolf and the Moon*. The latter was a song of the North. However, what surprised Sansa was the fifth song she performed.

*The snow glows white on the mountain tonight,*

*not a footprint to be seen.*

*A kingdom of isolation and it looks like I'm the queen.*

*The wind is howling like this swirling storm inside.*

*Couldn't keep it in, Heaven knows I tried.*

*Don't let them in, don't let them see.*

*Be the good girl you always have to be.*

*Conceal, don't feel, don't let them know.*

*Well, now they know!*

*Let it go, let it go!*

*Can't hold it back any more.*

*Let it go, let it go!*

*Turn away and slam the door.*

*I don't care what they're going to say.*

*Let the storm rage on.*

*The cold never bothered me anyway.*

*It's funny how some distance,*
makes everything seem small.
And the fears that once controlled me, can't get to me at all
It's time to see what I can do,
to test the limits and break through.
No right, no wrong, no rules for me.
I'm free!

Let it go, let it go.
I am one with the wind and sky.
Let it go, let it go.
You'll never see me cry.
Here I'll stand, and here I'll stay.
Let the storm rage on.

My power flurries through the air into the ground.
My soul is spiraling in frozen fractals all around
And one thought crystallizes like an icy blast
I'm never going back; the past is in the past!

Let it go, let it go.
And I'll rise like the break of dawn.
Let it go, let it go
That perfect girl is gone
Here I stand, in the light of day.

Let the storm rage on!
The cold never bothered me anyway

It was a song from a very ancient northern tale and everyone in the North knew it. When she was
young, Sansa used to hate that tale. The story was about two sisters, a queen and a princess. The queen had powers to create ice and snow, but couldn’t control them. She accidentally brought an eternal winter to her kingdom and her sister helped her to put an end to it. However, Sansa had hated this tale because the prince who the princess fell in love with at the beginning proved to be a traitor who tried to kill the queen and the princess. The princess finally fell in love with a mountain man. Sansa disliked that story before she left Winterfell because the beautiful prince wasn’t a perfect man. It wasn’t how songs and stories were supposed to be. She should have loved this kind of stories better. That could have helped her with Joffrey, much more than Florian and Jonquil.

Sansa listened to all the songs that were played, exchanging opinions about them with Tyrion between two. She also asked Joy and Genna for their opinion a few times, but it was mostly with Tyrion she spoke and laughed. Afterwards, musicians played dancing songs and people started to gather on the floor. Sansa liked to dance, but she didn’t dare to join the people. She decided to stay on the dais and to talk with Tyrion. She felt heat in her cheeks after a moment. Most people on the dais were dancing or discussing with people on the floor, but Sansa remained with her husband. She noticed Joy was dancing with Rollam Westerling. The boy was smiling.

“It seems your idea wasn’t such a bad one finally,” she told Tyrion.

Tyrion followed her gaze to the two children. “That will make things much easier.” Tyrion looked at her. “Sansa, you can dance if you want. They’re the festivities for your name day, after all.”

Sansa averted her gaze. “No, it’s alright.” She felt Tyrion’s gaze lingering on her. She stammered. “Would… Would you want to dance?”

Tyrion seemed quite surprised by her question and chuckled after a moment. “I don’t think it’s a good idea. I’ll only get people to laugh at you. But don’t stop yourself from dancing because you’re married to a dwarf. It’s your name day. Enjoy it.”

Sansa sighed, half discouraged, half smiling. She rose from her seat. “If my lord husband insist,” she said with a mocking voice. She took the jug of wine on the table between them. “But I’m taking this with me.”

“You’re really a cruel wife!”

“I know.” Sansa laughed, louder than she did usually. She walked away, still laughing, putting the jug on another table. She noticed the content was quite low. She couldn’t have let Tyrion drink so much. She put her hands on her forehead and her cheeks and realized they were quite hot. She felt lighter than in usual circumstances. Now she understood why the jug emptied so much. She shouldn’t drink for the rest of the evening. Did Tyrion notice it? If he realized she was drunk…

“Lady Lannister.”

Sansa turned to see Lord Gawen Westerling standing a few feet from her. “Lord Westerling.”

“My lady, would you do me the great honor to give me a dance.”

Sansa smiled, though her smile wasn’t entirely sincere. “Of course, Lord Gawen.”

He led Sansa on the floor and they started to dance. Sansa didn’t really know what to think of the Lord of the Crag. He wasn’t the one who betrayed Robb, but his wife and her brother did. She held him responsible in some way for allowing his family to betray Robb. Ser Damion was the next one she danced with, then followed Lord Jast, Ser Cleos, Lord Sarwyck, Rollam Westerling who broke his dance with Joy for a moment, Lord Marbrand and many others. She even danced with Bronn for
She finally left the dance and went to take a cup of wine before she realized she shouldn’t drink too much. She ate some pastries while drinking to make it less worse. She engaged conversations with other ladies, including Genna, Margot, Lanna, Cerenna, Myrielle and finally Alysanne Lefford. As she spoke with the Lady of the Golden Tooth, Sansa realized Tyrion was talking with Bronn and Daisy on the dais. Lady Alysanne seemed to notice it as well.

“Who’s this girl? I heard she worked in a brothel before. Is that true?”

Sansa decided to not reveal the truth to Lady Lefford. “We can expect everything with a former sellsword. This girl could have been anything before she became his paramour.”

“Anything,” the Lady of the Golden Tooth conceded. “But as a landed knight, he should marry instead to have a whore following him everywhere.”

Alysanne Lefford was a tall brown-haired woman with a shapely figure and a bright smile. She was quite attractive and reached her eighteenth name day last month. Sansa wondered why she wasn’t already married. Suitors surely didn’t lack. A beautiful young woman at the head of the second richest family of the Westerlands could only attract marriage propositions.

“And you, when are you going to marry, Lady Lefford?”

Alysanne shrugged. “I’m not in a hurry. I have all the time I want.”

Sansa thought she knew what she meant. She would wait to choose the best suitor she could get, just like the Tyrells waited to give Margaery the best match possible. Their conversation was interrupted by a presence in Sansa’s back.

“My lady. My lady.”

Sansa turned to face Ser Harrold Hardyng. He wore a blue doublet instead of his armor during the tourney. Sansa noticed how muscular he was, and very handsome, much more than from afar. He was probably no more than twenty years-old. He bowed before Sansa and Lady Lefford, dimples appearing as he smiled to them.

“Ser Harrold. It is a pleasure to meet you,” Alysanne exclaimed. “You rode very well in the joust.”

“Thank you, my lady,” the knight answered with a pleasant smile.

“Do you dance as well as you joust?”

“Even better, Lady Lefford. I would gladly ask for the honor to dance with you, but I already have a partner for all the following dances.”

“How unfair it is. I do hope this or these women who dance with you will enjoy it. Ser. My lady.”

Lady Lefford left, leaving Sansa alone with the knight. He always looked at her smiling between the words he exchanged with Lady Alyssanee, and Sansa didn’t like it anymore than during the tourney. His handsomeness, his pleasant ways and his smiles remembered her at the same time of Joffrey and Ser Loras, and the memory of these two men wasn’t to make her happy.

“I was surprised to see you at this tourney, Ser Harrold. We didn’t expect knights of the Vale to participate,” Sansa commented with her unemotional voice.
“Yes, my lady. I have no difficulty to imagine your pleasant surprise when you saw me compete. But I happened to be of passage in Lannisport when I heard about this competition, and I decided to do you the honor of my participation.”

“I appreciate it very much, ser. What were you doing in Lannisport?”

The young man seemed to search for an answer. “I… I was visiting the Westerlands. I decided to travel through Westeros recently and just happened to be there when I heard of the tourney. It was pure chance.”

“You decided to travel through Westeros in the middle of a war?” Sansa asked skeptically.

“Aye,” the young man answered after a moment, smiling again. “I wanted to see some of the country, and up to now, I’m not disappointed of the many beautiful marvels I’ve seen.”

These were the kind of compliments Sansa would have liked back when she was the sweet girl of Winterfell. But she was no longer this girl and she didn’t like the knight’s behavior. And she didn’t like the fact he happened to be there by apparent luck. How many knights decided to travel from the Eyrie to the Westerlands in the middle of the War of the Five Kings?

“You see me very pleased of this, ser. I hope the rest of your journey will be much entertaining as the beginning. If you’ll excuse me.” Sansa started to walk away.

“Lady Sansa!” the young knight nearly shouted as she walked away. Nearly shouted. “Would you make me the honor to dance the next dance with me?”

Sansa took a surprised look. “I thought you already had a partner for all the dances.” She raised an eyebrow.

Ser Harrold Hardyng looked taken aback for a moment, but he recovered quite quickly. “For you, I could set aside all the other women in the Seven Kingdoms.”

If he hoped to please Sansa with these words, he was wrong. “This isn’t very worthy of a knight to go back on his word, Ser Harrold. I wouldn’t want to force you to forsake a promise.”

“Yes, I know, but… I beg you, my lady. Please accept to give me the honor to dance with me.”

“I’m afraid I can’t. I’m very tired and need to rest.” Sansa turned around and started to walk away again, only to be followed by the young knight.

“Lady Sansa, I beg you. Only one dance. Only one.” Sansa continued to walk, her back turned on him. “I need to speak with you.”

Sansa finally turned again to face him, hoping she could get rid of him quickly if she let him speak. “Tell me what you have to say.” She stared in the eyes of the man.

Ser Harrold Hardyng paused for some time before he spoke. “Lady Sansa, I am only the son of a landed knight sworn to Lady Anya Waynwood of Ironoaks, one of the greatest ladies of the Vale. I was raised at Ironoaks since my childhood and was knighted only recently. Lady Waynwood talked a lot about your father. I never had the chance to meet him, but I wish I had. I was angry and very sad when I learned Lord Eddard Stark was killed, and my only wish was to fight to avenge him. Your father was loved in the Vale. All the lords there said he was a very good man, a man of honor. And they respected House Stark more than you can imagine. I just want to tell you… If you ever need any help, the Vale is ready to fight for you.”
Sansa wasn’t impressed by the speech. Even less when she saw the smile on the knight’s lips. Anger boiled in her. “I thank you for your offer, Ser Harrold, but I don’t need any help. I am safe here at Casterly Rock, and I have the lords of the Westerlands on my side.”

The knight of the Vale looked quite surprised by her words. “Lady Sansa…” He looked around himself and spoke lower. “You cannot trust the Lannisters. They are your family’s enemies. You’re not safe here.”

Sansa smiled. “Ser Harrold, the last time a knight who wasn’t from the Westerlands offered to help me and my family, he put a dagger on my throat and threatened to kill me.”

Ser Hardyng was taken aback again. “My lady, I… I would never do such a…”

“I wasn’t done speaking, ser. It isn’t proper for a knight to interrupt a lady while she talks.”

“For… Forgive me, my lady.”

“The person who saved me from this knight,” Sansa resumed immediately, “is now my sworn shield and my personal guard. With the protection of Lady Brienne, I have nothing to fear.”

“Lady Brienne?” Ser Harrold looked horrified. “But she’s only a woman!”

“A woman who defeated you this very afternoon, ser,” Sansa remembered him with a satisfied smile. “I hope you understand why I gave her my favor. If she can defeat you, I’m sure she can defeat anyone who approaches me.”

The knight’s face turned red. Sansa resumed. “When my father was executed for betraying his king, the North and the Riverlands rebelled against King Joffrey. They were traitors, but they fought for my father all the same. In the meantime, the knights of the Vale refused to join the rebellion and refused at the same time to answer the call of King Joffrey for help. The knights of the Vale remained behind their mountains. My brother Robb may have been a traitor, but no one can say he was a coward.”

The knight looked entirely confused by her words. Sansa witnessed with a great satisfaction how he couldn’t find something to answer. She took a step forward. “I would give you an advice, Ser Harrold Hardyng of the Vale. You said I couldn’t trust the Lannisters. I am Sansa Lannister of House Stark, Lady of Casterly Rock, Lady of the Westerlands and Lady of Winterfell. You’re speaking against my family in my own castle, on my lands, and you pretend you respected the former Lord of Winterfell while you did nothing when he was executed. The next time you dare to speak against House Lannister or against House Stark within these walls, there’s a huge risk of an accident happening to you before you leave.” Sansa didn’t know if it was still only confusion on the knight’s face or if fear had been added, but she didn’t stop. “I give you until midnight to leave my castle, or else I’ll make you leave myself after you’re accused of high treason for speaking against House Lannister and the king. And I’ll make sure Lord Robin Arryn is informed of the way your journey in the Westerlands ended. Leave now. I don’t want to see you or any man like you again.”

Sansa left the bewildered knight there and went to give orders to the guards in the Hall to make sure the handsome knight would leave. If Littlefinger sent him, he would understand she wanted nothing to do with him. Sansa wasn’t about to let another Ser Dontos put a knife on her throat, no matter he was handsome like Ser Loras or ugly like the Hound. Sansa’s anger was palpable when she joined Tyrion on the dais. He managed to get a new jug of wine, as always. Sansa took it away from him again and put it down on the table too abruptly.

“Are you alright?” Tyrion asked her, not complaining about the wine this time.
“Yes, I am,” Sansa answered angrily.

Tyrion leaned towards her. “Sansa, what’s going on?”

Sansa decided to tell him. After all, they both had many reasons to hate the Vale of Arryn, and she had nothing against sharing what just happened with her husband. Tyrion listened attentively to her story.

“Strange,” he said at the end. “Perhaps he’s only a foolish knight who wants to be gallant. He may have no link with Baelish, but we should keep an eye on him. It’s quite unusual he was present for your name day. But perhaps he only wanted to be a knight in shining armor.”

Sansa snorted. “He looks like a combination of Joffrey and Loras.”

Tyrion chuckled. “The worst possible combination. Let’s hope he followed your advice and went away. Do you see him?”

Sansa looked at the floor where people danced and didn’t see Ser Harrold Hardyng. “No. He probably left to hide. That’s what the knights of the Vale do best. Hide. But I’ll ask Brienne to stand guard before our rooms tonight, just in case.”

“What a reward for her victory at the tourney,” Tyrion remarked sarcastically, but smiling. Sansa looked at Brienne standing in one of the galleries. She was watching people, clad in full armor, Oathkeeper at her belt, her hand on the pommel, trying to detect some possible threat. Sansa couldn’t repress a chuckle. Brienne just won a tourney and she didn’t celebrate. She continued to do her duty as if nothing happened.

The musicians started a new song for the dance. Sansa never heard it before.

When in the springtime of the year
When the trees are crowned with leaves
When the ash and oak, and the birch and yew
Are dressed in ribbons fair

“Sansa, you’ll never know what Bronn asked me while you danced,” Tyrion told her all of a sudden. From the smile he displayed, Sansa expected something funny again.

“What did he tell you?” she asked with a false haughty smile.

“He asked for a wife. You remember, we still owe him one.”

“I thought he wasn’t eager to marry too soon.”

When owls call the breathless moon
In the blue veil of the night
The shadows of the trees appear
Amidst the lantern light

“Well, it seems he’s eager now.”

“So, it seems you’ll have to find him a wife now,” Sansa remarked.

“Me? You’re the one who promised him a wife, remember.”

“And you’re the one who lives thanks to that promise. So it’s your duty to find the wife,” she said with a wicked smile. Tyrion laughed at her expression.

We’ve been rambling all the night
And some time of this day
Now returning back again
We bring a garland gay

“I won’t have all this trouble. Bronn asked for a very specific wife.”

That revelation startled Sansa. “What? What do you mean? Bronn asked to marry one woman in particular?”

“Yes. He’s dancing with her right now.”

Tyrion pointed with his eyes to the dancing floor.

Who will go down to those shady groves
And summon the shadows there
And tie a ribbon on those sheltering arms
In the springtime of the year

Sansa made out Bronn among the dancers. She recognized immediately the woman he was dancing with. She was speaking about her with Lady Lefford a few minutes ago.

“Daisy?” Sansa was completely taken by surprise. “You can’t be serious!”

“You know how I love to make japes all the time, my lady, but this time I’m very serious. And Bronn is too.”

Sansa looked again at the pair dancing. Bronn wasn’t a great dancer, and to be honest the way Daisy
danced looked a bit indecent.

\[
\text{The songs of birds seem to fill the wood} \\
\text{That when the fiddler plays} \\
\text{All their voices can be heard} \\
\text{Long past their woodland days}
\]

“Bran wants to marry… a whore?”

Tyrion’s expression was between amusement, awkwardness, and sadness too. “Well, he wouldn’t be
the first.”

Tyrion’s gaze seemed lost for a long moment. Sansa didn’t dare to speak. She never knew what to
say when his first wife came as a subject. She preferred to believe he thought about Tysha than about
Shae.

\[
\text{We've been rambling all the night} \\
\text{And some time of this day} \\
\text{Now returning back again} \\
\text{We bring a garland gay}
\]

Tyrion seemed to recover his ability to speak after a moment, sparing Sansa the task to resume the
conversation. “Mostly, from what he told me, he prefers a wife who’s not complicated. He believes a
highborn lady would be too much trouble and too much demanding. Perhaps he’s not wrong.”

He looked at her seriously, then a smile appeared again on his face. Sansa couldn’t hold a laugh.
“You believe I’m too much trouble?”

Tyrion tilted his head to the side. “Well, you made it very difficult for me to drink wine.” His eyes
wandered to the far side of the long table where Sansa moved the jug. “And it has become very
difficult for me to awake in the morning. I’ve never slept better than since we started to sleep

They bothe chuckled at this, but Sansa noticed Tyrion was sincere in what he said. Sansa knew he
was saying the truth, even though he tried to make it a jape. He slept much better since she
welcomed him into her bed, and Sansa slept much better as well since that time. She awkwardly
averted her eyes and looked at the dancing floor, trying to listen to the end of the song.

\[
\text{And so they linked their hands and danced}
\]
Sansa and Tyrion finally resumed their talk. Without thinking, Sansa went to take the jug of wine and poured a cup for each of them. She felt red rising to her cheeks, and she didn’t think it was because of the way Tyrion looked at her or complimented her in his special way from time to time. At least, that wasn’t the only reason. Very late in the night, when most of the people were drunk or too exhausted to celebrate anymore, they left the feast after a last toast to Sansa. On their way back to their chambers, accompanied by Brienne, she stumbled a few times. In the end, she held Tyrion’s hand until they reached their rooms where Brienne left them, standing before the golden doors.

Sansa went directly to their bedchamber and let herself fall on the bed. She felt some dizziness and brought her hands on her face. She felt a pressure on the mattress next to her. She put her hands away from her eyes and saw Tyrion looking at her amusingly.

“It seems my lady is somewhat drunk,” he commented with a smile.

Sansa could only laugh. “I fear I am.” She looked back at her husband who was looking fondly at her. “You don’t look drunk, Tyrion.”

“Well, between the fact you stop me from drinking whenever you can and the fact that I am
accustomed to wine, that’s no surprise. You would have no chance in a drinking contest against me.”

Sansa laughed again. “I can’t argue with you on that. You’re the drunkard here.”

“This night, it’s you,” Tyrion replied. Sansa laughed again. She laughed too much. She was drunk for sure. Tyrion started to caress her cheek as he stroked one of her braids. Sansa closed her eyes, letting his fingers wander on the right side of her face. It felt good. It felt very good.

“Did you like your day?” Tyrion asked her kindly.

Sansa opened her eyes, smiling widely. “I loved it.” She sat up straight. “Thank you, Tyrion.”

She looked straight into his eyes, the green eyes she loved so much. Without realizing it, Sansa found her face closer and closer to Tyrion’s. She was attracted by his eyes who looked happily at her. Before long, their brows were in contact and her lips joined his. She kissed him. He returned the kiss almost immediately. Sansa’s mind was too numb to notice anything else. She kissed him deeper, and deeper, and he did the same. The taste of wine on his lips she felt the first time they shared a kiss came back to her mind, and she realized it was still there. Sansa only had one wish, to continue. She gasped as their kiss lingered. She didn’t want it to stop, not like the last time. There was no Joffrey to die and to interrupt them. She could only kiss him more fiercely each second, and Tyrion was doing the same.

But it seemed the gods didn’t want to let this moment last forever. Tyrion broke the kiss, but he didn’t back away. Their foreheads were still touching. Sansa was panting, and she realized Tyrion was too. Their heads were lowered a little, her eyes half-closed just like she believed his own were.

“What are you doing?” he asked her.

Without thinking, Sansa answered. “Something I want to do.”

She took his face between her hands and kissed him again. She couldn’t get enough of it. She wanted more. Even though they were both sitting on the bed, she was towering Tyrion with her height. His hands went to her hips. She remembered these times in the morning when his hands caressed her body. That only convinced her to kiss him more deeply if that was possible as the warm feeling she felt these mornings filled her whole body. After a moment, she felt his tongue entering her mouth. Sansa squealed when she felt his tongue touching hers. The warm feeling spread everywhere in all the parts of her body. She couldn’t bring herself to end their kiss, even if she was beginning to have some difficulty to breathe. She needed more.

But Tyrion broke their kiss again. Sansa was breathing quicker than she ever did, as far she could remember. “Sansa.”

Tyrion let her name escape from his lips. He was trying to catch his breath just like her. To hear her name said from him in such a low voice brought butterflies in her stomach. She talked to him the same way.

“Tyrion, I want to do it.”

“To do what?”

Sansa took some time to answer. It seemed her mind started to work again. Did she really want it? After a few seconds, she knew the answer. “To consummate.”

Tyrion raised his eyes, looking at her, unbelieving. Sansa herself couldn’t really believe what she just said. Seconds that looked like an eternity passed, during which their breathing slowed a little. Their
eyes never left those of the other one. “Are you sure?”

“Yes.” She answered after a second, but not because she hesitated, only because her breathing was still hesitant.

“Why?” He was still looking at her, not believing what she just said.

“So I need to tell you?” Was it so difficult to understand? She kissed him again, but slower this time. Tyrion didn’t react first, but then he returned it in the same kind. The fire that burned in Sansa only a moment ago was replaced by another feeling, less consuming, but sweeter, at least as much enjoyable than the previous one. She could still taste the wine on his lips, but instead of drinking the cup entirely in a single swallow, she wanted to drink it slowly. She wanted to savor it.

To her great sorrow, Tyrion broke their sweet kiss again. “When?”

She knew what he meant. “I don’t know. It just… happened. I just know I do.” She looked in his eyes, green eyes who looked at her with joy she never saw in them. A timid smile, as if it was frightened to appear, was playing on the lips she just touched with her own. All of a sudden, a question came to her mind. “Do you…?”

He seemed speechless for some time, then a very kind smile that his eyes followed appeared on his lips, a smile of regret. “Sansa.” He caressed her left cheek with his right hand. A part of her wanted to close her eyes and let his fingers run on her cheek without caring about anything else, but another wanted to know. She kept her eyes on his, afraid and excited of what he might say next. “It’s been a very long time now.” Her heart was running faster than she ever imagined it could. “I have loved you for a very long time.”

She closed her eyes and tears of joy left her eyes to run on her cheeks. He loves me. He loves me. He really loves me. She couldn’t open her eyes. She wouldn’t be able to see anything with the water flooding them. He loves me. He loves me. She was laughing. His other hand went to her right cheek and he proceeded to wipe the water flowing on both. She had never been so happy to feel his touch. She felt that his hands were bringing her head downwards. And she felt his lips on hers. He was kissing her. Before, she had always been the one to initiate their kisses. But now he was the one to kiss her first.

She didn’t return the kiss first. She wanted to know what it was to be simply kissed by him. But after some time, she couldn’t resist and kissed him in return, deeply, but slowly too, sweetly. That was so beautiful, so sweet, so perfect. His hands left her cheeks and went to her neck, her shoulders, her arms, her hips. Her body shivered in anticipation. Her heart was pounding in her chest. Was his heart pounding as well? She laid a hand where she thought his heart was, and she felt a very quick beat. She smiled in their kiss. He felt the same way she felt.

This time she broke their kiss. She looked into his green eyes that sparkled like she never saw them shine before. She smiled at him as he smiled at her. Surely her own eyes were shining as well. She hoped they did. She wanted him to see how she loved him. They remained there, only smiling at each other, until Sansa realized something. She said she wanted to consummate. Her smile faded. Tyrion noticed it and looked at her questioningly.

“Is there something wrong, Sansa?”

It took her a few seconds to answer with a very hesitant voice. “I… I… I don’t know what to do.”

She wanted to do it. Perhaps it was the wine that helped her to finally dare it, but she wasn’t more certain about what to do. She never did it. How should she act? She was never given any detail how to do it. She knew how it was done, but not what she should do on her side. What if Tyrion didn’t
like it? A fear crossed her mind. Tyrion spent so much time with so many other women, and these women were trained to please men. Who was she in comparison?

She thought of Shae, with her black hair and black eyes, her tanned skin and her dress that displayed a great part of her body. It was no surprise that Tyrion was attracted to her when she thought about it. What had Sansa to attract Tyrion? She was sixteen, but in his eyes, who was she? Probably still a child. An unexperienced child. A child with stupid dreams of knights in shining armor. A child who just admitted she had no idea how to share a bed with her husband.

Tyrion looked at her with concern. “You’re afraid?”

Sansa nodded. “Yes. I… I have no idea… I don’t know…” Sansa buried her face into her hands. *Why is it so difficult for me? Everyone does it. Why am I afraid?*

“You don’t have to worry, Sansa. It may be… painful, even traumatizing the first time. Every woman must go through it. It gets better with time. But I won’t hurt you, I promise.”

Sansa wasn’t afraid of the pain. She was afraid Tyrion may not appreciate her. Afraid he may judge her. Afraid he may not think good of her. She couldn’t get her face out of her hands. “If you don’t feel ready, we don’t have to do it tonight.”

The mention of this possibility forced Sansa to discover her face again. “No, I want to do it now.” She said it with a lot of determination. She wouldn’t retreat. If she didn’t do it tonight, then when? Tyrion seemed surprised by her sudden determination. He smiled fondly at her. She loved this smile.

“Very well. Lie down on your back.”

**WARNING: VERY EXPLICIT SECTION**

**EVERYONE WHO DOESN'T LIKE THAT KIND OF STUFF, YOU CAN SKIP TO THE END OF THIS SECTION**
Sansa complied to the command. If she was sure of one thing, it was that Tyrion knew better than her on this matter. Surely he knew what he was doing. Her arms were along her sides and she waited. Tyrion was looking at her, a strange look in his eyes, something she never saw before. She couldn’t decipher what he was thinking in this moment. But he kept his eyes on her face, not leaving it a single moment. He brought his hand on her hips and started to rub them. Sansa remembered when he used to do it these few mornings and how she liked it, but right now she couldn’t enjoy it like before.

“You’re shaking.” Tyrion was right. Sansa’s whole body was shaking, more than she ever did. She was nervous. What would he think of her? She tried to see if there was any reproach in Tyrion’s eyes, but she only saw concern, or perhaps regrets.

“What should I do?”

“Close your eyes. Try to relax. Don’t think about anything.”

Sansa did as he suggested. She tried to think about nothing. Even though she didn’t entirely succeed, the movements of Tyrion’s hand on her belly reduced her trembling a little. She began to enjoy it. The feeling wasn’t as good as when he did it on previous mornings, perhaps because her gown was thicker than her nightgowns, but it was an enjoyable and calming feeling all the same. Her breathing slowed a little and she calmed down. She opened her eyes and looked at her husband who was looking intensively at her.

“So, feel better?”

Sansa smiled. “Yes.”

Tyrion leaned over her face and kissed her tenderly. He kept the hand he already worked with on her hips while he brought the other on her cheek to rub it. Sansa closed her eyes again. The kiss was sweeter and better than all the others they exchanged before. She kept her hands on her sides, not wanting to do anything. She only returned the kisses Tyron was giving to her, trying to make them as sweet as she could.

A pleasant warmth spread through her body again, fighting her anxiety and reducing her shaking even more. The hand on her cheek moved to her neck. Tyrion’s lips left her mouth to wander on her nose and her brow. Sansa sighed, feeling like she felt in their previous private moments. His hand left her neck to come back to her cheek, then to her temple and finally in her hair. The other hand left her hips and travelled all the way along her body to her hair as well. On its way, it passed on her left breast. Sansa cried a little when it happened. She felt Tyrion’s hands playing with her hair, his lips going upper to kiss her hair as well. Tyrion was removing something and she sensed the braids and the coiffure her handmaidens prepared hours ago were undone, her hair falling freely around her. She turned her face on the side and opened her eyes long enough to see her golden hairnet being dropped unceremoniously on the floor. He also removed the two necklaces she wore, breaking the contact of his lips with her forehead a few seconds to do it.

She didn’t keep her eyes open very long since Tyrion lowered his lips again and began to kiss her cheek. She let the feeling of the kiss invade her as Tyrion’s hands both returned to her hips. His mouth continue to go down as well, reaching her neck. It went down very slowly and Sansa straightened her head on her neck. Tyrion’s kisses on the skin of her neck felt even better than on her cheek. She was trembling, but not in fear now. Tyrion remained in this region of her body for a very long time, and Sansa didn’t complain about it. She still didn’t dare to do anything on her own, afraid she might break this moment. She let Tyrion do what he thought was better.

“Astoundingly long.”
The words came out of his mouth as he continued to kiss the bottom of her neck. Sansa couldn’t hold a giggle as she remembered what he said about her neck during their wedding night. She opened her eyes to look at him. She saw a smile playing on his lips as he kept going down, reaching her collarbone, then going still lower. She closed her eyes again, enjoying the gentle kisses he put on the small region of skin that wasn’t covered by the silk of her gown. His hands were still moving on her hips, upward and downward, slowly, kindly, without interruption. The fresh air coming from the balcony made the places he touched with his lips colder when the breeze caressed her skin.

Sansa felt her breasts tightening against the fabric of her underclothes. Tyrion’s lips brushed their outline. She wanted him to go lower. But he didn’t. Instead, he brought his lips upward, kissing areas he didn’t touch before and bringing his lips back on hers. They kissed deeply this time and his tongue made its way into her mouth. Sansa tried to play with her tongue on his as well, but it felt awkward. Again, she didn’t know what to do. But she enjoyed the kiss all the same.

Tyrion began to unlace her gown, very slowly. Little by little, her gown opened until it was entirely unlaced, and Tyrion removed it and cast it aside. Sansa’s shoulders were uncovered and Tyrion used the situation to kiss them. Sansa still had her head thrown back and her eyes closed, enjoying the feeling of his lips on her body. Tyrion started to unlace her underwear now. She felt the pressure on her breasts lessening as the laces were undone. Like her gown, it was tossed away.

Tyrion stopped kissing her shoulder. Sansa opened her eyes to see him looking at her body. Above her hips, Sansa wore nothing. Tyrion took care of everything under her hips quite quickly. After staring at her chest for a time, he grabbed the sides of her dress along with the underclothes under it and slowly lowered them along her legs, until her feet left the fabric. Sansa really wore nothing now. She was entirely naked.

By instinct, Sansa brought her hands to her breasts. She had never been naked in front of a man before. Her shyness took over.

“No.” Tyrion only said a word, but his hands told much more than his mouth. He took her hands and removed them gently from her breasts, revealing her entire body. He stared at her with intensity. Sansa recognized this look. He looked at her the way he admired her after she put on a new gown, but his gaze was more intense than she ever saw. Sansa felt his eyes lingering on her legs, her hips, her belly, her breasts, her arms, before he returned to her face. There were such sparks in his eyes. She never saw him like this before. She was shivering again, she didn’t know if it was because she was expecting or anxious.

“You’re beautiful.” He leaned over her and kissed her again on the mouth. “So beautiful.” The words came out of his mouth as they shared a very deep kiss. Sansa was trying to kiss him the deeper she could. She wanted him to know her feelings for him, but without words. His hands went to her own and he removed the rings on her fingers. All safe her wedding ring. That was the only thing she needed on her. Except the proof of their marriage, Sansa’s body was entirely free of any jewel or clothe of any shape.

Tyrion’s hand came to grab her left breast and he began to massage it. Sansa let a moan escape her mouth in their kissing. His thumb ran on her teat, each passage leaving her with a wish to get more. His lips left hers and he trailed his mouth along the same path he took the last time, kissing her chin, her neck, her collarbone, and reaching the outline of her other breast. Her eyes were still closed, but she could feel all his movements and his touches. His lips followed the outline of her right breast, circling it. She opened her eyes to see him do it. He got closer and closer to her teat, and finally he sucked it. Sansa arched her neck, moaning as she closed her eyes again. It was so good. She was breathing heavily and she felt a wetness grow between her legs.
Tyrion kept going with the massage of a breast and the licking of the other one. His free hand was
cressing her belly and her thighs in the meantime. His right hand left her left breast after a time, then
his mouth left the right one. She wanted to grunt in displeasure until his mouth took her left breast.
His left hand came to knead the other breast now left uncared and his right hand took over the work
to rub her belly. Sansa felt she could stay there, allowing him to continue, forever. She didn’t dare to
move. She didn’t want to risk to ruin it with an inappropriate movement.

But it didn’t last forever like she wished. Tyrion brought his two hands to the underside of her thighs
and his mouth left her teat. Sansa really grunted this time. The trail of kisses he left from her belly to
her hips felt good, but not as good as the feeling of his hands and mouth on her breasts. She was still
gasping. Tyrion was too.

Suddenly, Tyrion brought one of his hands between her legs and massaged the zone. She let another
sound leave her throat. She felt his thumb entering her crevice and touching something at the top of
it. Sansa nearly screamed this time. The thumb kept moving against whatever it touched, and Sansa
kept whimpering. It only lasted a few seconds before Tyrion removed his hand from between her
legs, but Sansa never felt something like this. She didn’t know she could feel so much… delight.

Tyrion’s hands weren’t moving anymore and he stopped to kiss her hips. Sansa opened her eyes to
look at him. He was looking at her and she knew what he wanted. He wanted her. And she wanted
him. She was breathing more heavily than ever, eager to see what would come next.

“Do you trust me?”

The question startled Sansa. She answered with a voice she never used before. “Yes, I do.” She just
wanted him to resume his touching. Right now, she would be ready to do anything he asked from
her. She kept her half-closed eyes locked on his.

“Close your eyes.” His voice was soft, beautiful to hear. She wished she heard it before. Sansa
closed her eyes. She knew what he would do. After more than a year, he would do it.

First she felt his hands running on her thighs and her hips, until he spread her legs. Yes, he was
going to do it. Sansa knew it was going to be painful. Everyone said it. Her septa told her so. Her
mother told her. Even Tyrion told her. But she trusted him. If she was to lose her maidenhead, she
wanted to lose it to him and to no one else. I won’t ever hurt you. And he never did. He wouldn’t
hurt her. She felt thumbs opening her entrance and something got inside. It was wet. Sansa could
barely hold a cry of pleasure. Moaning and whimpering, she brought her arms above her head as
Tyrion entered her. Pleasure was filling her body, coming from her sex and spreading through all her
members. It grew more intense with time. She couldn’t think about anything else now. Her whole
body shook without interruption, and the shaking only kept growing. Her moans threatened to turn
into screams of pleasure. She thought she might explode like the wildfire her husband unleashed on
Stannis’s fleet.

Her body convulsed and she felt a pleasure she couldn’t imagine fill her body. She screamed this
time, even if she managed to keep it low, or at least she hoped she succeeded to keep it low. Tyrion
was still moving inside her and it still felt wonderful, but pleasure wasn’t burning her body anymore
as it did before, and it stopped building up. Tyrion left her womb, but her body was still filled with a
pleasure slowly receding that left a comfortable warmth within her. He resumed his kissing of her
hips and brought his mouth upwards. His lips passed on her belly, then on her breast, her neck and
finally rested on her cheek. Sansa turned her face and kissed her husband passionately. She didn’t
open her eyes. She didn’t need to see. She only needed to feel. Tyrion returned her kiss with the
same passion. They were smiling and laughing as they did so, their tongues playing together.

To her regret, Tyrion broke their kiss, but it was only to sweetly kiss her neck. His hands were
wandering on her body, brushing her teats, sometimes staying on them for a few seconds. Sansa felt her body was growing somewhat tired, but she only liked even more the attention Tyrion gave to it. For the first time since he began to play with her breasts, Sansa managed to think clearly.

They did it. They finally did it. Well, in fact, she didn’t do much. Tyrion was the one to make most of the work, if not all. What he did between her legs… It was divine. And it didn’t hurt. People didn’t know what they were talking about. Everyone said the first time was horrible and it got better with practice, but Sansa felt no pain at all. Only pleasure. Pure pleasure. A pleasure she didn’t know could exist. A pleasure she still felt right now, though less violently, thanks to the way Tyrion gave attention to her body. Recovering the boldness she had when she kissed Tyrion for the first time tonight, Sansa took his face between her hands and kissed him with all the passion she could muster in. His lips tasted wine, like before, but she noticed something else. She didn’t care and kept kissing him, stroking his hair just like he stroked her own. Still resting on her back, she kept him stuck with her.

“Tyrion, I love you.” She said it.

“Sansa. I love you too. You can’t know how much I love you.”

They resumed their kissing. He could talk, but after everything he made her feel, she thought she knew how much he loved her. He was probably the one to not know to what extent she loved him. It had nothing to do with the fancy she once had with Joffrey or Loras. She loved him for real. She trusted him. She wanted to share his burdens, his joys, his sorrows, his life. She wanted to live with him.

_He needs you. Not only as a wife to stand beside him during official events or to have children. He needs you in his life. He needs someone to share his life with. Someone who will look after him. Someone who cares about him, who wants him to be happy. Someone who will make him happy. You understand what I mean? Now she understood what Kevan Lannister once told her. Every man needs a woman at his side, especially a woman he loves._ Genna’s words echoed those of her brother. Sansa felt in this very moment she was more than what they asked from her. She loved Tyrion. She could give him her love without restraint. She wanted to give her love to him. She loved him.

Sansa laughed, and this time she was the one to break their kiss. That didn’t stop Tyrion from resuming his light and soft kisses on her neck. And to say she waited for more than a year to consummate their marriage. How silly she was. She had the best husband she could dream of, and she waited for so long before she finally accepted him. She should have accepted him on their wedding night. How wonderful it would have been. How perfect their marriage would have been since the beginning.

“Well,” she began with a sleeping voice, “the people who say that consummation is painful are wrong.” She couldn’t stop to chuckle on this. She barely noticed Tyrion stopped to kiss and massage her and straightened up on their bed. When she fully realized it and opened her eyes to look at her beloved husband, he was looking at her with unease.

“I… We didn’t consummate, Sansa.”

She couldn’t have been more surprised by this statement. She stood up on the bed while remaining seated. “What do you mean?”

With a strange smile, Tyrion answered. “It wasn’t my cock inside your womb.”

Even if Tyrion had a cruder language than most of the people Sansa knew, he always spoke more
properly in her presence. But it wasn’t his choice of words that struck her. His manhood didn’t enter her. But then…

“But… What… what did you…?”

Tyrion chuckled a little while looking at the mattress. “I don’t think it’s a discussion for tonight. Did you like it?”

“Yes, of course, I liked it!” She was nearly insulted by this question. How could he doubt she didn’t like it?

Tyrion chuckled again. “That’s what I thought, or else I would never have been able to explain why you squealed, moaned, whimpered, shook and screamed that way.”

Sansa was taken aback by the description of how she reacted to his touch. Tyrion laughed this time. Sansa flushed even more than she already did. She tried to gain back her composure. She realized suddenly Tyrion was still wearing his clothes. None had been removed. Even his breeches weren’t unlaced. He told the truth. It wasn’t his manhood she felt inside her. But then, what did she feel?

Tyrion managed to get back his seriousness. “Don’t worry with this. I just did you something to make you feel better. It makes things much less painful, and a lot more enjoyable, when it’s time to consummate.” He leaned in her direction and took one of her cheeks in his right hand. “You still want to do it?”

She only saw sincerity in his green eyes, as always. He was really ready to not go any further if she didn’t want. How could she find herself with such a good husband? She forced a smile on her lips. “Yes, I want.”

She had to force the smile not because she wasn’t sincere, but only because she was disappointed what she just felt wasn’t the loss of her maidenhead. It felt so wonderful. Would it feel so good when they would join for real?

Tyrion smiled at her again, perhaps a bit smugly this time. “I guess you know what to do.”

Sansa smiled a little and lied again on her back. Tyrion leaned over her again and resumed the caressing of her hips and belly. But before she abandoned herself to his touch, Sansa needed to know something. “Will it hurt?”

Tyrion looked at her with eyes that showed some regret. He averted his eyes from hers for a short moment before he looked at her again. “I won’t lie to you, Sansa. It hurts. There’s no way around it, I’m sorry. What I just did will make it less painful, and I can do other things to make it even more bearable, but the pain can only be lessened. I cannot make it disappear. I wish I could. You don’t deserve to suffer more than you already did.”

Sansa could see he really regretted it. He wanted to please her, and he was sad because their joining would be painful for her. She wanted to hug him, to kiss him, for that. Joffrey would have raped her. Loras Tyrell would probably not have cared for the way she felt. But Tyrion did. She closed her eyes and tears threatened to roll on her cheeks. She opened her eyes and saw him looking at her, with eyes that seemed to ask for her forgiveness. He didn’t need to ask for it. She was the one who should ask him for forgiveness. For how long did she reject him only because he was a dwarf? A Lannister? She lifted up her back and kissed him tenderly, her tears leaving her eyes and rolling on their cheeks.

His hands went to her back as she leaned to kiss him. Her own hands came to his small body, but she met his clothes instead of his skin. How would it feel to touch his flesh? She broke their kiss. He was
looking down and she looked down too, but since she was taller than him, she was looking at his face. She ran a finger on his scar. It healed since the battle. When they married, it was still a huge and fresh red line, but now it was only a pale mark on his face. **He’s rather good-looking even with the scar. Especially with the scar.** Margaery was right. It made him more handsome. Cersei tried to have him killed, and he would keep this mark for the rest of his life because of his sister’s cruelty. He had another scar, more recent she knew, on his chest. Sansa felt bold enough to open his doublet and, without thinking afterwards, she took off his shirt, pulling it over his head.

She looked at his bare chest. She saw Tyrion half-naked, or even entirely naked, a few times when they lived in King’s Landing, mostly in the first weeks of their marriage. However, she mostly saw him like this when his back was turned on her, and in the darkness. She looked at his chest, trying to remember every detail, but her eyes were attracted in the end on the huge scar crossing his chest above his navel and under his own breasts. It wasn’t entirely healed like the one on his face. She knew Creylen still took a look at it from time to time. She passed her hand along the second scar Cersei gave him.

She remembered how desperate she felt when this happened at the end of the trial. She just managed to save Tyrion from a sentence to death and Margarey had hugged her. She had succeeded. But then, a kingsguard had pushed aside Ser Jaime and tried to stab her husband in the heart. Tyrion managed to avoid a deadly stab, but blood had spurted all over him. Sansa had stared in horror at the scene before her. She did everything to have Tyrion cleared, but in the end it had been useless. Back then she had been like the little girl she was when her father was executed. Only, this time, no one was holding her and she had run to Tyrion, trying to stop the bleeding, screaming for help. She had remained at his side for more than a day afterwards, praying to the Old Gods and the Seven to save him. And he lived.

And now here he stood, her husband, the man she loved. He looked back at her, his eyes meeting hers. She kissed him. She didn’t stop. She didn’t want to stop. She wouldn’t let someone try to take him away from her again. She wanted to be with him forever. She didn’t know how long they shared this kiss, but it was surely longer than all the others they shared tonight. What time of the night was it now?

To her dread, Tyrion broke their kiss, but she resumed it almost immediately. He broke it again, but with the same result. Only at the fourth attempt he managed to place a word. **“If you really want to consummate, I’m afraid you’ll have to remove my breeches too, my lady. Unless you want me to remove them myself?”**

Tyrion was smiling and laughing a little as he said it, and Sansa could only do the same. **“No. I’ll do it.”**

With haste and trembling hands, clumsily, she unlaced Tyrion’s breeches and revealed his manhood. He was naked before her just like she was before him. She looked at all his body, trying to memorize all of it. Surely it was what he tried to do when he looked at her after undressing her completely. Tyrion looked away as she observed him.

“What do you have?” she asked, concerned.

“Nothing.” He tried to smile and to laugh, but she could see he forced himself. **“It’s just… You’re so beautiful. You deserve better than an ugly dwarf for a husband. I know I’m not a pretty sight.”**

Sansa wished she could say something. She never knew what to say when Tyrion talked lowly of him. About his dwarfism. About the horrible things his family did. About his first wife. Did he think about her in this instant? Sansa pushed the thought aside. She took Tyrion’s shoulders and forced him to look at her. **“I don’t care what you look like. I love you.”**
They kissed again. After a moment, Sansa ended lying on her back like before, but this time her hands were running on her husband’s body, feeling his flesh between her fingers. She wasn’t afraid of what she might do anymore. She wanted him. She could feel his manhood pressing against her belly. She was so lost in her embrace with the man she loved that she couldn’t look at it. She barely remembered how it looked like, even if she saw it no more than a few minutes ago. But she felt his manhood against her all the same. Was it so little as he said at their wedding? Would she really feel nothing, as if he wasn’t there? For the time being, she felt it against her.

Tyrion broke their kiss and repeated the journey of his mouth over her body, stopping at her neck and her breasts. The same feelings came back to Sansa, filling her body with pleasure. *Tyrion may surprise you. From what I’ve heard, he’s quite experienced.* Margaery was right. Sansa never thought she could enjoy the touch of Tyrion Lannister so much. She knew nothing. Margaery knew. And to say the Queen of Thorns tried to have her married to Tyrion instead of Sansa after Joffrey’s murder… Sansa knew what Margaery was missing now. And she wasn’t about to regret it.

Tyrion resumed his path after he gave enough attention to her breasts. His mouth was trailing on her skin, causing gooseprickles to form where he left some saliva on her. His mouth reached her left thigh where it stayed. Sansa was breathing deeply, occasionally moaning, at the same time excited and afraid of what he would do next. Her hands were once again on her sides, laying on the bed cover.

Tyrion stopped to kiss her thigh and raised on his legs. It was strange to see him towering her, but she didn’t hate it. He looked straight in her eyes as he opened her legs and brought his hand between them, massaging the space between her thighs. Sansa closed her eyes again. She let them open since they began their second embrace, but she couldn’t now. His touch was sure, and she could feel the wetness between her legs growing. His fingers were soon sliding. His thumb entered her womb like the other time. The delight she felt when he touched it was as good as the first time, if not better. He rubbed it longer than previously and Sansa felt the same tension growing in her belly. Was it how he did the first time? Instead of his manhood inside her, was it his thumb? No, that was impossible. Sansa remembered how the thing he introduced inside, and it didn’t feel like his thumb. How did he do the first time? She couldn’t find an answer to this question as the burning intensified once more. But all of a sudden, Tyrion stopped his movement and withdrew his finger.

Sansa’s breathing was very quick. She wanted more. Her body wanted more. She opened her eyes with the attention to order her husband to continue. But he spoke before her.

“*You’re ready?*” Sansa realized. They were supposed to consummate. Her body was crying for him. She nodded immediately, nearly forgetting the pain to come.

Her eyes went to his manhood. It was straight and long. She never saw another one, so she didn’t know if it was really little in comparison to the others, but to her it didn’t seem very small. Tyrion seemed to notice her interest.

“*If you want me to stop at any time, just say it. I’ll stop.*”

Sansa lifted her eyes to stare into his own. “*Do it.*” Her body was still screaming for him. She wouldn’t reject him. She wanted him. She wanted to be his wife. To really be his wife.

“*Then let us do our duty.*”

He leaned over and gave her another lingering kiss. She felt his manhood on her belly again. Soon it would be inside her. She knew it. Tyrion’s lips left hers and he positioned himself over her. She tensed in anticipation. She felt something damp at the entrance of her womb first. Then Tyrion positioned his hands on her folds. She felt his thumbs opening it. And he processed to enter.
It was nothing like the first time. It was definitely not his manhood that entered her back then. But now it was, and to the opposite of the first time, the thing she felt the most was pain. She caught deep breaths of air as his manhood filled her. He did it slowly, progressively, but it hurt all the same. Finally he filled her completely. *My poor wife won’t even know I’m here?* What a joke! She could feel him, and feel him very well inside her.

Once his manhood was entirely inside her, Tyrion didn’t move for a time. He was only looking at her, as if he expected something. Sansa didn’t want him to believe he was hurting her. Perhaps he would take the sounds she made for gasps of pleasure and not of pain. She smiled at him. They were husband and wife now. Now and forever. Sansa was happy for that.

Tyrion moved inside her. He pushed. Sansa let a cry escape her throat. It hurt. She gasped and tried to hide the pain she felt. Her gaze left Tyrion’s face when he pushed. He backed a little, something Sansa found more enjoyable, or at least less painful. She still didn’t accommodate to the presence of his manhood inside her womb.

Tyrion looked at her with something that looked like a sorry face. He didn’t move again. Well, he didn’t move between her legs. He brought his left hand to knead her right breast. After a few squeezes, Sansa felt some pleasure coming back to her body and her mind. He massaged her breast gently, caressing her teat with great attention. It was impossible to forget he was present between her legs, but this presence became more uncomfortable than painful. He lowered his face and went to suckle her other breast. She whimpered in pleasure from the movements of his hand on her right breast and from the movements of his mouth on the left one. THAT felt good. He continued to do it for a time, then he gave another thrust inside her. It was painful, but the attention he gave to her breasts made it less unpleasant.

They continued like this for some time. Her teats receiving attention all the time while Tyrion tried a thrust from time to time. Sansa still couldn’t enjoy what he did between her legs, but she could appreciate the overall lovemaking. Each thrust seemed more bearable than the previous one. Her eyes were closed again.

“Raise your legs.” Sansa’s mind had grown numb. She didn’t understand what he meant.

“What?” He voice was very low. She couldn’t speak louder.

Tyrion’s tongue stopped to lick her left teat for a short time. “Raise your legs. You’ll like it better.”

He went back to her teat. Sansa didn’t know why he wanted her to do so, but she wasn’t in a mind’s state to refuse him. She raised her legs a little. Tyrion’s free hand, the right one, helped her to lift them more. He thrusted again. The pain was still there, but she felt some small pleasure from the movement this time. He did it again with the same result. She started to enjoy it. She felt his breath quickening on her left breast. She liked the feeling of his mouth’s hot breathing on her body. She slowly brought her arms around his head, wrapping it tenderly, though she would have wanted to do it more fiercely. But he was kind and gentle with her, and she didn’t want to be any different with him.

It was at this moment that she felt something else between her legs. Something was slipping between her husband’s member and what few space was left in her womb. It reached the little mound inside her. She recognized what it was when it rubbed the siege on her pleasure. Tyrion’s thumb was inside her, just like his manhood. She cried as his thumb caressed her little butt, not in pain but in pleasure. And he started.

Tyrion was moving inside her. Her legs were wrapped around his hips. He thrusted in her and rubbed her mound with his thumb at the same time. Sansa moaned. It was pleasant and painful at the
same time. He did it again, and again, and again. He adjusted the movements of his manhood and his thumb so they would be simultaneous. At the same time he kept suckling and kneading her breasts.

Sansa found herself lost in a haze of pleasure and pain. Each thrust of Tyrion with his manhood was accompanied by a caress of his thumb on her mound. Pleasure and pain were mixed within a single blur. Sansa didn’t know if she enjoyed the pain or feared the pleasure. She tightened her arms around his head and he sucked her left breast more sharply. She didn’t only feel his tongue and his lips, but also his teeth on her teat now. There was nothing she could do but feel. Delight and pain fought and joined in each member of her body. Tyrion’s movements became erratic and quicker, always more insistent, and the waves Sansa felt flowing through her body followed his rhythm. Her moans and whimpering threatened again to turn into screams as the waves hit her. She could hear Tyrion making sounds with his mouth against her breast too.

For the second time this night, Sansa hit a wall and her body convulsed, her back arching. Two or three thrusts inside her and Tyrion let escape a deep and loud groan, abandoning her left breast. A loud sound escaped from Sansa’s throat as well. She realized they were both shaking as their joined bodies relaxed after reaching their peaks. Tyrion’s thumb continued to rub whatever was inside her womb for a moment, until he finally got it out. His manhood was still inside her, but it wasn’t the only thing Sansa could feel. Something heavy but not solid seemed to flow in her womb. Tyrion stopped to massage her right teat with his hand and put a light kiss between her two breasts. Sansa’s body was resolving from the encounter and she felt a peace and a feeling of well-being she never felt before spread from her feet to her head. Tyrion finally went out of her. His manhood was no longer in her, but she still felt the heavy fluid she suspected to come from her husband.

END OF THE VERY EXPLICIT SECTION

Tyrion was sitting next to her now, a gentle smile on his lips. “How did you find it?”

Sansa thought she perceived concern in his voice. He was afraid he might have hurt her. He didn’t. She came on her thighs and kissed him the most tenderly she could. “I loved it. Thank you.”

Sansa thought she never saw him so happy before. And she was happy too. She kissed him again, lighter, then rested her brow against his head. She didn’t know how long they remained in that
position, but they probably stayed this way for a long time. Her body grew tired and she felt a great desire to sleep. She let herself fall on the bed cover. Tyrion rested his smaller body next to her. They didn’t leave each other’s eyes. Tyrion extended a hand to pass it through her hair. Her eyes grew heavy with sleep. But before she fell asleep, there was something she needed to say to her husband.

“I love you, Tyrion.” It was nothing more than a whisper, but she said it.

“I love you, my lady. I love you, Sansa.” These were the last words she heard before she fell asleep.

She walked down the alley to the High Septon who waited for her with her betrothed, Ser Loras Tyrell, between the altars of the Mother and the Father. Her father was accompanying her, leading her with her arm under his. She wore a beautiful golden gown with a direwolf cloak. Ser Loras was waiting for her with a green cloak. He climbed the steps with her. Arrived before the High Septon and her soon-to-be-husband, her father released her arm and took the grey cloak off her shoulders. Ser Loras cloaked her with the green one. The ceremony carried on in the same way every wedding ceremony was celebrated in the sight of the Seven. After they exchanged vows, Sansa looked down at the people assembled for the occasion. Her father, her mother, Robb, Arya, Bran, Rickon, all their direwolves including Lady, even Jon and her uncle Benjen were present. Sansa also saw Margaery and Mira in the assistance, and her friend from Winterfell, Jeyne Poole. They were all smiling at her, happy she was getting married. Sansa was happier than she ever was. She smiled fondly at all of them, then turned to face her husband for the kiss. But he wasn’t there anymore.

Where was he? Where was Loras? She looked back at her family and her friends, but they kept smiling at her, as if there was nothing strange.Sansa didn’t understand. She looked right before her again, but she saw nothing. Where was her husband? Did she imagine it? Was there no one to marry her? Were her family and her friends mocking her? No, that couldn’t be something she imagined. He put a cloak on her shoulders. She could feel the weight of the cloak on her. She looked at her left shoulder to be sure she was really wearing a cloak.

She had a great shock. She wore a cloak, a wedding cloak, but it wasn’t green like the one she was just draped in. And it wasn’t grey either, like the one she came with into the Great Sept. This cloak was red. It looked like the cloak… She stared before her. Life is a song. And yours is just about to begin. The bard was there too. She heard his voice. Now she knew. All previous times, she thought her husband disappeared after the vows. But now she knew. She looked down, and she saw him.

He wore the same clothes she remembered him wearing. Tyrion Lannister. The voice of her father resonated in her head. When you’re old enough, I’ll make you a match with someone who’s worthy of you, someone who’s brave and gentle and strong. Tyrion was smiling at her. Not smiling with lust or desire or cruelty, but with kindness, meaning she had nothing to fear from him. She looked again at her friends and her family. They were still all smiling at her, including her father. Someone who’s brave and gentle and strong. She turned to face her husband again and couldn’t help but smile. She knelt and they kissed for the first time. People cheered and they turned to face them.

A feast followed where she spoke with everyone present. Tyrion may surprise you. From what I’ve heard, he’s quite experienced, Margaery told her. Mira said he was a good man. He’s brave, gentle and strong, her father told her. Her mother gave her advices about how to be a good wife, and Robb came to congratulate her. There was a woman heavy with child she never met before with her eldest brother. Bran and Rickon hugged her, just like Jeyne and her mother. Even Jon came to give her his best wishes. Arya laughed about how she was twice the height of her husband, and Sansa laughed with her. Everything was so perfect. She saw her father and Tyrion exchange a few words and shake hands. She saw him exchanging jokes with Bran, Rickon and Arya, then with Margaery and Mira. Tyrion talked about a special saddle with Bran who had to be carried by Hodor since he couldn’t walk. Only her mother and Robb seemed to have some reserve towards her husband and stayed
away from him. Then came the bedding ceremony. The only thing Sansa didn’t like in the bedding was the suggestive eyes Margaery made to her husband. But when they arrived to their wedding bed, they only had eyes and ears for each other and Sansa spent the best night of her life. She was now Sansa Lannister, wife of Tyrion Lannister, the man she loved. Life is a song. And yours is just beginning.

Chapter End Notes

OK... They finally did it! I'm sure many of you must have thought this at the end of the chapter. Some may have thought I was going to deceive them again. But no, this time this is real, the marriage is consummated.

I'm really sorry everyone who waited for so long for this. I received many comments and reviews saying they wanted Tyrion and Sansa to become husband and wife for good, and many wondered if I would ever bring them physically together. I'm sorry again for the long time it took. Does anyone know a Tyrion/Sansa fic where it took 73 chapters or more to reach the consummation? I think I set up a record.

That was my intention since the beginning to have Tyrion and Sansa consummate their marriage on her sixteenth name day. In my country (Canada), it is legal for an adult to have sexual relationships with someone as long as he is at least sixteen-years-old, so I thought this was a minimum to reach. And what better opportunity than a name day for that.

The songs in this chapter (in order of appearance):
- Written in Starlight (by Karliene Reynolds, available on Apple Music and Spotify, impossible to find entirely on Youtube)
- Mother's Hymn (by Karliene Reynolds, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKvOQXPfrMA)
- My Featherbed (by Karliene Reynolds, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SogjdgwYy9c)
- False Love (by Karliene Reynolds, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZvRpMDGUyE)
- The Wolf and the Moon (by Karliene Reynolds, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7ejbNmyJ04)
- Let it go (by Indina Menzel, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEKLFS-aKcw)
- The Mummer's Dance (by Loreena McKennitt, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxTpVA-pUG0)

There are a lot of things new that happened in this chapter. This is not only about the consummation, far from it. Aside the fact Tyrion and Sansa are now truly married, here are the important things to remember for the future of the fic:
- Sansa's indentifying herself more and more to the Lannisters
- Ser Harrold Hardyng
- Joy Hill/Rollam Westerling
- First real appearance of Alysanne Lefford
- Marriage Bronn/Daisy
- Tyrion's present (he didn't give it to Sansa yet)
- Tyrion/Sansa sealed forever
Also, I want to make it clear. I wrote an explicit scene, and that's not going to happen again. I decided to do it once, but that will be all. I've never been very comfortable with sex and nudity on television, and only a little in books. This is me. I wrote the consummation to show how the relationship between Tyrion and Sansa reached a decisive point, and I won't depict things like this again.

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
Thank you to everyone who reviewed on the previous chapter. I really appreciated the feedback on it.

This chapter takes place about a week after the previous chapter. Tyrion has a lot to think about. And there's someone who's not happy about a certain marriage.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“‘This is outrageous! An insult! I will not allow it!’”

Tyrion didn’t lift his eyes from the order he was writing for the officials of the cells of Casterly Rock, Lannisport and all the other castles and towns in the Westerlands. The order was more pressing than the complaints of the woman before him.

“‘Did you hear me, Imp! I will not allow it!’”

Tyrion stopped to write and looked at the woman who stood tall before his desk, fury obvious on her face. Lady Sybell Westerling was no better than her brother, but probably more dangerous. Tyrion had the feeling she was the real mind behind the betrayal of the Westerlings.

“If I were you, Lady Westerling, I would be careful of the words you use in my presence.”

Tyrion’s words didn’t seem to calm the woman. “Lord Tywin promised us a bride for our heir if we played our part, and you give us some wretch.”

A silence followed the lady’s words. Tyrion looked at her. She was still staring at him, furious. Tyrion put down his pen. He seized a bell on his desk and rang it. Bronn immediately burst through the door and entered Tyrion’s solar. Without waiting, he grabbed Sybell Westerling from behind and put a knife on her throat. The woman who stood so tall and proud a moment ago was now paling and shivering like an old woman who could barely stand. Her eyes looked around in distress. The doors shut behind Bronn immediately after he came in.

Tyrion rose from his seat behind his desk and went to stand before the Lady of the Crag. He could be small, but in this moment height meant nothing. He stood taller than the heartless and trembling woman before him. “My lady, I present you Ser Bronn of Blackwater. Surely you heard about him. He’s the one who took Clegane’s Keep after Ser Gregor unfortunately died. I’m quite certain you know about the way Ser Gregor’s men died afterwards. For the right amount of gold, he could kill anybody, and it so happens I have the right amount of gold for your head. A single word from me, and he would slit your throat like it was nothing, and you would run out of blood within seconds. Do you want me to give the word?”

Lady Westerling was panicking. She didn’t expect this. To be honest, Tyrion would be happy to see Bronn kill this treacherous schemer, but that wouldn’t be for the best. It was never good to kill one of
your bannermen’s wife in his own solar. Lady Westerling pointed it out herself. “You wouldn’t dare. You wouldn’t dare. You wouldn’t kill the Lady of the Crag inside the walls of the Rock.”

“I would. If you were to attack me in hatred for organizing a marriage for your son that you disapproved, then I would be in position to pledge legitimate defense. And after all the schemes you participated to, I don’t think people would weep for you, or care for your death, or even question my version of the facts after your role in the Red Wedding.”

She was stuck. She knew it, and Tyrion knew it. “Please, my lord. Forgive me. I spoke out of anger. I didn’t know what I was saying. Please spare me. I will do everything you ask from me. Everything. Just let me live. I beg you. I won’t protest against this marriage. I promise.”

That was very satisfying to see this woman pleading for her own life after she insulted him, so proud she was of herself. Tyrion put a mischievous smile on his face. “Let’s make a deal, Lady Westerling. You will forget I threatened you today. If you do it, I will be in your debt. And a Lannister always pays his debts. So if you never talk about the way my friend and I threatened you, I will forget you insulted me and my cousin. We will resume this discussion in good terms and do as if nothing ever happened. Is that a deal good enough for you? I fear the other solution is quite at your disadvantage.”

The Lady of the Crag seemed confused by the offer, but after a moment she nodded strongly to show her approval. It was a deal. On a sign of Tyrion’s head, Bronn let her go.

“My friend will stay here for the rest of our meeting,” Tyrion added. “He will be able to confirm our discussion went without trouble.”

Bronn went to sit in a corner of the solar, sheathing his dagger. However, he unsheathed his sword and started to sharpen it with a whetstone. The noise of the sharpening sword went out, regular and threatening. Tyrion knew it had some effect on Sybell Spicer. She smoothed her gown and sat on a chair before Tyrion’s desk.

“Thank you, my lord.” She sat without being invited, and her disdain was quite obvious in her voice. *She won’t forget that. Good.*

Tyrion went back behind his desk. “So, as I told you earlier before this interruption, your son Rollam will marry in four years when my cousin reaches her fifteenth name day.”

“Your father promised joy for my son,” Lady Sybell specified.

“And that’s what your son is getting. A Lannister always pays his debts.”

“We were promised joy, not Joy.”

“I think this is the same. Joy is a sweet, beautiful and lovely girl. And your son seems to like her a lot. She will make a fine Lady of the Crag in time.”

“A bast…” Lady Westerling refrained at the last moment. “A natural daughter cannot become the Lady Westerling, my lord. What marriage prospect would there be for my grandchildren?”

“I believe they would have much more chances to marry than your children. Joy is the niece of Tywin Lannister. She may be a bastard, but Lannister blood runs through her veins. Her children will have much more possibilities of marriage than the children of a merchant’s granddaughter.”

Fury was plain in Lady Sybell’s eyes. “He’s my son. My last son. He deserves better than this.”

“You’re right. He deserves a better mother than you.” Lady Westerling was in obvious shock before
the statement. “You participated to a plan that led to the breaking of the guest rights. You betrayed
your liege lord, and your king. And by the same way you had your eldest son, Raynald Westerling,
killed.”

“You participated to a plan that led to the breaking of the guest rights. You betrayed
your liege lord, and your king. And by the same way you had your eldest son, Raynald Westerling,
killed.”

“The Freys killed my son,” the woman tried to argue.

“Because you conspired with them,” Tyrion countered.

“Just like you.”

Tyrion breathed deeply before he answered. “You conspired with my father, my lady. And you
conspired with him to murder my mother-in-law, my brother-in-law and the child who would have
been my nephew. And you also conspired to kill the sister-in-law of my wife. And your king. And
many other people.”

“They were traitors, my lord. We served House Lannister. We served your father.”

“Yes, you served my father. You didn’t serve me. Consider yourself lucky. I confirmed the granting
of Castamere to your brother, and I arranged a marriage to your son with a suitable wife. I paid the
debts of my father. Don’t give me a reason to pay my debts for the sufferings you inflicted to my
wife, your liege lady. Everything you did to her, you did it to me as well. You have what you were
promised. Rollam Westerling will marry Joy Hill in four years. Now go. The next time House
Westerling has something to ask from Casterly Rock, send your husband. I suffer him much better
than you. He’s not a turncloak and he took no part in the death of his son and heir.”

Tyrion went back to writing the order. Bronn left the corner where he sat previously and approached
the horrible woman. Reluctantly, she left and was escorted back to the door where a guard took over
Bronn’s task. The doors shut behind her. Good riddance.

Brons came to sit into another chair before Tyrion’s desk. He took his usual comfortable position
with his boots on his desk. “For a knight, you don’t behave properly in the presence of your liege
lord,” Tyrion noted.

“I never behaved properly in anyone’s presence,” the former sellsword replied. He started to cut his
nails.

“Not even in your wife’s presence?”

Brons stopped as quickly as he started to cut his nails. “She’s not my wife yet. By the way…”

“Don’t worry. You’ll have your wedding rings. The goldsmiths of Lannisport are working on it.”

“And it will be free?”

“That’s not free since you get them for being my guard until your wedding.”

“I would have been your guard anyway. Life here is too boring. I would have guarded you even
without payment.”

“Life is boring? Here? In Casterly Rock?”

“I don’t enjoy books like you, your knights refuse to spar with me since they believe me to fight
unfairly, Daisy is busy with the marriage preparations, and you forbade me from fucking the
servants.”
“Sansa forbade you,” Tyrion corrected.

“What difference is there for me, whether it was you or the Stark girl?”

“None.” Tyrion signed the order and put his seal on it. He looked back at his friend who resumed the operation on his nails. “I still don’t understand why you’re marrying her. Didn’t you want a highborn lady?”

“Now I have lands, I wanted a highborn lady so I could get a castle from her, but I don’t need it anymore. She would only give me trouble. Daisy gives me no trouble. Only a good fuck at night.” Bronn didn’t stop to cut his nails as he spoke.

“What about your children? They’ll be poor marriage prospects if you marry a whore.”

Brons shrugged. “The elder will inherit my lands. We might have only one child. Daisy has no problem using moon tea, and I have no problem with her using it. All the other servants at my keep take some too.”

Tyrion rolled his eyes. “You’re not very faithful for a soon to be married man.”

“Soon to be married. I’m going to enjoy my freedom as long as I have it. After the wedding, we’ll see if I’ll keep fucking the other women at my keep. I’m not there yet.”

Tyrion wondered if Bronn really didn’t have any heart within himself. How would Daisy feel with a husband who slept with all the women working at their keep? Perhaps she wouldn’t care. After all, she was a whore most of her life. Tyrion remembered how Shae had been angry when he married Sansa, but Shae had loved him. Or at least she seemed to love him before her betrayal. Did Daisy love Bronn? From the way she behaved with him, Tyrion thought that she did. Did Bronn love her too? Tyrion couldn’t really imagine Bronn loving someone. Or even befriending someone. Even their friendship was mostly based on gold more than anything else. But there was something in the way Bronn behaved with Daisy that let Tyrion perplexed.

“Why are you marrying her?” Tyrion asked. Bronn stopped to clip his nails again and put down his cutter. He looked at Tyrion.

“She’s young, soft, warm, pretty, and she fucks well. And she’s not difficult. She likes the life at our keep. Most ladies would ask a hundred things from me, unlike her. I don’t want trouble. I have lands, a keep, incomes. For me that’s enough. All I want is some peace now. I want a boring death after the adventurous life I had. My death will be quite boring with Daisy.” He took a questioning look.

“Except if I die while I’m inside her. I could die in my own bed, at the age of eighty, with a belly full of wine and Daisy’s mouth around my cock.” Tyrion remembered saying something similar one day. “No. She would be too old at this time. I wouldn’t want her mouth around my cock anymore.”

Sometimes Tyrion was discouraged by his friend’s thoughts. Though he had to admit his own thoughts wouldn’t have been that different a few years ago. “So that’s why you decided to marry her? To have a boring death?”

Brons took off his feet from the desk and grabbed a cup of wine he filled. He could be a landed knight now, but he would always behave like a sellsword. Perhaps that was what Tyrion liked about him. Finally someone who served him without licking his boots. Bronn drank an entire cup.

“Arbor Gold. I missed it.” He filled another cup. “I don’t want her to go. She’s a good and kind girl. She’ll make a good wife for the rest of my days. She won’t give me any problems and she’ll be happy. She’s already acting as the Lady of Blackwater Keep and everything is alright, so why
change it? She’ll have a better life with me than anywhere else.” He ended his second cup. Bronn
was grinning again. “And she fucks well. Very well. What do you to reproach me anyway? You
married a whore, remember.”

Bad memories came back to Tyrion’s head. For an entire week he didn’t think about Tysha or Shae,
and now his discussion with the sellsword brought them back to his mind. “I don’t think this is good
reference.”

“I don’t have a father to get my wife raped, or to force me to marry some suitable highborn lady, and
I’m not a great lord. Only some landed knight. Who will care about this?”

More people than you could think. People knew Bronn was Tyrion’s man. The new of his marriage
with a whore would spread quickly and may cause some humiliation for Tyrion and his family.
Though, when Tyrion thought about it, so many people already mocked and laughed at him that it
would make no difference. And between Bronn and the Mountain… No, that wouldn’t pose much
problems. Only Genna would openly complain, but since Tyrion organized the wedding ceremony
next week in Lannisport instead of Casterly Rock, Genna kept quiet.

Tyrion sighed internally. “You’ll have the rings on the day of the wedding.” Tyrion hoped it would
conclude their meeting, but Bronn remained here, laying back his boots on Tyrion’s desk. Tyrion
brought back his attention to him after he took a scroll from Faircastle. “Don’t you have anything
else to do? You have a wedding to prepare.”

“Daisy takes care of it. I’m not interested in organizing it.”

“You’re not interested in your own wedding?”

“Only with the bedding ceremony and what comes after.” Tyrion started to read the scroll from Lord
Farman. “And you? How does the bedding go?” Tyrion stared at his friend in surprise. Bronn took
an appearance that could be as close to innocence as it could be. “Don’t look at me this way. A
kitchen wench told me after I fucked her. Almost half the servants in this rock already know it. I
guess the other half will know within a few days.”

Tyrion wanted to curse. The people knew. Well, now there would be no argument left to contest
Sansa’s place as Lady of Casterly Rock. It only happened a week ago, the night after the celebrations
for her name day. They had consummated their marriage, finally. And more than that, they both
admitted their love for each other. Tyrion still had some hard time to believe Sansa truly loved him,
but all her demeanor seemed to prove it now. All the same, Tyrion had tried to hide they finally
found themselves as husband and wife. He didn’t really know why. Perhaps he only wanted this to
remain between him and Sansa. He didn’t want anyone else to know about what was going on in
their bedchamber. But he should have known people would discover the truth sooner or later.
Between the blood on the bed cover the morning that followed Sansa’s name day and the fact that
her handmaidens would find Sansa without clothes in their bed at the beginning of each day, it was
no surprise everyone would know after some time. It was probably the main subject of discussion
among the household’s staff now, and maybe among Tyrion’s kin as well.

“So, nothing to say?” Bronn asked, getting him out of his thoughts. “Is she good?”

Bonn seemed to expect something. Tyrion waved a hand. “Get out of here, Bronn. That’s an order.”

The sellsword looked surprised, and disappointed. “Alright. I’ll go find the wench. Perhaps she’ll
want to give me a fight and beat me like in the tourney.” He left with a last grin. Tyrion wondered
for a moment if Brienne would accept to spar with Bronn. She didn’t have a very good opinion of
the man, and this was an understatement.
Tyrion’s thoughts on that matter disappeared as soon as the door closed behind Bronn. The Lord of Casterly Rock was alone in his solar. His thoughts wandered to his wife, as they often went to her since the last week. Well, they often went to her before, but since the name day they went to Sansa almost all time Tyrion’s mind wasn’t occupied by some work.

He thought about their first real night together. Tyrion hadn’t expected this. He had hoped Sansa would be very happy about her sixteenth name day, but he never thought she would willingly share her bed with him this way on this night. Or ever. She had kissed him so suddenly, taking his face between her hands. Her kiss had been unexperienced, but passionate. Tyrion never saw something like this in Sansa. She kissed him as if she wanted him. And when he understood she wanted to consummate... and that she loved him...

Tyrion had finally confessed that he loved her too afterwards, and he had never been happy to see a woman cry but in this occasion. They were tears of joy. And they had begun. That was a long time since Tyrion desired Sansa. Perhaps he desired her even before their wedding, ever since the time they were betrothed probably. Bronn may have been right. You want to fuck that Stark girl. You just don’t want to admit it. Tyrion had wanted Sansa for a very long time, but he didn’t want her as he wanted a whore. He wanted her as his wife. He wanted her to bring him her sorrows, her happiness, her joys, her lust. He didn’t want to take her. He wanted her to give herself to him. And she did it on that night.

That had been more than a year since Tyrion last had a woman. But despite his strong desire to have a woman, and to especially have her, he had resisted and performed slowly. It was obvious she was afraid. It was her first time. He didn’t want to hurt her. So he prepared her body and made everything so she would enjoy it. It had been difficult for him to not get on with the act immediately, but he couldn’t resolve to hurt her. He couldn’t. And she enjoyed it. She said so to him that night, and the night that followed.

For the last week, they had made their duty as husband and wife each night. After such a long time without a woman, Tyrion couldn’t get enough of Sansa. She was soft, warm, sweet, shy too, but her shyness only made her more attractive in his eyes. Making love to her was so different from making love to a whore. Whores were paid and trained to look pleased, and very often they did much of the work. Men went to whores to be pleased, not to please them. Tyrion had been no exception to the rule. The memory of this made him feel guilty. But that wasn’t entirely true. Tyrion hadn’t gone to whores only to have them please him. The first time, yes, he let them do what he paid them for, but as soon as it was the second time, Tyrion was the one to do some things to them. Most of the time, he thought they liked it. It was a way to repent for the horrible things he did to Tysha. He had raped her. He didn’t want to only take advantage of these girls like he did with her. So he tried to give them something. Gold wasn’t enough. They wouldn’t refuse it, but Tyrion wanted them to believe they were liked, or at least appreciated, just like he wanted to believe they liked him. Did they? Tyrion doubted it.

With Sansa, he was the one trying to make it comfortable for her. He wanted her to be happy, to enjoy it, to enjoy the time she spent with him. And up to now, judging from the way she reacted ever since the first night, she seemed to like it. Her reactions in bed were natural, sincere, real, true, without any attempt to hide how she felt. Tyrion liked to hear her squeal, gasp, cry or moan, or to hear his name whispered on her lips. Sansa was a woman now. She was sixteen. No one could deny she was a young and beautiful woman, probably the most beautiful in the Seven Kingdoms. Tyrion never enjoyed his time with a woman like he enjoyed his time with Sansa. Never. Except...

The memory of a young girl crying as he broke her maidenhead came back to his mind. It had been so long ago. She was only a whore, damn fool. Everything she did was for gold. She didn’t love you. Tyrion tried to convince himself of these words. She was a whore. Everything she told me,
everything we shared, all of it was a lie. But other words came to his mind. Was it a lie? Was I the liar? The words lingered in his head. Was I the liar? What did she mean? Someone else lied? Jaime told him she was a whore he paid for. She was a whore. A lie. Nothing more. The dream of her was a lie too.

Tyrion looked outside the window. From the position of the sun, he would say they were in the middle of the afternoon. He wouldn’t see Sansa before a few hours. He sighed, discouraged. He would give anything to spend more time with her, but their days as Lord and Lady of the Westerlands were entirely occupied by their duties. They often only met in the evening when it was time for dinner. Tyrion stopped to drink in his solar after dinner so they could spend more time together, but for him it wasn’t enough. He wanted her to be with him right now. When he was with her, he forgot everything else. The world was limited to the two of them at night. Nothing else mattered in these moments. All the worries and thoughts of day would leave him as they slept together. He needed her to forget about Tysha. He remembered her face, the tears and the screams as his father’s guards took their turns on her. And her distress when he went last. Was I the liar?

Tyrion took his head with his hands, trying to get the image out of his head. When it began to recede, he filled himself another cup of wine and drank deeply. He sighed in relief and went back to the scrolls. Lord Sebastion Farman was reporting an attack on a ship from Fair Isle, probably by Ironmen, but he couldn’t be sure. Many lords sent reports of their efforts to prepare for winter. With plundered lands and the war still going on, not to mention the threat of the Iron Islands and the preparations of their invasion, many lords complained about the difficulty to gather enough food stocks to go through winter.

Tyrion finally reached a message he read hours ago. A message from the Night’s Watch and his brother-in-law.

Lord Tyrion,

Stannis Baratheon left the Wall. If you want to help us, now is the time. We need all the help we can get, and quickly. Take care of my sister.

Jon Snow

The first decisions about this matter had been taken by Tyrion earlier in the day, not long after he read the scroll for the first time. If Stannis Baratheon wasn’t at the Wall anymore, then Tyrion could act. Though Tyrion wondered where Stannis went if he left the Wall? Jon Snow didn’t tell in the message. Perhaps he wanted to hide it to Tyrion. Stannis saved them from the wildlings while Tyrion was sitting here in Casterly Rock with Sansa, doing nothing. Perhaps Jon Snow had some respect for Stannis Baratheon for saving the Wall. Or perhaps he knew his father tried to name Stannis king after Robert died. Or it may be only because the Night’s Watch took no part in the wars of the Seven Kingdoms. All the same, he would send help to Jon Snow and the Night’s Watch, and soon. Someone had to.

There was also another report from White Harbor. Lord Wyman Manderly sent information regularly to Casterly Rock about the state of the North and House Bolton. Perhaps he hoped Tyrion would march on the North to kill Roose Bolton. But the most interesting things about House Manderly’s reports, and the most horrible, were the details they gave about Roose Bolton’s son, Ramsay. Tales about his madness and cruelty began to spread through the North. Girls were found in the woods, clothes all torn apart, sometimes without clothes at all, telling horrible stories about the bastard of the Dreadfort. How he skinned their fingers to make them beg to cut them, how he would rape them until he grew bored and released them in the forests to chase them with his dogs. It seemed they found someone crazier than Joffrey. And it was a decree from Tyrion’s nephew, a decree prepared
by his own father, that legitimized this bastard and made him the heir to the Dreadfort. *Here are the results of your actions for family, Father. A mad dog will rule the North one day.* News had come to Tyrion from his ambassador at Winterfell that Lady Walda Bolton was with child. Perhaps Roose Bolton would set aside his legitimated bastard son for his new legitimate one. Tyrion wouldn’t oppose this. Between the rumors of peeled bodies that hung before the doors of Winterfell, the assassination of Lord Cerwyn and his family and the stories about raped girls, Ramsay Bolton didn’t look like a desirable Warden of the North. Sansa had been horrified when she read the scrolls about the horrors the bastard perpetrated. Tyrion wondered if the behaviour of Ramsay Bolton could be a reason strong enough by itself to invade the North and take back Winterfell to give it to Sansa. She would like it surely. But Tyrion wasn’t sure. For now, he had to wait and collect all the information he could on the situation in the North.

Tyrion took a look at the results of the mining of the last month. Thanks to Yroan’s good work, revenues started to increase. But the increase wouldn’t be as great as Yroan promised, and that by Tyrion’s fault. It was sad, but with White Walkers coming, the safety of the Seven Kingdoms was more important than his family’s wealth. Tyrion would have to do with it, and with the new rules Tyrion and Sansa put into place. Mine administrators weren’t allowed to make anyone work for more than twelve hours each day in the mines now. Tyrion also removed two administrators who forced miners to pay them for the food they were given and to work on easier hours. The last time he went into the mines, the miners seemed to show some recognition and he talked with a few of them. He asked them questions about their working conditions and their life, and Tyrion learned a lot this way. It wasn’t by staying into a solar that you could know how your people lived and what they needed. Tyrion had some ideas to make the work in the mines less horrible for men. He would need to think about it and to talk with some administrators he could trust, especially Yroan, to see if these solutions were possible to apply.

Tyrion spent hours reading scrolls, messages, reports, accounts, writing messages and orders. Finally the sun was about to disappear and he decided he worked long enough for today. He went back to his chambers.

Sansa was standing on the balcony, looking at the last rays of the sun. Since the sunlight was fading, it didn’t color her hair very much, but it still did enough to make a difference, even with her back turned on him. Tyrion stood away from her, looking at her frame in the dim color of the sunset.

“Don’t you think you already look enough at me during the night?” Sansa knew he was behind her of course.

“I don’t know. What’s your opinion on the matter?” Tyrion asked, faking ignorance. He couldn’t get enough of her sight, no matter what she wore. Right now, she wore a yellow gown.

“That you should come and look at it with me.”

She didn’t turn her head to face him, but Tyrion knew she was smiling. He approached to stand at Sansa’s side and laid his left hand on her right. Her hand was smooth like always. She intertwined her fingers in his and they held each other’s hand. She looked at him for a moment, smiling sweetly like she was the only one who could. She turned her eyes again to look at the sun falling at the horizon. Tyrion looked at it too. When it had disappeared, they went back into the living room where their dinner was waiting for them. Sansa sent away the two handmaidens who brought it and they found themselves alone, like every dinner.

“You had a rough day?” Sansa asked him.

“No rougher than the previous ones. I received a raven from your brother.”
“Me too. He asked for help again. But he also asked other news from me. And he beheaded Janos Slynt.”

Tyrion almost choked on the wine he was drinking. Sansa had to pat him in the back a few times before he could express anything before this unexpected new. “Janos Slynt? Your brother beheaded Janos Slynt?”

“Yes, he did.” The shadow of a smile appeared on her lips for a moment. “He refused to obey Jon’s order to rebuild Greyguard. So Jon had no other choice but to execute him.”

“I won’t blame him. I had quite a mind to have Janos Slynt beheaded when I was Hand of the King.” This child’s butcher finally met the end he deserved. Tyrion couldn’t repress a light chuckle.

“Me too. It seems there’s some justice finally.” They resumed to eat for a moment. “What did Jon tell in his message for you?”

“Mostly the same thing than yours. But without the new about Janos Slynt. He asked for help to the Wall, and to take care of you. And he said Stannis left the Wall.”

Sansa swallowed the carrots she just picked with her fork. “We should send him help. It’s time.”

“I agree, Sansa. I already took dispositions. Ravens will fly all over the Westerlands tomorrow. All the lords and landed knights are to offer to all their prisoners the option to go the Wall, whatever their crimes. They will be brought here to Casterly Rock, then sent to King’s Landing where they’ll wait for the next ship that will bring them to Eastwatch-by-the-Sea. I’ll also send large amounts of food from our stores at the same time.”

Sansa was looking at him with a strange expression. “Prisoners? That’s all we can send him?”

Tyrion wiped his mouth with his towel. “I’m afraid. I cannot send an army yet.”

“Why?” Sansa’s voice wasn’t without outrage. Tyrion didn’t like to see her like this. Not when she was outraged at him.

“Stannis left the Wall according to your brother. But I don’t think he left with his fleet. It is still anchored at the port of Eastwatch-by-the-Sea. Stannis knows he doesn’t have enough forces to take back the advantage in the south. He doesn’t have enough men to take King’s Landing, or the Vale, or Storm’s End. But there’s a kingdom that is weak right now, where he might find allies, and very close to Castleblack.”

Realization came to Sansa’s face immediately. “The North. He wants to take the North.”

Tyrion nodded. “The Boltons are hated for their betrayal to your family, and many northern lords will be more than happy to see Stannis mount Roose Bolton’s head on a spike, and his son’s head next to his. This is the best target, and probably the only one Stannis has a real chance to take.”

“Do you think he could succeed? That he could defeat the Boltons?” There was hope in Sansa’s words, and in her eyes too.

“I think Stannis could. He’s a brilliant battle commander. No one can take that from him. Without my father’s arrival, he would have defeated me at Blackwater. But for many Northerners, Stannis is probably just another southern king who wants to impose his law on them. He may not get many allies in his war against the Boltons. But no matter who is defeated and who wins, I guess we’ll have one enemy less to care about.”
A silence followed. “I hope Stannis will kill the Boltons.” She looked at Tyrion with something like regret, but also with determination. “I’m sorry, but that’s what I want.”

“I wouldn’t mind to see all the Boltons dead. Between Roose Bolton and his mad son, I think the world would be much better without both of them. But if Stannis takes Winterfell, I hope he won’t burn the godswood like he did at Storm’s End.” Fear flashed through Sansa’s face for a time. The idea to see Stannis rule the North probably didn’t look so enticing all of a sudden. “Anyway, I can’t send an army of Lannister soldiers at the Wall claiming they’re here to defend the Realm and not for the war. Stannis will attack them, and since the castles along the Wall aren’t very fortified, the army would be easily defeated. We would have sent men for nothing. Stannis’s ships at Eastwatch won’t let them pass. But they will let prisoners and food pass. I’m sure of that.”

Sansa sighed. “We should do more.”

“I wish we could, my dear. For now, I fear we’re confined to this castle.”

“At least, we have no reason to be bored.” She smiled at him and Tyrion understood the second meaning.

They spoke about many other things, including Joy’s betrothal to Rollam Westerling and the marriage between Bronn and Daisy, but Tyrion’s mind wasn’t entirely there. The images he saw this afternoon went back from time to time and turned his mood dark. The subject of Bronn’s marriage brought it back to the surface. Sansa noticed it after some time and asked if there was anything wrong with him.

“T’m alright, Sansa. Don’t worry.”

Sansa didn’t seem convinced by his words. She put her hand on his. “Tell me what’s going on.” Her eyes were a mix of command and worry.

“That’s nothing, Sansa. I just… I discussed with Bronn about his marriage today, and it brought me back memories of my first marriage. Memories I don’t like.” The last sentence was said with a very low voice. Sansa looked at the floor. Tyrion took his hand out of hers. “It’s alright, Sansa. It will pass. I just need some time.”

They managed to restart a conversation later around desserts, and Tyrion nearly managed to forget about Tysha. He read for an hour after dinner while Sansa made some embroidery. She left for their bedchamber before him. He went to join her not long after. She wore a lighter nightgown than she did the previous nights. When he climbed into their bed, she kissed him and very soon nothing mattered but her.

Some time later, Sansa was asleep, her belly resting on the mattress, sheets covering her back up to her breasts. Her face was turned towards Tyrion, a thin smile crossing it. There were times Tyrion wondered if all this wasn’t only a dream. He was afraid of the time this dream could end. Sansa meant so much for him. He couldn’t imagine his life without her. He didn’t know what he would without her. He remembered his uncle Gerion told him that when his mother died, the best part of his father died with her. Would the same thing happen to him if Sansa was to die? Words of Kevan came back to his mind. You once told me you weren’t your father, Tyrion. It’s true, you’re not Tywin. But now I realize that of all his children, you’re the one who looks the most like him.

Was he really like his father? Or was he really the one who looked the most like him? Tywin Lannister had always hated his second son. How could the son he hated above all be the one who looked like him? Tyrion remembered Tysha again, when he raped her. He did it on his father’s orders, but he did it all the same. He was the one to do it. He took his hand off his wife’s back. He
didn’t deserve this, not after what he did. Everything he did for Sansa couldn’t erase the wrongs he made to Tysha. She was his wife, and he raped her. He swore to protect her, and he let his father have her raped by his guards. If his father had lived, if he didn’t die on this night in King’s Landing, would Tyrion have respected his promise to protect Sansa? Or would he have obeyed his father in the end? What would he have been ready to do to not consummate his marriage without Sansa’s consent? Would he have been ready to kill his father? Would he have dared to become a kinslayer to protect his wife? A child from a family who was in war with his own? Sansa said she loved him. Did he deserve this love? In this moment, Tyrion felt he didn’t. If things had gone differently, he could have raped the young woman he slept with. Tears began to roll from his eyes as Tyrion fell asleep, the peaceful face of his wife turned toward his own scarred face.

He was riding on a road near Lannisport. It was the end of a beautiful day of summer. Although he was close to home, Tyrion felt the need to stop somewhere to eat and rest. He caught sight of an inn not far away and stopped there. He was hungry, and tired. Tyrion paid the innkeeper enough silver to have three chickens and a flagon of wine. Once he was done with the food and the wine, Tyrion was guided to a chamber where he could rest. When he entered the chamber, Tyrion realized something was wrong. He knew this place. He slept in this room, in that very bed, a long time ago. With someone else.

“You remember?” The voice came from behind. Tyrion didn’t turn to face the woman to who it belonged. “That’s where we did it. That’s where you made me a woman.”

Tyrion stared at the bed before him. Images of the past flowed through his mind. Images of a girl with black hair. He felt her approaching him in his back. He wouldn’t look at her. He couldn’t.

“I cried when you went into me the first time. I never felt so much pain. But after I was happy.”

Tyrion nodded faintly. “You kissed me. You sang me a song.” A silence weighed the atmosphere in the room. “I shouldn’t have done it. What I have done… I should have disobeyed. I should have protected you.” You were a whore, but I was your husband. I married you. I swore to protect you, and instead I raped you. I should have opposed my father. At least I should have refused to take you last. Like I refused with Sansa.

He felt a hand resting on his shoulder in a calming gesture. “It’s done.” Yes, it was done. There was nothing Tyrion could change to what he did.

“I should have done something against my father. I should have stopped him from doing what he did to you. I was supposed to defend you. Even if you were a whore.”

Tyrion heard Tysha sigh behind him. “Even if I was a whore. Even if I was.”

Tyrion moved forward to escape the hand on his shoulder. “That’s who you were. Jaime hired you for me. He even paid you double since you were a maiden.”

A silence followed before the young woman replied. “Perhaps he could have done something for me then. And for you. He hired me for you. He should have made sure I wasn’t mistreated.”

Tyrion dismissed the suggestion immediately. “He couldn’t know that I would fall in love with you. He couldn’t know that I would marry you. He couldn’t know what our father would do next.”

Another silence followed before an angry voice answered Tyrion’s statements. “He should have known. You should know better, Tyrion.” Footsteps on the floor indicated Tysha had left the room. After a moment, Tyrion sat on the edge of the bed. The bed where he deflowered the woman who would become his first wife. And he wept.
Tyrion woke up with tears flowing silently on his cheeks. Sansa was still sleeping peacefully in the same position next to him. She was beautiful. Tyrion closed his eyes. He lost Tysha. He lost Shae. If he ever lost Sansa, he didn’t know what he would become.

Chapter End Notes

OK, the end is a bit gloomy, I admit it. Especially when we compare it to the chapter that came right before. But there is a reason why it ends this way and why Tysha appears again at the moment when the relationship between Tyrion and Sansa is really blooming. Also, there is a very happy chapter coming for another character.

By the way, I recently ran into a very good video on Tyrion. I don't understand why less than a hundred people watched it yet. Here's the link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyH_Bo4PHhU

Please review

Next chapter: someone we haven't seen for a very long time
Cersei IV

Chapter Notes

OK, not the chapter I loved to write the most, but I thought it would be good to know how was Cersei in the meantime. I tried to make it some sort of funny chapter with humor, though Cersei is far from being a funny character.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CERSEI IV

“There wouldn’t be sunflowers. I don’t like yellow. But roses are very nice. There would definitely be roses. And many other flowers. I don’t know all their names, but they would be there. I would have music too. I adore music. But without flutes. I hate flutes. A harp maybe, but no flutes. Perhaps bells too. And the food. That would be the most important thing. And the guests too. Guests are even more important.”

Cersei had to refrain to not hit Lollys Stokeworth in the face. She had been babbling about how she would make her marriage for months now. It was always the same stupid comments about flowers, food, music, dance and guests. She ignored the second daughter of Lady Tanda Stokeworth, focusing on the flowers of the garden she knew only too well now. For six months now she had wandered in this garden every day, not knowing what else to do. It was so small that she knew every corner by heart now. And she had to support the company of a Stokeworth almost half the time she came here. Today it was Lollys who came to tell her again how she would imagine her marriage. *Only a sellsword or a dwarf would accept to marry you, and only if he was given enough gold.* Cersei wondered for a moment why her father didn’t marry the Imp to Lollys instead of Sansa. How much trouble would they have avoided then?

“Isn’t it what you ate in the capital?”

Lolly’s question came from nowhere. Cersei turned to face her. “You were saying?” She had no intention to show any interest to Lollys Stokeworth. She couldn’t send her away, but nothing obliged her to listen to her incessant jabber.

“About the pigeon pies. Isn’t it what they eat in King’s Landing for weddings?” The ugly woman didn’t seem aware of Cersei’s indifference.

“Yes.” Cersei said nothing more.

“Then we should have some. And many other things they eat for weddings.”

Cersei had to support a long monologue from Lollys she tried to not hear before she could excuse herself and go back to her rooms. The ill-favoured maid talked about the wedding she could have had again and again ever since her betrothal with the Imp’s sellsword was called off. Cersei regretted she didn’t marry the ugly thing to the mercenary. She would be away in the Westerlands right now, and Cersei’s wretched brother would be the one to suffer Lollys Stokeworth. But a Lannister always pays her debts. Bronn helped Tyrion to escape the judgement he deserved, and Cersei wouldn’t give
anything to the sellsword in retaliation.

She was accompanied by two guards on her way back to her rooms. Kevan gave them to her along with fifty others to officially ensure her protection here, and to prevent her from leaving the castle officiously. Cersei had already tried to convince them to let her go back to King’s Landing to visit her son, or to let her wander through the castle and its surroundings without them on her trails, but all her attempts had failed. They were her uncle’s men, and didn’t obey or listen to her orders.

All this unnerved Cersei and made her angry more than she could show. These men should be hers by right, and follow her orders. She was their legitimate lady, the only true Lady of Casterly Rock, and yet they kept her prisoner here among fools. While Cersei was stuck here, the little monster occupied the castle and the golden throne of the father he killed. Cersei would have him killed one day. And the Tyrell bitch as well. And Sansa too.

Cersei couldn’t understand how she had been blind enough to not see Sansa’s real nature. She was a traitor from a family of traitors, and yet Cersei mentored her and advised her in the hope she would make a fine queen one day. And to reward Cersei of her help, she turned against her, spread lies about her and took the title that was hers. It made Cersei sick to think that Sansa Stark was now acting as Lady of Casterly Rock at Tyrion’s side when both had no right upon it. She would have them all killed.

She should have dealt with all of them long ago. Tyrion, Sansa, Margaery. She was sure now that the three of them were part of an alliance to bring her down and seize the power for themselves. They killed her father with poison and forged a false will where he gave Casterly Rock to Tyrion and Sansa. Without Tywin Lannister, Margaery surely thought she could have Joffrey for her alone while Tyrion and Sansa would get Casterly Rock. The three of them had something to gain from it. Sansa could get her revenge for her family by the same way.

Only, they hadn’t expected Cersei to elude their plan by arresting Tyrion. But the dwarf managed to convince Jaime to talk to Joffrey and to call their uncle. Kevan, stupid like he was, believed Tyrion over her. Despite this, the trial should have proved the guilt of Tyrion and Sansa, but that was when Cersei made her mistake. She didn’t consider that Margaery could turn people against her and convince Kevan that Tyrion was innocent. Even more unexpected was the way Margaery used Sansa at her own advantage. She and the little dove spent so much time together. Perhaps that was when Sansa changed. Margaery perverted her. In normal circumstances, the trial would have ended with Tyrion being executed. Cersei would have received Casterly Rock since it was hers by right, Sansa would have been married off to someone else, perhaps some of Cersei’s cousin, and Margaery would have found herself alone.

Instead, Cersei was stripped of her powers and dignity, imprisoned in her own chambers, deprived of her right to see her children, and sent away to some insignificant castle. She was even forbidden to ever come back in the Westerlands as long as her little brother would rule from Casterly Rock, but it hadn’t been enough for these three schemers. Sansa wanted more revenge, Margaery wanted a more pliable husband, and Tyrion… She guessed the two whores probably convinced him after a few nights with both of them. She had no difficulty to imagine Margaery licking her brother’s little cock to get what she wanted from him. And since Margaery had a lot of influence on Sansa, the traitorous wolf probably did it too. Anyway, Tyrion hated Joffrey and wanted him dead. Cersei understood the day he decided to send him on the battlements for the Battle of Blackwater. He wanted her son to die. And the three had what they wanted. They poisoned Joffrey, just like they poisoned her father. Joffrey wouldn’t have let Margaery control him in time. She wanted a husband she could manipulate in every circumstance, and Cersei’s sweet and weak Tommen was more than ideal for this.

The valonqar. The whore of Highgarden. The wolf bitch. They would all die. Cersei kept her anger
hidden before the Stokeworths, but one day she would get her revenge. She would destroy them and give them justice for what they did. She would free her family and her children from the control of these three plotters. In the meantime, she had to stay here, doing nothing. With hope, the Stokeworths could prove to be allies. If she could put them on her side, she would be able to use them when time would come to take back what was hers. They were already more than happy to have her as their guest. She could turn it to her advantage. But for now, she wanted to go back to the tranquility and the solitude of her rooms. She wouldn’t be able to support the Stokeworths more than for dinner. If she saw one of them again before or after…

They arrived before her door and there, one of the two men guarding it stepped forward to stop her. *He wouldn’t dare if I was still the queen and the Lady of Casterly Rock.*

“Your Grace.” He bowed lightly before her.

“Stand aside and let me enter.” Cersei had no time to lose with her uncle’s men.

“Your Grace,” the guard resumed without flinching, “your brother is here.”

Cersei’s heart stopped. *My brother is here. Which one? I have only one real brother. It has to be him.*

“Ser Jaime arrived while you were in the gardens. He is waiting for you in your chambers.” The guard added it before her lack of reaction.

Cersei pushed the man aside and burst into her rooms. Here he was, sitting in a chair, his right arm with a golden hand resting on the arm of the chair, his left arm on his thigh. He raised his head when she entered. His hair was still cut short like the last time she saw him. He wore his armor and the white cloak of the Kingsguard. When the door closed behind Cersei, he stood up and walked slowly to her.

“Cersei.” She didn’t see the usual lust and hunger in his eyes when they were alone. Instead his expression seemed to show something like pain. But to Cersei it didn’t matter.

She ran to him and pulled him into an embrace. He was there, her twin brother, her lover, the father of her children, the man she came with into the world, her other half. Her face was buried into his shoulder. He didn’t react first, but after some time he put his left arm around her shoulders.

“Jaime. Oh, Jaime. My love.”

She kissed the man she loved passionately. How much time since they did it for the last time? She didn’t care. She wanted him. Now. Jaime tried to resist, arguing they could be surprised, but she shut him up with her tongue in his mouth. She knew he couldn’t resist, no more than she could resist. They were made for each other. They needed each other. They weren’t full as long as they weren’t together. After some resistance, her lover finally gave up and started to rip her clothes apart. She removed his armor and soon they were joining. It was a blur of pleasure and completeness she didn’t feel for so long, something she needed more than she realized until this very moment when she saw her twin brother. They ended up sweating against each other on the floor, Jaime under her. She was the one in control.

“We shouldn’t have done this,” Jaime said when they were done. “Someone could see us. There are guards outside the door.”

Jaime got up to put on his clothes and armor again, not leaving Cersei any time to stop him and to resume their joining. Cersei saw her clothes torn apart on the floor. She wouldn’t be able to wear
them again. She went to another room to put on another gown. When she came back, Jaime had barely managed to put on half of his clothes, not to mention his armor still laid on the floor. Cersei had to help, enjoying all the parts of his body she touched. She felt him tense wherever she touched him. When he was finally entirely clad into his clothes and armor, they sat and Cersei called a handmaiden to pour them some wine.

“It’s been such a long time,” Cersei began. “I barely received news from you or anyone else.”

“I’m sorry. Everyone is very busy. Tommen is learning to be king, we must deal with fanatics who invaded the streets of the city, the Redwynes are still fighting on Dragonstone…”

“I understand.” The handmaiden left the room at this moment. “Learning to be king is more important for my son than worrying about the well-being of his mother, and fanatics are a more pressing matter than your sister.”

Jaime stared at her for a moment after her reproach, then sighed. “Tommen doesn’t have to worry about your well-being. The Stokeworths are loyal to the Crown, and from what I’ve seen you’re treated with more than respect.”

“Respect?” Cersei nearly spit. “I have to endure fools and halfwits from morning to evening. My eldest son is dead, Myrcella was sold like livestock, Tommen is in the hands of some whore from Highgarden, and a wolf bitch has taken the place of Lady of Casterly Rock that should be mine.”

“I didn’t come here to listen to your complaints about the supposed injustice you are victim, sweet sister. I came here to give you news about your children.”

Jaime’s abrupt reply left her frozen for a time, but she recovered quickly. That would be no use to argue with Jaime. He was a fool, just like the Stokeworths.

“How is Tommen?” If Jaime was there to give her news about her children, then all the better if he gave them immediately. Cersei would know quicker how her children were and Jaime would leave sooner.

“He’s alright. He spends most of his days with Kevan learning what it is to be king, and with the queen too.”

Anger rose in Cersei. “The queen? So that’s how you call this little bitch who murdered our son?”

Jaime dropped his arms. “Margaery didn’t kill Joffrey. Ser Meryn did this. And if you didn’t tell him to do everything to protect Joffrey from the rose, your son might still be alive.”

Cersei should never have trusted Ser Meryn and Ser Boros with Joffrey’s protection. She should have named more competent people in the Kingsguard. “How does it come Tommen sent me no raven? No message? No letter? Why didn’t he visit me?”

“As I told you, he’s very occupied.” Cersei smashed her cup of wine on the table. Some of the content spilled from the goblet.

“It’s Margaery, isn’t it? She’s the one who keeps him away from me?”

“He just got married, Cersei. Don’t you find it normal that he wants to spend some time with his wife.”

“You’re really a fool, Jaime. Can’t you see it? She’s stealing our son away from us.” Cersei was screaming.
“Not so loud.”

“Not so loud? Our baby boy is being taken away from us and you’re worried I’m speaking too loudly?”

“People can’t know he’s our son.” Jaime’s voice was barely more than a whisper.

“Then don’t call him your son. You’ve never been a father to him.”

“If I was a father to any of my children, they’d be dead.”

“And what has your caution brought?” Cersei asked. “Our eldest child murdered during his wedding night. Our only daughter shipped off to Dorne. Our baby boy married to a smirking whore from Highgarden.”

Jaime didn’t seem to know what to answer. Cersei took her cup and drank, savoring that little victory. It had been so long since the last time she won against someone. She had nearly forgotten how good it tasted.

Jaime looked around for a minute, then he rose from his chair and finally looked at her. “I didn’t come here to bring you news from Tommen, but I talked to him before I left King’s Landing, to know if he had any message for you. He says he misses you, and that he’ll come to visit you as soon as he can. He doesn’t know when.”

This brought some relief to Cersei. Her last son wasn’t lost yet. Margaery hadn’t taken control of him entirely. He wasn’t strong like Joffrey, but he was still her son. He had some force within him.

“But as I said, I didn’t come here to talk about Tommen. I came here because of Myrcella.”

Jaime’s words struck her. Myrcella. That was even longer since the last time she saw her. How old was she now? Surely she became a very beautiful young woman now.

“What of her?” Cersei asked, eager to know about her only daughter.

“We received a message from Dorne. Or to be more precise, a threat.”

Cersei’s breathing stopped. “A threat?”

“A box with Myrcella’s necklace in the mouth of a viper. There was no note with it. We don’t know who sent it, only that it came from Dorne. Kevan doesn’t believe Doran Martell is behind it.”

The necklace of her daughter in the mouth of a viper? Cersei’s breath quickened suddenly. First she panicked. Her daughter was in danger. Her beautiful and sweet daughter. Soon distress was replaced by anger. “If they ever dare to touch her, I will burn their cities to the ground! What did Kevan do?”

Jaime looked at the floor. “Nothing. He sent back the necklace with a message to tell Prince Doran that anything done against her would endanger our alliance with Dorne.”

Cersei would have ripped her uncle’s heart if he had been there. She rose from her seat. “My daughter is in danger in Dorne and all he finds to do is to remember to Doran Martell of our alliance? He’s weak! Father was wrong to keep him as an advisor.”

“Cersei, there is nothing we can do. I just wanted you to know.”

Cersei stared at her brother with all the fury she could gather. “So, that’s all? You’re going to remain idle while our daughter is in danger? While she could be killed anytime?”
“Doran Martell won’t kill her. He’s too cautious. He will do everything to ensure her safety. We’re talking about a man with the gout, stuck to a chair, who did nothing when his sister and her children were butchered. He’s not the Red Viper. Oberyn is dead. The threat probably came from someone else in Dorne. Doran Martell won’t let Myrcella being hurt after the message Kevan sent.”

“You trust a Martell? They loathe us. They would kill us all if they could.”

Jaime’s face turned angry now. “You told me the same thing about Tyrion not long ago. And look at our situation now. Look at your situation.” He took a step toward her. “You tried to kill my brother. Our brother. You fucked our cousin.” He shook his head. “I should never have come.”

Jaime walked away, leaving her there like this, and opened the door. “Farewell, your Grace.” He left the door without another look behind.

Cersei collapsed in her chair. Her little daughter, her good and sweet Myrcella, was in danger. The Martells wanted to kill her, and there was nothing she could do about it. She cried. *Gold will be their crowns. Gold their shrouds.* The prophecy was coming true. And there was nothing she could do to stop it from coming true. She was powerless. For the first time in her life, she had no power. Her daughter was in danger, and all that was Tyrion’s fault. He sent her to Dorne. He had Gregor Clegane kill Oberyn Martell. He wanted Myrcella to be killed, just like he wanted to kill Joffrey before.

Her handmaidens entered to prepare her for the dinner. Cersei would have to sit through a whole meal with the Stokeworths like she had to twice a week. She dried her tears and prepared. The dinner was boring, but less than it was in normal circumstances. Cersei didn’t care about the discussion around her, her mind entirely set upon Myrcella. Jaime wasn’t there. Lady Falyse said he left not long after he visited Cersei, saying he had urgent matters awaiting him in King’s Landing. Her poor daughter could die any moment, and no one did anything to save her. Jaime and Kevan had no intention to do something about it, and Tyrion surely plotted to make sure Myrcella would die. She had to do something for her little girl. She was the only who was ready to save her.

“What do you think of it, your Grace?”

Lady Tanda Stokeworth was addressing her. Cersei was in no mood to talk. “Think of what?” She didn’t try to hide she wasn’t listening.

“About the tourney at Lannisport. About the fact a woman won it.”

That caught Cersei’s attention. “A tourney in Lannisport? Won by a woman?”

“Yes, your Grace,” Lady Falyse confirmed. “Ser Jaime told us. There was a tourney there about a month ago, organized for the name day of the Lady of Casterly Rock.”

To hear that her wretched brother organized a tourney for Sansa brought more anger to Cersei. As much anger that it brought to hear the little girl being called the Lady of the Rock, Cersei’s title.

“Ser Jaime said the tourney’s champion was a woman,” Ser Balman Byrch, Falyse’s husband, confirmed. “What was her name?”

“Brienne,” Tanda Stokeworth said. “I remember she was there at the royal wedding. I think she is the daughter of some lord in the Stormlands.” Jaime talked about this woman? That was curious. “Such a shame. To believe that Lollys could be the Lady of Casterly Rock if I convinced Lord Tyrion to marry her when he was Hand of the King. What a great lady Lollys would have made.”

Lollys Stokeworth seemed lost in her thoughts and to not hear what her mother just said. Cersei
glared at this ugly woman. She didn’t know what made her the sicker. The idea of Lollies Stokeworth as Lady of Casterly Rock, or the knowledge that Sansa Stark was the lady of the home where Cersei grew up. Balman Byrch was boasting how he would have been more than pleased to participate in the tourney if he had known about it. He believed he would surely have won it. The knights there were probably poor jousters since a woman defeated them all.

“Well, anyway, now it’s too late,” Ser Balman threw. “And for Lollys too. She could have had a chance before, but now it’s impossible to end the marriage between Lord Tyrion and Lady Sansa. If Ser Jaime is right, Lady Sansa is no longer a maiden. That’s what his brother told him in his last message.”

Cersei excused herself when the main service was over. She went back to her chambers. She would make them all pay. Jaime. Kevan. Tyrion. Sansa. Margaery. Brienne. All their allies. She would get back Casterly Rock. She would save her children. She would rule the Seven Kingdoms like she should always have, and people would remember her for centuries afterwards, while her enemies would disappear in the shadows. No one would take another of her children away from her. She would protect them like she always did. They would have golden crowns, but no shroud. No queen would cast her down. She would have Margaery’s head. And she would have the valonqar’s head before he could even try to kill her.

With satisfaction, Cersei thought that Sansa may regret to have fought to save her dwarf husband. What horrible things could the girl be going through now that Tyrion put her into his bed? Surely Sansa already suffered much more than Cersei suffered in sixteen years between Robert’s hands. I will let her suffer. Then I will kill her before Tyrion’s eyes. And I will make him suffer, just like I will make Margaery suffer. They will all suffer before I take their heads and plant it on spikes. Cersei Lannister would come back to King’s Landing. And when she would come back, she would have her revenge.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Mira (one of the chapters I loved to write the most up to now)
“You’ll be more beautiful than you’ve ever been. I can’t wait to see how Ser Gerold will react when he’ll see you walking in his direction.”

Sera didn’t stop to talk ever since she started to help Mira getting prepared. Mira on her side stood silent as Sera helped her to put on her gown and arranged her hair. Mira wore a white gown with black regions where was the girdle, on her shoulders and on the sides of her tummy and her chest. The gown was quite lightweight and remembered her of the one Queen Margaery wore at her own wedding, though this one was less richly decorated and displayed much less her body. Her back was entirely covered, but she had a generous triangular neckline that plunged deeply. Mira was used to gowns lighter than the ones she wore in the North after her years in the south, but she didn’t feel quite comfortable with this neckline. She had the impression to be naked from time to time. There were silver lines that followed the neckline and the hem. She also wore a silver necklace that her betrothed gave her this morning through his sister during the breakfast. The gown outlined her thin figure very well. As for her hair, flowers held a few braids that would fall on her shoulders and her sides in normal times to only let a trail of smooth black hair fall on her back. Sera was completing the arrangement of her hair as Mira stood still.

They had arrived at Hightower only two weeks ago. Mira had been restless during the last days of their travel. Before that, their journey had been eventless and without problems. Mira and Sera both enjoyed to see the Reach again. They even stayed at Highgarden for two days when they passed by it. Lady Olenna was sharp as always, though Mira felt some coldness toward her. However, Lady Alerie Tyrell proved to be quite welcoming toward them, especially for Mira. She gave her more attention than she ever gave her. Mira had the occasion to learn for this occasion that Lady Alerie had participated to the arrangement of her betrothal with Ser Gerold Hightower. Mira supposed she shouldn’t have been surprised since Lady Alerie was born a Hightower, and that she was the daughter of Lord Leyton. She talked a lot with Mira about Oldtown and her family during their stay, and she kept talking about it on their way to Oldtown since she decided to accompany them at the last minute. Mira gave some news about Margaery in return and Lady Tyrell spoke with her and Sera for most of the journey.

The last days had been more difficult for Mira. She didn’t know what to expect from her future husband. Lady Alerie only gave her general comments about her nephew. She didn’t seem to know him well. Mira had managed to keep a calm behavior in Sera’s presence, but she was afraid all the same. Finally, they had arrived at Oldtown.
Mira had read the *Wonders made by man* Rodrik sent her long ago. The Hightower, the seat of House Hightower, was among them. It was the highest structure made by man in all the Seven Kingdoms, even higher than the Wall. Some people even said it was possible to see the Wall from the top of the tower, but descriptions in books were nothing when you saw it with your own eyes. The Hightower dominated the city of Oldtown in its center, a great beacon at the top to guide ships into its ports. Mira never saw something so high. It cast a shadow on a great part of the city. That would be her new home soon.

They travelled through the cobbled streets of Oldtown in the carriage. To the opposite of King’s Landing, Oldtown was very well organized. Roads and streets were paved and the wheels didn’t get stuck in the mud like it often happened in the capital. Most of the buildings were made of stone, and there was no stench. This place was so different from King’s Landing. It was also very different from Ironrath. Mira would never be able to feel alone here. She didn’t find this thought very comforting.

Lady Alerie told her about the best places to visit in the city and promised to show Mira everything in time. After a long perambulation through alleys, streets and avenues, all of them paved, they arrived at wharves. Mira could see very well the Hightower on Battle Island right before them. No one could miss it.

“This is one of the many anchorages where we can take safe passage to the island,” Margaery’s mother explained. “It seems there is already a ship waiting for us.”

Mira looked through the window of their carriage and saw it was true. A boat was waiting for them with the sigil of House Hightower on its sail. When their carriage with its guard stopped, Lady Alerie Tyrell was the first one to leave it since she was the highest ranking lady of them all. Mira followed and Sera was last. Lady Tyrell walked in the direction of the men waiting for them. They were five, one standing before them, crossed arms, with the sigil of the Hightowers on his breastplate. Mira would say he was in the fifties. His serious face turned to smile when Lady Alerie walked to him and hugged him tightly.

“Baelor!”

“Glad to see you again, little sister.”

Mira realized she was before the heir to Hightower, the father of her betrothed. He would be her father too very soon. Mira remained behind as the sister and the brother talked about their families and how they were. After a minute, Lady Tyrell turned to her and Ser Baelor’s gaze followed her movement. The queen’s mother went to Mira and took her by the arm, leading her before the heir to Hightower.

“Baelor, I present you Lady Mira Forrester, the handmaiden and a great friend of my daughter the queen. Lady Mira, this is my eldest brother, Ser Baelor Hightower. He is the father of the man you’re going to marry.”

Ser Baelor was still smiling. Mira stepped forward and curtsied before the man. “Ser Baelor.”

“Lady Mira. This is a pleasure to finally meet you. My sister and her daughter spoke highly of you. I can see what they said about your beauty wasn’t exaggerated. My son Gerold is more than eager to meet you.”

“You’re very kind, ser. I can’t wait to meet your son.”

“Then let’s not lose one more moment. The ship is waiting for us. Follow me.”
They embarked on the ship and sailed for the island. Ser Baelor and Lady Alerie spoke to her all the way, telling her how kind, gentle, brave, handsome, comely and of good company Ser Gerold Hightower was. Mira tried to listen, but it was difficult with the Hightower growing before her. The Red Keep was nothing when compared to it. The ship floated easily to the island and berthed on wharves very similar to those they just left. Baelor Hightower helped all the ladies, Lady Alerie, Mira, and even Sera, to get out of the ship, reaching out for them with his arm.

They followed smooth pathways along the battlements that led to the entrance of the tower. Many people of various ages were waiting for them here, but the one who caught her attention was an old man sitting in a sumptuous chair at the top of the few steps that led to the great doors of Hightower. Mira would say he was about the same age than Lady Olenna. He rose from his seat with the help of a cane as they approached and Lady Tyrell went to her father to kiss him on the two cheeks.

“Alerie. How good to see you again. It’s been years now.”

“Yes, Father. And it seems I will assist to another marriage very soon after the two of my daughter.”

Lord Leyton went to look at the people behind his daughter. His eldest son stepped forward. “Father, I present you Lady Mira Forrester.”

Mira stepped forward too and curtsied. “My lord.”

She saw from the corner of her eyes Lord Leyton walking quietly to her with his cane. “Look at me, child.” Mira brought up her face and looked at the old lord’s eyes. He seemed to examine her. After a moment, he smiled. “I guess my granddaughter the queen chooses well her handmaidens. Welcome to Hightower, Lady Mira. I hope you’ll enjoy life here.”

“Up to now, I don’t know how I couldn’t.”

The comment she made brought a little laugh to Lord Leyton. In the meantime, Ser Baelor had climbed the steps and came with a young man with short brown hair who had to be around Mira’s age. He had blue eyes and a long face. He wasn’t excessively handsome, but he wasn’t without charm either.

“Lady Mira,” Ser Baelor began, “I present you my son, Gerold.”

So here was the man she would marry. Mira had curtsied before him and he had awkwardly bowed in response after a moment. He was staring at Mira with an open mouth. It was quite unsettling for Mira and she didn’t know what to think of it. The presentations hadn’t lasted very long since Lord Leyton asked quite quickly afterwards to Lady Elys, the only daughter of Ser Baelor, to accompany Mira to her rooms.

In the days that followed, Mira mostly spent her time with Sera and Elys Hightower. The only daughter of the heir to House Hightower just celebrated her seventeenth name day, so she had the same age than Mira. She had a very sharp tongue and told her opinion about everything. Mira thought she was testing her to see how she would react to her remarks, but Mira knew how to keep calm in every situation, and Lady Elys seemed frustrated to not be able to have Mira react to her misplaced words. However, she enjoyed Mira’s well placed replies to her declarations. Mira also met Lady Rhonda Rowan, Ser Baelor’s wife, and his two other sons, Altos and Garlan.

However, in the two weeks before the wedding, Mira seldom spoke with her betrothed. Gerold Hightower didn’t seem eager to spend time with her. They had one conversation two days after her arrival as they walked together in the gardens of Hightower. He had mostly complimented her on her beauty and asked her a few questions about her time as Margaery’s handmaiden, but he hadn’t
looked as if he wanted to speak with her. He kept looking at her with a fascination Mira hadn’t been
able to decipher. A few times, she caught him looking at her while she spent time with Sera or Elys,
but he went away when he realized she had seen him.

Mira didn’t really know what to think of her soon to be husband. He looked like a respectable
knight, but Mira didn’t know much about him. The little she knew about Ser Gerold Hightower, she
learned it through her discussions with his parents, his sister and her brothers. Mostly, she knew he
was a good man, but nothing more. She hoped to learn more about him through their marriage, but
before that, there was the wedding.

Mira was somewhat both excited and terrified at the prospect of getting married today. The
Hightowers seemed like good people from what she saw up to now. Their castle was very huge,
comfortable and had many interesting things to appreciate, and she knew she would appreciate much
more to become a Hightower than a Whitehill. However, there was a great bitter taste in her mouth.
After this night, her family name would disappear to live only in history books. She would be the last
Forrester of all time, but she had no choice. She knew a long time ago she would have to marry one
day or another. What saddened her more than anything else was that her family wouldn’t be there.
Her mother sent her south so she may learn the ways of the Seven Kingdoms below Moat Cailin and
eventually marry a southern lord. House Branfield, her mother’s house, was entirely destroyed at the
end of Robert’s Rebellion because they fought for the Targaryens, safe for her mother and her uncle
Malcolm, but her mother still had connections in the south and managed to find her a place in
Highgarden when Mira was still thirteen.

The dream of her mother had become reality. Mira would marry a knight from the south, but her
mother wouldn’t be there to see it. Nor her father. Nor anyone of her family. They were all gone. If
only Margaery had been present, but as queen, she had to remain in King’s Landing with the king.
At least Sera was here, but Mira would have been happier of her presence if she was still betrothed to
Lord Tarwick. Sera looked happy for her, and Mira believed her friend when she said she was
happy, but Mira knew Sera also hid some bitterness since Mira was getting married while she
remained unwed. Mira wished her marriage took place under better circumstances.

“Here we are. You’re ready.” Sera had completed the arrangement of her hair.

Mira left her seat to look at her reflection in the glass she had. Her black and white wedding gown
couldn’t have been more suited. These were the colors of her family’s sigil. At the same time, the
white symbolized her virginity while the black showed she was still mourning the loss of her family.
Without the plunging neckline, Mira would have found her gown perfect. Her hair were also very
well arranged. Sera did a very good job. Margaery would have liked it.

Mira caught Sera’s reflection behind her in the glass. She was smiling, though some regret showed
through it. “I’m sorry you’re not to the one getting married, Sera.”

Sera’s smile faded. “Please, Mira. It’s your wedding. You should enjoy it. Don’t ruin it because you
pity me. There’s nothing both of us can do about it.”

Mira turned to face her friend and smiled empathically at her. “Alright. But I only accept to enjoy my
wedding if you enjoy it.”

Sera chuckled weakly. “How couldn’t I? My best friend is getting married. You can count on me.”
After a moment, Sera threw her arms around Mira’s shoulders and hugged her tightly. Mira returned
the hug after she recovered her breath. “I’m so happy for you, Mira. So happy.”

“Thank you, Sera. But unless you want to ruin the hair you just arranged, I would suggest you to
back away.”
Sera pulled away immediately. “Oh no. I hope I haven’t undone anything.”

Sera Durwell went immediately to examine Mira’s hair on all sides and from every possible angles. Mira wanted to laugh at her friend, but she kept it inside and simply smiled. Sera didn’t notice the smile, occupied like she was to check her hair. Sera worked so long on them and thought for such a long time about the way to braid and brush Mira’s hair for the wedding that it became an obsession these last days. The only thought that Mira’s hair could be ruined caused her to panic. It was funny in some way to see Sera more preoccupied by the bride’s hair than the actual bride. Sera finally stopped to turn around her and sighed in relief.

“Everything is alright. Everyone will envy you.”

Mira sniggered. “I doubt it. I’m not Margaery.”

Mira’s handmaiden chose this moment to enter her room. The Hightowers assigned her to Mira’s service after she arrived, even though Sera almost acted as her handmaiden. However, Sera was officially only a friend who came for the wedding and had no official position, and Mira didn’t want to consider her as her handmaiden after they spent so much time together in Margaery’s service. It wouldn’t be fair for Sera. She had her own chamber, though much smaller than Mira, and spent most of her days with her, and liked to help Mira prepare for each day. For the wedding day, she had insisted to be the only one to help Mira prepare. As for Mira, a friend helped her to get ready, not a servant.

“Lady Mira,” the girl said, “Ser Gerold would like to speak with you for a moment. Alone if that’s possible.”

Mira looked at Sera who nodded to mean she didn’t object. “Of course. Please leave us, Sera.”

“The wedding will start very soon. I’ll be waiting for you at the litter,” Sera said as she left.

As soon as she was gone through the door, Ser Gerold Hightower came in and closed the door behind him. He wore a costly grey doublet with some red on the arms for the occasion. He just remained here, looking at her with the same expression he had the day they met. Mira had the impression his eyes lingered on the neckline of her gown. A few minutes passed before he spoke.

“Lady Mira, let me tell you… You’re beautiful.”

Mira answered while smiling. “Thank you, ser.”

“Please, call me Gerold. We are going to be wed very soon after all.”

“Please forgive me. Thank you, Gerold.”

“There’s… there’s nothing to forgive, my lady.”

“If you want me to call you by your name, then you should do the same with me,” Mira pointed. Her betrothed chuckled and lowered his head for a moment.

“Yes, you’re right. Forgive me, Mira.”

“There’s nothing to forgive.” They both chuckled at her words. Mira realized he was uncomfortable and anxious. Another moment went away and she decided to break it herself this time.

“You wanted to speak to me?”
“Yes.” Again there was a silence. “Sorry, Mira. I just… I was never very good at it, and… I just wanted to tell you… I never thought I would marry someone like you.”

The declaration could be interpreted in various ways. “I guess I must take it as a compliment.”

He seemed to realize what she implied. “Yes, of course. I never meant… Sorry. I have never been good talking with women. Even with my cousins.” He breathed deeply. “I just wanted to ask you… Are you happy here?”

“Yes, I am. Hightower and Oldtown are very beautiful places. More beautiful than King’s Landing. They rival with Highgarden.”

That brought a smile on the knight’s face. “I hope I’ll be able to make you happy, my lady.”

“I hope I’ll make you happy too, Gerold,” Mira replied. “But you forgot to just call me by my name.”

He looked ashamed. “Yes, I did. I’m really sorry, again.” He walked toward her slowly. Mira had the impression he walked as if he was afraid of her. “May I escort you to your litter?” He offered his arm for her to take.

Mira smiled to show her agreement and she took his arm. They left her room. When she thought about that, it was probably the last time she would spend in it. She would live in the same rooms than her husband after the wedding. They came down the many stairs in silence. The man who would be her husband let her go when time came to enter her litter with Sera.

The wedding would take place at the Starry Sept of Oldtown and there was some distance before they arrived at their destination. Mira didn’t talk on the way. She was about to marry after all. A new life was waiting for her at the end of this path. Finally they arrived before the sept near the Honeywine, the large river that crossed Oldtown. Mira thought that weddings of people from House Hightower probably attracted a great crowd, but it didn’t seem to be the case today. Perhaps it was because it was only the wedding of a thirdborn son of the heir of Hightower, or perhaps because he was marrying a Northerner. Mira knew only too well the prejudice against people of the North in the Reach. She suffered it years ago when she arrived at Highgarden. They stopped before the Starry Sept and left the litter.

“Wait a minute, Mira.” Sera took a black cloak in the litter. When she unfolded it, Mira saw a white tree with a sword in its heart on the black ground. It was the sigil of her family. Her maiden cloak. “I helped to sew it. I hope it’s representative.”

Mira smiled fondly at her friend. “Yes, it is. Thank you, Sera.”

Her friend helped her to don the cloak. Mira hugged it against her. It would probably be the last time she would bear her family’s sigil. She walked toward the steps of the large sept. Ser Baelor Hightower was waiting for her at the beginning of them.

“Lady Mira,” he said when she was close enough to him, “I know your father should lead you to my son, but since he cannot be here, I hope you’ll consent to give me this honor.” He had a sorry expression on his face.

“I consent. Thank you, Ser Baelor.” She took his arm and they walked toward the sept.

The climb to the entrance seemed to last forever. Mira’s stomach fluttered and she had to breathe deeper to control her breathing. Step by step, they approached the huge doors of the Starry Sept. It wasn’t high like the Great Sept of Baelor, but it was very impressive all the same. Before the
construction of the Great Sept by Baelor the Blessed, it had been the seat of the High Septon for more than a thousand years. Mira would be wed in this place. They finally reached the huge doors of the sept and, after a moment, they opened.

Mira knew from the weddings she assisted in the capital (the wedding of Sansa and Lord Tyrion, and the two weddings of Margaery) that a great light entered the Sept and probably blinded the people. It could give an impressive first vision of the bride when she would enter the Sept. Margaery had been wonderful the two times she married at this moment, and Sansa had nothing to envy her on that account, but Mira wondered what impression she gave. She wondered if the effect of the colors of her clothes would be good. She wore black and white on her gown, just like on her cloak, and she knew that her skin was whiter than most people in the Reach and her hair black like ink. Black and white. Would that make a pretty sight? Mira didn’t concern herself so much about her appearance usually. She did, but less than the other people in Highgarden and King’s Landing. However, today was her wedding, and she was anxious about anything that could go wrong.

The walk down the alley to the marriage altar took an eternity. Mira walked slowly, looking right before her and displaying a discreet smile. A bride had to smile for her wedding. She spotted Sera smiling widely at her with Alerie Tyrell at her side on the left while most of the Hightowers were on the right. Elys Hightower had her usual wicked knowing smile. Lord Leyton was standing straight with the help of his cane. Most of the people were smiling, but the one who smiled the most was her future husband waiting for her between the statues of the Mother and the Father. Ser Gerold Hightower looked happy like a maester about to be chained or a knight about to be knighted. However, Mira thought she saw some nervousness in his smile. She smiled back at him, trying to reassure him this way.

However, what caught the most Mira’s attention weren’t the people who were present. It was the people who weren’t there. There was only one person Mira was very close to who was present, and it was Sera. Mira had never been especially close to Margaery’s mother. That wasn’t supposed to be like this. Mira’s family should have been there. Her mother had always wanted her to marry a southern knight or lord. Her wish had been fulfilled, and she wasn’t present to see it realized. Her father wasn’t there either, no more than Talia or her brothers, or her uncle Malcolm. Even Gared Tuttle wasn’t here. Perhaps he was still alive, but if that was the case he was at the Wall, at the other end of Westeros. Even Margaery and Sansa weren’t there. The first one was in King’s Landing, the second one at Casterly Rock. Mira wished more people close to her could be here.

She climbed the first row of steps to the altar at Ser Baelor’s left. When they reached the middle of the steps, Ser Baelor released her from his arm and went behind her to remove the cloak from her back. Mira closed her eyes as she felt the white tree of House Forrester leave her. She would never wear it again. The heir of Hightower went down the stairs with the cloak under his arm, leaving Mira with the man who would soon be her husband. She took the arm he offered her, standing at his left, and they climbed the last steps to the septon waiting for them.

“You may now cloak the bride and bring her under your protection,” the septon declared when they stood before him.

The second son of Ser Baelor, Ser Garlan, handed the cloak to his brother. Mira turned her back to Ser Gerold so he could put the cloak on her shoulders. Again she closed her eyes when she felt the grey cloak with a white tower crowned with flames fall on her shoulders. She felt the hands of her betrothed shaking as he cloaked her. Mira opened her eyes again, breathing deeply. She tried to think about the fact the two cloaks weren’t so different. From dark with a white tree to grey with a white tower, that wasn’t such a change. She turned to face the septon again.

“My lords, my ladies,” he began, “we stand here in the sight of gods and men to witness the union of
man and wife. One flesh, one heart, one soul, now and forever.” He continued the usual speech for every wedding until he showed a white ribbon to them. Mira and Ser Gerold took each other’s hand and the septon tied the ribbon in a knot around it. “Let it be known that Mira of House Forrester and Gerold of House Hightower are one heart, one flesh, one soul. Cursed be he who would seek to tear them asunder. In the sight of the Seven, I hereby seal these two souls, binding them as one for eternity.” He untied the ribbon and Mira kept her hand in Gerold’s, still feeling the shaking of her betrothed. She remained calm. “Look upon each other and say the words.”

Mira turned to be face to face with the man she was marrying. She recited her vows as Gerold recited his. “Father, Smith, Warrior, Mother, Maiden, Crone, Stranger. I am his and he is mine. From this day, until the end of my days.”

Mira noticed a shining in the knight’s eyes as he said the following words. “With this kiss, I pledge my love.”

He didn’t divert his eyes from her as he spoke and tenderly touched her cheek with his right hand. Mira gave in and kissed a man for the first time in her life. The people present applauded as the kiss lingered. When they broke it, they turned to face the assistance, smiling widely. Mira and her husband left the Starry Sept, followed by all the people of the assistance and a litter brought them back to the Hightower where a feast would take place.

Most of the people went to their rooms to change their clothes or, and Mira knew it was the main reason, to satisfy natural needs. The change of clothes was only an excuse most of the time. However, the groom and the bride couldn’t allow themselves this luxury. They had to go directly to the wedding feast, without any opportunity to go anywhere else before.

On the way to the Hightower and to the feast, Gerold spoke more than she ever saw him do. He asked her questions about everything on her, from her favorite food and colors to her time in Highgarden. Mira was surprised by this. He never seemed very interested in her before, but now he was drinking her words. She found it unsettling, but she had to admit she liked it. She tried to ask questions about him in return, but he seemed too eager to know more about her and barely allowed her to place any word out of her answers to his own questions.

Mira abandoned the grey cloak of Hightower she was cloaked in to her handmaiden when they arrived. She walked with her husband to the dais in the Great Hall where the feast would take place. Some of the guests had arrived to the Hightower before them to be present when they would arrive and most of them were there when Mira took her place. The people on the dais were Hightowers for the majority, including Gerold’s brothers, sister, father, mother and grandfather. Lady Tyrell was there as well, and Sera too. Mira had managed to convince Lord Leyton to let Sera sit on the dais since she was the closest person she had for a family here.

The wedding feast consisted of seven courses with various bards, musicians and singers entertaining the people. The first course was a mushroom soup with rosemary as flavoring. There was a first toast to the newlyweds when it was served, and Mira was sure it wouldn’t be the last one. Mira remembered the first service of the wedding of Margaery to Joffrey had been a similar soup, though of a much more refined type. She didn’t complain about it. After the pomp and the luxury of King’s Landing, she appreciated something simpler.

“Was the soup to your taste, Mira?” Gerold asked her when they had emptied their bowls.

“Yes. Thank you.”

He looked a little hesitant when he asked her another question. “You surely weren’t used to that in the North. Weren’t you?”
“No,” she confirmed. “Life is much less refined there. My family lived very comfortably and we ate well, but we didn’t have the possibility to make too much refined things. Life can be hard in the North. Many people live from hunting and fishing. Lands are not very fertile.”

Gerold nodded in understanding. “My father had a sister. I think her name was Lynesse. She married some northern lord at the Tourney of Lannisport. She left with him but turned miserable where they lived. My father doesn’t remember the name of the lord, but I think he came from an island.”

The mention of the Tourney of Lannisport brought back memories to Mira. *I met your father once. At the Tourney at Lannisport. Even then he didn’t trust Roose Bolton. We only spoke briefly, but your father struck me as an honourable man.* Lord Tyrion’s words resonated in her head, but she managed to put them aside. “Could it be Bear Island?” she asked.

“Yes, I think that’s it. Bear Island. They eventually left Westeros and went to the east because the lord started to sell people into slavery. We don’t know what happened to them.”

“I’m sorry for your aunt. Bear Island is a very little island with very few people. And it’s in the north of the North. Life is quite difficult there, even for the lords and ladies. It can be difficult to get used to life there when we come from the south. But I’m quite used to that kind of things now. I spent enough time in Highgarden and King’s Landing. The soup reminds me of the one they served at the beginning at the feast for the royal wedding.”

“Really?”

“Yes. The one between Queen Margaery and King Joffrey,” Mira specified.

“Of course. I should have known. You were the handmaiden of the queen at this moment.”

Mira smiled timidly. “Not really.”

Gerold looked at her, puzzled. “What do you mean? You were the queen’s handmaiden, weren’t you?”

“No at this time. I was at the service of Lady Sansa Lannister at this moment. The queen put me to her service for some time because she lacked a handmaiden.”

They didn’t have time to continue their conversation since the second service arrived. It was essentially a salad with lemons, pomegranates and a red sauce. Mira’s husband started again to ask her question about her life at Highgarden and in King’s Landing. Between the questions, they received the visit of many guests who congratulated them and gave them their best hopes. The third service was composed of shrimps covered of garlic with three different sauces. They were probably fished in the Whispering Sound, the large bay where the Honeywine emptied right where Oldtown stood.

Musicians started to come on the floor to play their songs one by one. The songs weren’t so different from the ones Mira heard in Highgarden or King’s Landing. The fourth service arrived. This time it was chicken soaked in a tomato sauce along with potatoes, lettuce and corn. They brought them wine from the Arbor. Gerold was surprised when she told him it wasn’t the first time she drank of it. He looked impressed by the fact she had been so close to Margaery, and more a friend than a handmaiden to the queen.

While they were at the middle of the fourth service, a woman with a harp came with many other musicians. The song caught Mira’s attention.
On either side of the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the world and meet the sky;
And thro' the field the road run by
To many-towered Camelot;
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow
Round an island there below,
The island of Shalott.

Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver
Thro' the wave that runs for ever
By the island in the river
Flowing down to Camelot.

Four grey walls, and four grey towers,
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle imbowsers
The Lady of Shalott.

Only reapers, reaping early,
In among the bearded barley
Hear a song that echoes cheerly
From the river winding clearly
Down to tower'd Camelot;
And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers '"tis the fairy
The Lady of Shalott."
There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay,
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay
To look down to Camelot.

She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
The Lady of Shalott.

And moving through a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near
Winding down to Camelot;
And sometimes thro' the mirror blue
The Knights come riding two and two.
She hath no loyal Knight and true,
The Lady Of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror's magic sights,
For often thro' the silent nights
A funeral, with plumes and lights
And music, went to Camelot;
Or when the Moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed.
"I am half sick of shadows," said
The Lady Of Shalott.

A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,
He rode between the barley sheaves,
The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves,
And flamed upon the brazen greaves
Of bold Sir Lancelot.

A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd
To a lady in his shield,
That sparkled on the yellow field,
Beside remote Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd;
On burnish'd hooves his war-horse trode;
From underneath his helmet flow'd
His coal-black curls as on he rode,
As he rode back to Camelot.

From the bank and from the river
He flashed into the crystal mirror,
"Tirra Lirra, " by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces taro' the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She looked down to Camelot.

Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror cracked from side to side;
"The curse is come upon me," cried
The Lady of Shalott.

In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining.

Heavily the low sky raining
Over towered Camelot;
Down she came and found a boat
Beneath a willow left afloat,
And round about the prow she wrote
The Lady of Shalott

And down the river's dim expanse
Like some bold seer in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance -
With a glassy countenance
Did she look to Camelot.

And at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain and down she lay;
The broad stream bore her far away,
The Lady of Shalott.

Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darkened wholly,
Turn'd to towered Camelot.
For ere she reach'd upon the tide
The first house by the water-side,
Singing in her song she died,

The Lady of Shalott.

Under tower and balcony,
By garden-wall and gallery,
A gleaming shape she floated by,
Dead-pale between the houses high,

Silent into Camelot.

Out upon the wharfs they came,
Knight and Burgher, Lord and Dame,

And round the prow they read her name,

The Lady of Shalott.

Who is this? And what is here?
And in the lighted palace near
Died the sound of royal cheer;

And they crossed themselves for fear,
All the Knights at Camelot;

But Lancelot mused a little space
He said, "She has a lovely face;

God in his mercy lend her grace,

The Lady of Shalott

After the song was over Gerold began to explain her something. “This woman is very popular in Oldtown. She’s asked to play at every feast and event. I heard she travelled through all Westeros, from Dorne to the Wall.”

Mira was quite surprised by this. “I never heard of her.”

“Apparently she only played for the smallfolk when she travelled. That’s why she’s not well-known among the nobleborn, but here in Oldtown, she’s barely less than a legend.”
Before Mira could ask more, another song began from the same woman.

*The thundering waves are calling me home unto you*

*The pounding sea is calling me home unto you*

*On a dark new year's night*

*On the west coast of Clare*

*I heard your voice singing*

*Your eyes danced the song*

*Your hands played the tune*

*T'was a vision before me.*

We left the music behind and the dance carried on

*As we stole away to the seashore*

*We smelt the brine, felt the wind in our hair*

*And with sadness you paused.*

Suddenly I knew that you'd have to go

*Your world was not mine, your eyes told me so*

*Yet it was there I felt the crossroads of time*

*And I wondered why.*

As we cast our gaze on the tumbling sea

*A vision came o'er me*

*Of thundering hooves and beating wings*

*In clouds above.*

As you turned to go I heard you call my name,

*You were like a bird in a cage spreading its wings to fly*
"The old ways are lost," you sang as you flew
And I wondered why.

The thundering waves are calling me home unto you
The pounding sea is calling me home unto you
The thundering waves are calling me home unto you
The pounding sea is calling me home unto you

People nearly exploded in applause when the singer was done. Talia would have liked to sing this song. The fifth service arrived not long after the end of her last song. They ate various fruits with white cream. Mira noticed some people started to find it difficult to eat more. There were even more people who were drunk. Toasts multiplied. The sixth service was the gigantic pigeon pie they brought. It wasn’t huge like the one for Margaery’s wedding, but it was huge all the same. At least Mira’s husband used a common sword to slice the pie, and not a Valyrian steel sword. The seventh and last service was made of pastries, some rich and others light. Of course, more wine was brought to wash it down. There were already some people about to fall asleep on the tables right before them, and the celebrations weren’t over. Wine would continue to flow until late in the night.

Since the dinner was over, it was time to dance. Mira and Gerold were the ones to lead the dance since this was their marriage. They started to dance alone, everyone’s eyes fixed on them. Mira knew how to dance quite well. Her mother showed her when she was a child at Ironrath, and she had the possibility to improve her dancing talents after she arrived in the south. Feasts and celebrations were far from rare both in Highgarden and the capital. Her husband seemed a little unsure at the beginning, but with time he gained assurance. Their movements were fluid and well arranged, and soon other people joined them to dance, beginning by Ser Baelor and his wife, Lady Rhonda Rowan. As they changed of partners, Mira found herself dancing with all Gerold’s uncles and his brothers, and with a few bannermen of the Hightowers. Altos Hightower, the eldest son of Ser Baelor, proved to be a little too much patronizing for her taste. The second brother, Garlan, was kinder and wished her all the happiness in the world with his brother, saying he was a good man. Garth Greysteel didn’t talk much. Ser Gunthor and Ser Humfrey, the two other uncles of her husband, proved to be of better company, though Ser Humfrey obviously needed dance lessons. Ser Baelor told her he never saw his son so happy in years.

Mira had to admit the man she just married looked more than happy. His lips were fixed in a smile that could only widen, his eyes were shining like Mira rarely saw eyes shine, and she had the impression he always kept an eye on her, even when the dance separated them.

After a long time, Mira left the dancing floor to take some rest. She noticed Elys Hightower drinking near a table full of lemon cakes. Since Sera was still dancing, Mira went to her new sister-in-law.

“Elys.”

“Mira. Or should I call you sister now?”

Both chuckled. Mira thought about Talia. “If you want. Shouldn’t you be dancing?” Gerold’s sister hadn’t gone on the dancing floor up to now. She remained in her corner, observing the others.
“Why should I? It’s not my wedding. And I never really felt attracted by the dance. I have other talents and interests.”

“Yes. I know your greatest skills reside in your tongue and not in your feet and legs.”

Elys’s smile was close to being mischievous. “I like to say what I think. No more, no less. And you like to subtly put back people to their place with the right words.”

“It’s better to win over people with words they can do nothing against.”

“But it’s not amusing like telling them straightforward who they are and how things really are.” Elys’s smile didn’t leave her face. “For example, do you want to know what I think about your wedding?”

“After two weeks with you, I know my answer won’t matter.”

“Then I will tell you. The ceremony is great, but to be honest, if you wanted a good marriage, you would have been better to marry Altos or Garlan. Altos is insufferable, but he will be heir to Hightower when my grandfather dies. As for Garlan, he’s better than Gerold at almost everything. Too bad for you the two of them were already married.”

“Gerold is not so bad,” Mira replied.

“No, but he’s middling. He doesn’t have any particular talent. He’s middling at everything. And he’s a thirdborn son.”

“And I am a thirdborn child. I don’t really care about it, Elys.”

Elys Hightower shrugged. “As you wish.” Mira’s sister-in-law brought back her attention to her cup of wine.

To Mira, it wasn’t really important that she married a thirdborn son or that her husband was not extraordinary. She had asked for this kind of marriage. It was far better than the betrothal Ser Kevan tried to arrange with Torrhen Whitehill. Mira had the best claim on Ironrath in all the Seven Kingdoms. When time would come, the Hightowers could try to take back her home and Mira would be the Lady of Ironrath. If her home wouldn’t be the seat of House Forrester any longer, at least House Hightower of Ironrath would come from a Forrester and it would be far better than to have a Whitehill ruling the place where she grew up. Ser Gerold Hightower didn’t seem to be evil, and for Mira that was enough. If Margaery could accept to be married with Tommen, then why wouldn’t she be able to marry Gerold?

Sera left the dancing floor to come to meet them and congratulate Mira. They spoke for some time about the guests, the decorations, the ceremony, Oldtown and many more or less important subjects until Mira and Sera both decided to join back the dance, leaving Elys to drink alone. Mira noticed red was beginning to flourish on the lady’s cheeks.

Mira managed to find back her husband who was talking with his brother Garlan. He was still smiling and his smile only grew when he saw her. They returned to dance as musicians played slower songs. Mira supposed the end of the day was coming. The dances were now without changing of partners and Mira ended dancing with her husband for a very long time as a consequence. She didn’t know how many compliments he told her, but he did a lot. The world seemed to grow smaller as Mira focused on the dance. It was her wedding, so best to enjoy it.

The music stopped after one more dance was completed. Mira asked Gerold for a pause and he followed her outside the dancing floor like most of the people. It was at this moment that Elys
Hightower decided to show everyone she existed.

“Aye, everyone! Good dance! You really danced and ate and drank very well.” She walked to the middle of the dancing floor, a cup of wine in her hand. She was drunk for real now. Mira was afraid of what the lady could do, but she smiled in amusement a little all the same.

“Don’t worry, Mira,” Gerold told her. “She always puts a show like this. Every time. I just hope she won’t say something that will ruin all of it.” He tried to be reassuring, but after everything she saw in King’s Landing, and a few things she witnessed in Highgarden, Mira was ready for everything. She wasn’t sure something could surprise her anymore.

“So, we have a septon who said prayers, we had vows, a cloak, a feast, wine, food, dance and, more important than everything else, we had a pigeon pie!” Some people laughed at the jest. “But, there’s a part of a wedding that wasn’t completed yet.” Mira shuddered. She had a good idea of what was coming. “It’s time my brother proves he is a man! What do you say, Lord grandfather?”

Lord Hightower still sat on the dais. He couldn’t dance with his cane. There was a silence, then people started to cheer and to pound their cups and fists on the tables. “To bed! To bed! To bed! To bed!”

It continued for a time. Mira glanced at her husband. He looked… afraid. If Mira was in some way uncomfortable with what would come, it seemed he was even more than her. Mira knew it would happen. That was part of a wedding ceremony. Better to face it while keeping the head up. Cheering, pounding and shouting continued for a long moment, until finally Leyton Hightower rose and asked people for silence with a gesture of his hand.

“Well, my son and heir Baelor has three sons. Two of them are already married. It’s time for the last one to be too. Let’s bed them!” He clapped his hands and people burst into even more cheers.

“TO BED! TO BED! TO BED! TO BED! TO BED! TO BED!”

People were advancing on them now. Mira cast her eyes on Gerold and put a reassuring smile. She walked ahead, slowly and graciously, head up, looking straight before her. The men who converged on her let her pass, and then she was seized by the arms and legs and put on about ten men’s shoulders. She looked behind and saw Gerold being lifted by a few women. Sera and Elys were among them. Mira couldn’t hold a giggle at his expression. It was a mix of excitement and fear.

“TO BED! TO BED! TO BED! TO BED! TO BED! TO BED!”

People at the feast kept shouting and clapping as she was carried to her wedding bed. Soon, they were far from the Great Hall and the sounds of the people left at the feast receded until they disappeared. Shouts were replaced by ribald suggestions by the people who carried the groom and the bride. On the way, the men removed her clothes one after one. When they finally reached the bridal chamber, only her smallclothes were left on her and she was dropped in the marriage bed. Her husband followed not long after, only wearing smallclothes too. The men and women left them and closed the door behind, leaving Mira alone with her husband. She observed him like he observed her. He was approximately the same height than her. He wasn’t very muscled, but he wasn’t frail either. In his eyes, Mira thought she saw hunger, but also shyness as he looked at her.

“Well, it went better than I thought.” He tried to laugh, but barely managed to do it. Mira chuckled as well. She kept looking at him, waiting for what he would do. After a moment he looked at her from her head to toe, he brought a hand on her cheek and looked directly in her eyes. “You’re beautiful, Mira.”
Gerold Hightower approached his head from hers and kissed her. Mira returned the kiss the best she could. She never kissed a man before this day. She was probably one of the very few women in Highgarden who never at least kissed someone else. Despite her friendship with Margaery, there was one thing in which Mira would never have followed the queen: to have sexual relationships before her wedding. She was a maid. The hand of her husband wandered from her cheek to her shoulder and her arm. Soon Mira was lying on the sheets of their bed with him over her, still kissing her lips. The kisses felt good. They nearly struggled to get inside the bed covers and the blankets. Her husband didn’t want to leave her lips even a single second. His kisses became more insistent. He also struggled to get her smallclothes out of her. From what she heard in Highgarden and her discussions with Margaery, she guessed that meant he hadn’t been with other women very frequently. He released himself from his own smallclothes very soon. They were both naked now. He consummated their marriage immediately.

It hurt. It hurt a lot. Mira knew that was the way things went the first time, but nothing prepared her to the pain. At least it didn’t last long. After a short moment, he laid on the bed next to her while Mira was trying to recover from the encounter. She was a Forrester no longer. Now she was Mira Hightower. The thought nearly brought tears in her eyes. She only managed to keep them away thinking about the fact she may just have saved her family’s home from the Whitehills.

Their movements in the bed had put aside some of the blankets that covered them and Mira could see the blood where her thighs met. No one would doubt their marriage. Mira thought about Sansa whose marriage was still unconsummated, unless she finally decided to give in to Lord Tyrion. She turned her head on her left to look at her husband who was looking at her legs. There seemed to be a shock on his face.

“Did I hurt you?” He looked at her face, a worried expression in his face. “Are you alright?”

Mira tried to put away his worries. “Don’t worry. That’s what happens the first time. And you know now for sure that I was a maiden.”

She put on a smile despite the pain that lingered between her legs. Her husband smiled lightly. “I never doubted it.” The smile faded immediately. “I’m sorry. I’ve been too eager. I’ve… I’ve never been with a woman before.”

You must be one of the few ones in the Seven Kingdoms. At least at the south of Moat Cailin. Mira knew very well most of the men didn’t wait for their wedding to bed a woman. If her husband said the truth, he was among the exceptions. She raised a little and put a tender kiss on his cheek. “Don’t feel guilty. I’m your wife. You’re my husband. That’s what wife and husband do.”

He smiled back at her after a short moment where he seemed to process the things she just told him. He brought his hand again to her cheek, caressing it tenderly. Mira liked it much more than when he had been inside her.

“Mira.” Her eyes met his. He was looking intensively at her, a strange fascination plain on his face, but also something that looked like sadness but wasn’t sadness. “You know, when I saw you the first time, when you arrived, I couldn’t believe what I saw before me. I couldn’t believe you were the one I would marry. I just… I wasn’t expecting someone like you.”

Mira stopped her from chuckling but she smiled as she looked down. “What were you expecting?”

He looked ashamed. “I don’t know. There are… There aren’t many people from the North that come to Oldtown, and we don’t know them very much. I was afraid…” He took off his hand from her cheek and looked away. “I never had very much. Because I am the third son of my father. Most of the time, I’m left with nothing while my two brothers get everything. So, when my father told me I
would marry a Northerner… I just… I didn’t know who I was about to marry. And then I saw you.”
He faced her again, his eyes shining once more. “You were beautiful. You behaved very well, like a true lady, more than many women I met in my life. And I observed you for two weeks, and I still couldn’t believe you were real. You’re kind. You’re intelligent. You’re brave too. You need to be after you spoke to my sister like you did. And you’re probably the first person I met who was able to make her shut her mouth.”

He chuckled on the last remarks and Mira chuckled as well. She also reddened. No man really complimented and praised her this way before. When she looked back at him, he didn’t say a word. He just kept looking at her, and she did the same. Slowly, he approached of her and Mira closed her eyes when he got close enough. His forehead met hers. He was breathing heavily, and Mira’s heart had started to pound too. She could hear it.

“I love you, Mira.” She felt his lips approaching her own as his hot breath caressed them. “I love you so much.”

He kissed her again, tenderly, sweetly, softly. There was some aftertaste of wine and garlic in his mouth as she returned the kiss. Mira grew hungry for it, just like he was hungry for her mouth. First they were sitting on the bed, but with time Mira returned to her position when they became man and wife. He kept whispering her name. She liked it. When he took her for the second time, she wasn’t hurt like the first time. There was still some pain, but perhaps it was mostly remains from their first time. Essentially, it was uncomfortable, but not entirely unpleasant.

When they were done, they lied next to each other, breathing quickly. Mira rarely felt so exhausted in her life. She drifted away into sleep very quickly after pulling a blanket on her naked body. She slept well this night. No nightmare came to disturb her.

The next morning, Mira woke up as the sun came out and bathed her face with his light. She looked on her left to see her husband, his back turned on her. She didn’t dream. She was really married. Mira noticed an ache between her legs. She sat in the bed, keeping the blankets on her chest to hide her breasts, though when she thought about it, the only one present in that room was her husband, and they didn’t have anything to hide to each other now. Mira saw a dressing gown on a nearby chair. She left the bed, abandoning the blankets behind her and put the gown on her. She felt better that way. She noticed flowers on the floor around their bed. She wondered where they came from for a moment, but when she brought her right hand to her hair, she realized something was missing. She had a good idea who removed them. She looked at her husband, still sleeping.

Mira went to wash her face in a basin and took more time to observe the room where she was. It was cozy, with chairs, a large bed for two people, two tables including one with a game of Cyvasse. She had played to the game a few times when she lived at Highgarden. There was also a balcony. Mira went to it. Hightower really deserved its name. She was actually several hundred feet from the ground. She could see ships sailing in the Honeywine and the Whispering Sound from where she was, and she managed to find some buildings of the Citadel and the Starry Sept where she was wed yesterday. And it wasn’t stinking. Oldtown was a much better place to live than King’s Landing. From this altitude, the wind was quite strong and Mira’s hair were flying around a little. She stepped away from the balcony a little, but kept looking at the city of Oldtown.

Arms suddenly wrapped around her hips. Mira shrieked a little and tried to duck for a second, but she realized it was Gerold. He began to kiss her neck on the side, discarding some of her hair. Mira closed her eyes. She wasn’t going to send her husband away. Not after everything they did last night. A warm feeling of well-being and contentment filled her body, along with excitement.

“How’s my lady slept well?” he asked with a whispering sound that sent shivers on Mira’s back.
“Yes, she has. And her name is Mira. Remember,” she replied on a low voice.

He untied her dress and dropped it on the floor. For the first time, Mira moaned loudly. They went on the bed and joined. Everything felt good this time. She was relaxed, and his kisses all over her face and body filled her with joy and desire. Soon they were entangled around each other and a blur of pleasure seized her.

Mira lied among the sheets, blankets barely covering half of her legs. Her husband was no different from her. They needed some time to catch up their breath after such an expenditure of energy. Before Mira felt she had recovered, Gerold came back to kiss her in her neck, caressing her skin with his lips. Mira kept her eyes closed.

“You’re so lovely, Mira. So warm. So perfect.” After everything that happened within a single night and a single morning, Mira could only enjoy the words her husband said with such an enticing voice.

Her husband brought his head at the level of hers and laid his own body on hers. They kept kissing and whispering to each other. Mira let his name escape from her lips more than once. Was it how her mother and her father felt when they married? She didn’t know. She wasn’t born yet at this moment. At best Rodrik was on his way. Would a child be on his way in her belly after this night? They remained in that position for a very long time, without joining. They didn’t need it.

“Mira. You’re so good,” her husband said as he nibbled behind her ear. “I would spend my whole life with you.”

“You will,” she replied with a sleepy voice. “We’re married. Remember.”

“I know. But I would like to spend my whole life with you in this bed. Just with you.”

Mira chuckled. “I’m afraid your family won’t allow it.”

He looked at her. “What about today?”

“You think your father would like you to spend all the day here?”

“I don’t care if he likes it or not. I only care for you. Only you.”

They resumed their kissing. Mira never felt like this. She didn’t know for how long they remained there in each other’s arms. A servant came in at some moment to bring their breakfast, but Gerold sent her away with an angry voice before he dedicated all his attention to her again. When she thought they were reaching the middle of the day, Mira succeeded after a few failed attempts to convince her husband to let her leave their bed. Reluctantly, he let her leave and she put the dressing gown still lying on the floor on her shoulders. Mira then called a handmaiden so she could take a bath. She needed one after everything that happened since yesterday. The handmaiden who was at her service since she arrived brought buckets of hot water to the bathtub in an adjacent room and Mira washed herself. Her clothes were there and she could dress in a light blue gown.

Gerold had put some clothes on him when she came back and he went to take a bath too. The breakfast the servant brought earlier was still on the table and Mira helped herself with some lemon water. Images of the morning and the night were swirling in her head. More than once, she smiled at the thought of one thing or another. Her husband came out from the other room and joined her in the late breaking of their fast. Gerold seemed to consider seriously what he said before since they spent the whole day together in their rooms. Mira had received a few books during the breakfast last morning and started to read some of them, including a special copy of the Wonders made by man that Ser Garlan gave her. She noticed Gerold often spied on her as she read. They also played
Cyvasse, though both weren’t very good players, and they talked a lot. Mira managed to know more about her husband in a single day than in the two previous weeks.

Next morning, Mira left their rooms in the morning to break her fast with Sera. She had abandoned her friend long enough. Sera welcomed her quite warmly, but she seemed a little upset that Mira didn’t come to visit her yesterday.

“I’m sorry, Sera,” Mira apologized as she ate some eggs. “It wasn’t my decision, believe me.”

Sera looked intrigued by this. “It was your husband?”

Mira smiled thinly. “He didn’t forbid me to see you, but let’s say he was very insistent that we spent the whole day together without anybody else.”

Sera nearly burst into laughs. “And I thought you finally abandoned your septa’s attitude! So your husband kept you in your bed for all the day?”

“No,” Mira was quick to deny. “We just spent our time in our rooms. It’s good for knowing each other.”

“Of course.” Sera didn’t really seem to believe her. “So tell me. How was it?”

Mira sighed. “Sera, I’m not talking about this.”

“Come on. You were just wed. Loosen yourself a little. Everyone talks about these things. You remember the kissing games of Alla and Megga?”

“Yes, I do remember, Sera. They tried to convince me to join them one day. And I’m sure you remember the answer I gave them.”

Sera knew it and nodded. “Please, Mira. Give me a few details at least.”

Mira sighed. Sera was her friend. “You promise me to not repeat it to anybody? I don’t want everyone talking about it all around the castle.”

Sera smiled patronizingly. “Very well. I won’t talk about it to anybody. You have my word. Tell me now.”

Reluctantly, Mira told her what happened during her wedding night and the morning that followed. Before Sera’s insistence, she also added some details about the events of last night. Mira wouldn’t talk about it to anyone else, no one except Margaery one day if the queen ever asked her about it. But there was one person she would never talk about it to: Elys Hightower.

Chapter End Notes

For those who wonder why there was no death, no poison, no threat of gelding and no psychopath, I thought it was time to have a marriage where the worst thing that could happen was a drunken sister calling for the bedding ceremony. There are some marriages that must go on without major problems at some time, even in Game of Thrones.

The characters of Lord Leyton Hightower and his sons exist in the books, but the
children of Ser Baelor Hightower, including Mira's husband, are all characters I made myself. For Gerold Hightower, I took some inspiration from Quentyn Martell in the books, more on the psychological side than the physical one.

Again, the songs played at the wedding are real:
- The Lady of Shalott by Loreena McKennitt (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QguMgi_lq0)
- The Old Ways by Loreena McKennitt (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4PC451UEhU)

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
Sansa XX

Chapter Notes

Everyone who wondered what was the gift Tyrion gave to Sansa for her name day, you’re just about to discover it. A key chapter to the story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sansa XX

“That’s your sister? Arya?”

Sansa had brought Joy to see the tapestry. Winterfell stood, proud and undamaged, in the background. Before it stood House Stark. Her father had a grim expression as he stood tall, Ice unsheathed and straight before him as if he was leaning on it. Benjen Stark, the uncle Sansa had never known enough, stood next to him, all clad in black like every brother of the Night’s Watch ought to be, a little smile playing on his lips. Robb stood on the other side of her father. Bran had an unbowed bow and an arrow in his hands. Rickon wasn’t far from him, crushing nuts on a stone. Her mother was looking benevolently at her two youngest sons. Sansa was there too, sitting on a rock, making an embroidery. Arya was on the other side on the tapestry, holding a wooden sword in her hands while Jon, clad in black like their uncle, was ruffling her hair. The plucky little girl with a sword was the one Joy pointed.

“Yes, that’s her. And right next to her is my brother, Jon Snow.”

Joy stared in wonder at the image of Sansa’s half-brother. “He looks so handsome.”

Sansa couldn’t hold a smile. Joy was right. Her brother Jon was far from ugly. If he had been born a legitimate son, girls would have turned around him just like they turned around Robb. From what Sansa could recall, Jon and Robb were nearly equals in everything, or if one was better than the other in something, it was compensated by being less talented than the other in something else. Jon was deprived of so much only because he didn’t have the right mother. Sansa was pained at the idea she had shared her mother’s distaste for bastards. Jon had been her brother just like Robb, Bran and Rickon, but she never showed him the affection a sister owed to her brother, all that because Sansa wanted to follow her mother. It would be so good to see him again.

“Remember, Joy. You are betrothed now,” Sansa remembered her not very seriously.

“Sorry, Sansa.” Joy went back to look at the tapestry. “Is that you?” She pointed the redhead girl.

“Yes, it’s me.”

“You look different.”

“It’s me when I was younger.”

The tapestry was made to represent House Stark before they left Winterfell. Tyrion had ordered it many months ago. He had people who knew her family to help the artisans draw it. It took a lot of
time to make one of good quality, but they succeeded. Sansa had been speechless when Tyrion showed it to her the first time. The day after her sixteenth name day, in the evening, he had led her to the ancient Great Hall of Casterly Rock and showed her this in one of the galleries. Sansa was still amazed by the realism of the representation of her family a month later. It was Tyrion’s present for her name day. He had wanted to show it to her on the evening of her name day, but something both Tyrion and Sansa didn’t expect had prevented him from doing so. Thus Tyrion had showed her the next day.

It was so well done. Everyone was represented so well. By looking closer, you could see the six direwolves running in the background near Winterfell. Five were grey, the other one was white. Everyone was exactly like she remembered them back when she left Winterfell, with a few changes. Bran wasn’t a cripple, and Jon was garbed with black clothes as if he already was a member of the Night’s Watch. Sansa didn’t really care about the changes. Overall, it showed her family before everything started.

This tapestry showed the time when Sansa only cared about what she didn’t have. She hadn’t been able to appreciate what she had back then. Her song had been at Winterfell, before she left. The moment they went south was the end of her song, the moment when her life became a nightmare. She looked at the little girl she had been. A pretty little girl with good manners, always behaving like a lady, who loved lemon cakes, needlework, knights, stories, songs, and who only waited for a knight in shining armor or a charming prince to come and bring her somewhere they would have a perfect life in a great castle.

Sansa had never met her knight in shining armor, nor her charming prince. These men didn’t exist. Instead, she met Tyrion. The nightmare that began when she left Winterfell ended when she left King’s Landing and came to Casterly Rock. Now she was the lady of a great castle, she had real friends, and a husband who loved her. And even more important, she had a husband she truly loved.

“It’s cold,” Joy complained all of a sudden.

She was right. Sansa had started to shiver too. “Yes. Let’s go back to the surface.”

That was a way of speaking. Inside the Rock, they were never really at the surface, but they could get closer to it. As they walked out of the Great Hall, Sansa remembered another time when she shivered much more violently as she left the depths of Casterly Rock. About a month after she arrived here, Tyrion had showed her the watery caverns deep inside the castle. These caverns were beautiful, but they were also very dark. There wasn’t much light in it. Sansa had stumbled on a stone and fallen into one of the lakes down there. She had come back to their rooms all soaked and cold. Tyrion had been barely able to contain his laughter. She had gone back to the caves with Tyrion last week, but the memories related to that second time were much more pleasant.

“Will you bring me with you when you’ll go back North? I would like to meet Jon.”

Sansa had told Joy she would travel to the North one day, when the time would come to go back to Winterfell. She told Joy that she would probably visit her last brother at the Wall at the same time.

“I don’t know when I’ll go to the North, Joy. Probably after winter. I’ll have to wait a long time before I see Jon again.” Let’s hope the dead won’t have made him one of them by this time.

“Do you think he would like me? Is he kind?”

“Of course, he will like you, Joy. And yes, Jon is very kind. I mentioned you in one of the ravens I sent for him.”
“Really?” Joy looked very enthralled by this revelation.

“Yes,” Sansa answered as she kept smiling. “I told him you’re a great friend of mine.”

Joy was smiling madly now. “Sansa, promise me you’ll bring me in the North. You always say how Jon is a good man and how Winterfell is beautiful. I want to see it. I don’t care if it’s in five years or ten years. Just promise me.”

Sansa surrendered. “Very well. I promise, but it’s very possible that you’ll be married at this moment. You must marry Rollam when you’re fifteen.”

Doubts showed on Joy’s face. “Rollam is kind. He’ll let me go. I only want to see it once. And you can order him to let me follow you.”

“Alright. I will force your lovely and kind husband to let you accompany me. Are you satisfied now, Lady Joy Westerling?”

The little girl chuckled. “Yes, I am.” They remained silent for a moment. “Do you think I’ll be a good lady?”

“You’ll be. Everyone will be jealous of you, and they will be jealous of your husband since he married a Lannister.”


Sansa stopped and took Joy by the shoulders. She knelt to have her eyes at the same level than hers. “Joy, look at me. You know what my name is?”

The girl seemed distraught for a moment. “Sansa.”

“And my complete name?”

“Sansa Lannister of House Stark, Lady of Casterly Rock, Lady of the Westerlands and Lady of Winterfell.”


“Because you were a Stark before.”

“Yes. I was born a Stark. You just saw the tapestry. I am the daughter of Eddard Stark, who was the son of Rickard Stark, who was the son of Edwyle Stark. If we go farther into the past, we find that my ancestor is Bran the Builder, the man who built the Wall and Winterfell. I am only a Lannister by name, Joy. The only reason I have this name is because I’m married to Tyrion. By my blood, I am Stark. However, Tyrion is a Lannister. His father was Tywin Lannister, whose father was Tytos Lannister, whose father before him was Gerold Lannister. Tytos Lannister was the father of your own father. He was your grandfather, and Lord Gerold was your great-grandfather. And if we go far enough in the past, we find that you descend from Lann the Clever, the man who took the castle where we live only with his wits. You are a descendant from Lann the Clever just like I am one of Bran the Builder. You are a Lannister, just like I am a Stark.”

“But you’re not a bastard.”

“It doesn’t matter, Joy. My brother Jon is a bastard, just like you, and he is a Stark. He may not have
the name of the Starks, but he has the blood. You don’t have the name of the Lannisters, but you have their blood. Much more than I’ll ever have. You are more a Lannister than myself. It doesn’t matter that your name is Hill or Snow or Lannister or Stark or Waters or Westerling. The blood of Lann the Clever runs through your veins. You are a Lannister, and you will always be a Lannister. No matter what the others say. This is the truth.”

Joy listened to Sansa attentively. Tears started to appear in the little girl’s eyes. Sansa patted her shoulder empathically. “Come now. We have a meal to take with Cerenna and Myrielle.”

They resumed their walk. As they reached the upper levels, Joy managed to speak again. “Thank you, Sansa.”

They arrived at her private rooms. The two daughters of Stafford Lannister were already there. They took place immediately and the discussions started around rice, bread and soups. Myrielle really was Sansa’s friend now. Sansa couldn’t pretend she was close to her like she was to Joy and Cerenna, but she had become a good friend in the end like every other woman at Casterly Rock. Myrielle also behaved very well towards Joy, not wishing to insult her again after the incident during the first day Sansa spent at the Rock.

In the middle of a conversation about sweets, Cerenna indirectly informed Sansa of something. “While we talk about sweets, Sansa, the lemon cakes have arrived.”

“Good. They arrived the way I asked?” Sansa wondered.

“Yes. Everything is in order.”

“What are you talking about? What lemon cakes?” Joy asked. Myrielle and Cerenna exchanged an amused look. Sansa was the one to answer.

“I commanded heavy shipments of lemon cakes before winter prevented us to bring in more and that the harvests are exhausted,” she explained.

“Oh, good. I love lemon cakes.” Joy didn’t seem to find anything strange. That was good. Cerenna, Sansa and Myrielle developed a secret language to talk about the festivities for Joy’s twelfth name day. The lemon cakes were used to designate the preparations. It meant everything was ready for Joy’s name day that would come next week.

“Joy, how do you find your betrothed? Rollam Westerling?” Myrielle asked suddenly.

“He’s very kind. I just wished his brother wasn’t dead. He’s very sad about it. I hate the Freys!” Joy seldom showed hatred, but this time was among the few she did show some. Her voice was filled with it.

“I agree,” Cerenna supported. “They’re horrible. And they’re all ugly from what I heard. Genna’s sons are not bad people, but they don’t distinguish themselves with their looks. I would kill myself before I marry a squid like one of them.”

“Sansa, do you think you could do something for Daven?” Myrielle asked.

“Forgive me?” Sansa replied.

“Do you think you could stop it? His marriage with a Frey girl?”

“What does she mean?” Joy interrupted. “Daven must marry a Frey?”
Sansa never told Joy, and she had no way to hide it now without looking suspicious. “Yes. Lord Tywin arranged a betrothal between Ser Daven and a daughter of Lord Walder Frey. He made it not long before he died.”

Joy looked astonished. “But… you can’t let that happen! The Freys are murderers. They’re evil! They killed your brother and your mother! They killed Raynald, Rollam’s brother!”

“I know, Joy.” How could she say that in the presence of Myrielle and Cerenna? “But your uncle organized this, and a Lannister always pays his debts. For now, I’m afraid we can’t annul Daven’s betrothal.”

Myrielle spoke at this moment. “Sansa, our father was negotiating with Lord Paxter Redwyne before the war started. He was trying to arrange a marriage between his daughter Desmera and our brother. Perhaps you could write to him and arrange a marriage for Daven with her.”

Sansa hesitated. “Lord Tywin promised a marriage between Daven and a Frey. The betrothal between Desmera and Daven was only discussed. Nothing more. I cannot use that.”

“But you managed to annul the betrothal between…” Sansa silenced Myrielle with a glare. She didn’t want Joy to know that her grandfather had planned to marry her to some Frey bastard.

“I think that what Myrielle tried to say,” Cerenna resumed, coming to the rescue before Joy suspected something, “is that there may be a way to spare Daven a marriage within a house of murderers and stoats.”

“Yes, there must be,” Joy supported.

Sansa looked at the three of them, all looking at her, expecting a solution, an answer. “I’m going to discuss about it with Tyrion this evening. Believe me, I’m not happy about any marriage between the Lannisters and the Freys, but we must be careful. Walder Frey is not someone we can hope to displease without consequences. He would never forget that if we acted too rashly.”

Myrielle didn’t look satisfied of the answer. Cerenna seemed to understand more what Sansa meant. As for Joy, she was obviously unhappy too. Sadly, there was nothing Sansa could tell to any of them. She and Tyrion had to keep the secret. They couldn’t stop Daven’s marriage. To arrange another one for Joy was already dangerous when it only concerned a bastard son of Walder Frey. To cancel a betrothal that involved a legitimate daughter could be suicidal. Tyrion was now decided to have Daven marry Amerai Frey once the siege of Riverrun would be over. At least, Daven would get lands and a castle along with his wife, Tyrion said. Sansa didn’t like the idea, but there wasn’t much she could do. She had argued, tried to convince Tyrion to find a way out for his cousin, but Tyrion simply stated he couldn’t call off two betrothals his father promised, not to mention the complications that would follow the vacant seat of Darry. Sansa had to give up. She wasn’t eager to announce the new to Cerenna and Myrielle, especially when Myrielle just stopped to hate her. She would tell them once the betrothal became official.

Once they were done eating, Sansa went to meet the stewards about the preparations for Joy’s name day. She thought for a moment afterwards to pay a visit to Tyrion in his solar, but she thought in the end that it wasn’t the good time. She had too much work, and Tyrion surely had a lot to do as well. Couldn’t this day end faster? Sansa went to her own solar and sighed heavily after she sat before the great piles of requests and letters.

The requests Sansa received as Lady of Casterly Rock and the Westerlands varied greatly. Many asked her to intercede for them before Tyrion, but many also asked favors to her directly. Lords asked for positions in Casterly Rock for members of their family, some offered children as wards, or
even suggested betrothals with members of House Lannister. Cerenna and Myrielle had their share of demands, just like Ser Lucion and Genna’s sons and grandsons. Sansa let Genna take care of the proposals for her own family, but she took care of the other ones. There were even demands for Daven. Some didn’t know yet about his betrothal to a Frey. Sansa had to answer carefully to every proposal, not accepting nor refusing, except for Daven where she had to explain he was already engaged. There were also messages from the charity works she opened in Lannisport, mostly asking for financial support or for a visit from her. Sansa had already two visits planned for the next week. The septon of the city near the Rock also regularly asked for her support. There was even a group of citizens of Lannisport who recently asked if she could build a godswood in the city for the few people living here who followed the Old Gods.

When the afternoon neared its end, Sansa decided to walk a little to clear her ideas. The day had been long. She went to the gardens and walked alone. She tightened her gown firmly around her. The days grew colder. Winter is coming. All the same, fresh air did her some good. She sat on a bench after a few minutes, listening to the quiet sounds around her. She thought she heard the waves crashing against the castle even from there. The peace was disrupted when Sansa felt a hand on her shoulder. Cerenna had found her.

“Does it bother you if I sit?” the Lannister girl asked.

“No. Make yourself comfortable.” Cerenna sat right next to Sansa on the bench with her authorization.

“You managed to cancel Joy’s betrothal, didn’t you?” Cerenna asked after a moment. That was the moment Sansa dreaded.

“She was betrothed to a bastard. And with her betrothal with the heir to the Crag, we can still say we were proposed a much better match, but for your brother… It is more difficult.”

Cerenna sighed. Sansa wanted to do the same. “So. Who’s going to be my sister-in-law?”

“I don’t know yet,” Sansa lied. “I’m trying my best, Cerenna. Believe me. I hate the Freys. I hate them much more than you. But I’m not the Lord of Casterly Rock. The decision belongs to Tyrion in the end.”

“Can’t you really convince him?” Cerenna looked exasperated and despaired.

“I’ll try again. Who knows? Perhaps an opportunity will present itself. I won’t abandon your brother.” Sansa didn’t want to lose Cerenna’s friendship. She would try to spare Ser Daven such a marriage, but she doubted she would succeed.

“Perhaps you could use new methods to convince my cousin.”

Sansa frowned at Cerenna’s suggestion. “What do you mean?”

“You know what I’m talking about.” Sansa’s friend was now smiling wickedly. “Make him happy tonight.”

Sansa knew very well what she meant, but she wouldn’t use that kind of things, and she wouldn’t talk about it. What happened between her and Tyrion in the bedchamber was only for her and Tyrion to know, and no one else.

“That’s not an option.” Sansa said it firmly. She would leave no place to discussion.

“Who knows, Sansa? Perhaps if you screamed a little louder than last night, that would be enough to
Sansa averted her face. “I’m not going to talk about this topic.”

Cerenna shrugged. “Alright. Then I’ll talk about it. I’ll tell you about the time when I fucked this squire in the pantry.”

Sansa tried to ignore the story. It had been a month now since she and Tyrion had come together as husband and wife, and still this was the main subject of conversation at the Rock. Servants, knights, and even the other members of House Lannister were all talking about this, or at least she thought so. They never talked about it in her presence, but she surprised a few whispers between some people and others. After a week, Cerenna had started to ask her details about her nocturnal activities. That wasn’t something Sansa wanted to talk about. After a few failed attempts, her friend finally decided to tell her tales of her own experiences. Sansa didn’t think they were all true, but after the nights she spent with Tyrion and the other intimate moments they shared, she knew enough to realize Cerenna was no maiden at all. When she thought about it, Sansa came to the conclusion Margaery probably wasn’t a maiden either when she married Joffrey. The things she told her before her wedding with Tyrion were proof enough to Sansa’s eyes. All the same, Sansa wouldn’t speak about her intimate activities with her husband, except to her husband.

“Let me tell you he had a hard time explaining to the knight he served how his clothes were all torn apart. I heard the knight wondered if his squire had been attacked by some lion. He wasn’t far from the truth. Only it was a lioness who assaulted the poor boy.”

Despite the fact Sansa didn’t want to hear more stories of Cerenna’s private experiences, she couldn’t retain a laugh. “You made my day, Cerenna. I think it’s time for me to leave.”

“Did I make your night? I wouldn’t want to deprive your husband from the good fucking he probably expects.”

Sansa sighed internally. “Good evening, Cerenna.”

As Sansa left the bench and walked away, Ser Stafford’s daughter called for her. “Sansa. Please, do something for my brother. I don’t want him to end up married with a stoat.”

“If only it depended on me, your brother would marry Desmera Redwyne, but it doesn’t depend only on me. I’ll try to convince Tyrion, but I can’t promise you anything.”

Sansa didn’t turn to look at her friend. She knew Tyrion wouldn’t change his mind and she didn’t want Cerenna to see it on her face. He wanted Darry to be kept between Lannister hands, and the only way for that was to marry a Lannister to Amerei Frey. Sansa couldn’t deny Tyrion’s reasons were good. They couldn’t break two betrothals with House Frey like that, and Sansa wasn’t about to give Joy to a Frey to save Cerenna’s brother. She hated the fact she thought like this, but if she was to give a Lannister to a Frey, she preferred to sacrifice Ser Daven than Joy.

Sansa walked back to her private rooms. She knew her way around the castle well enough now. There were still places she didn’t know quite well, but she could walk around Casterly Rock easily enough. As she walked, she wondered how tonight would be. A smile rose to her lips and her
cheeks reddened. Ever since her name day, every night with her husband had been very occupied. Even a moon after they started to perform their duty, Sansa still had difficulty to believe there were so many ways to join with him. Every time she thought she understood what Margaery had meant when she told her Tyrion was quite experienced, Sansa discovered she still didn’t fully know what it meant. Tyrion used so many ways to make her enjoy it. There were even nights he didn’t even try to put a child in her, as if he only wanted her to feel pleasure. Sansa didn’t complain about this. That made the nights only more exciting. Even more so since Tyrion convinced her to initiate things on her own.

Sansa flushed at the memories of some things she did with her husband. The way she acted in their bed was completely unladylike, but she didn’t want to end it. Tyrion didn’t seem to disapprove what she did. In these moments, he looked at her like she never saw him look at something or someone before. What made her flush the most were the few initiatives she took during the two last weeks, when she visited Tyrion in his solar during the day. It was a good thing she ordered the guards to let no one enter when she did, but she also noticed their amused looks on their face, sometimes when she left her husband’s solar. A giggle escaped from her throat.

Sansa was no longer a child. She was a married woman, and a Lannister. She had consummated her marriage. Despite what she said to Joy this morning, she felt less and less like a Stark every day. She didn’t dare to talk about it with Tyrion, or with anyone else. She had changed. She felt her place was in Casterly Rock. She felt that she belonged there. She still felt attached to Winterfell, but it was so far, and she was unable to visit it for now. All her family was dead. The tapestry showed what her family was before they left Winterfell. Of all the people on it, only Sansa and Jon still lived, and she was a Lannister now. She could feel it everywhere in her body, even more when she was with Tyrion in their marriage bed. She loved him, and she wanted to be happy with him. Beyond Tyrion, she had Cerenna as her best friend and confident, Joy who was like a little sister, Genna, Dorna and Darlessa who were like aunts, Lanna and Myrielle who were good friends, and she even started to appreciate Genna’s sons. She had come to realize they weren’t prouder to be Freys than their mother. The only one she couldn’t really support was Ser Emmon Frey. She pitied Genna to have married this man, though sometimes he was the one she pitied when she saw how Genna ruled him.

Her family was dead, or far away. House Stark was dead or far away. The tapestry was a reminder of the past, not a picture of the present. Her life was here now, at Casterly Rock, with Tyrion. I am a Stark no more. I am a Lannister. Sadness filled her. One of her hands came to her tummy. It seemed normal. Her last moonblood had taken place two weeks ago, but considering how often they made love, Sansa may already have a child within her without knowing it. She thought about asking Creylen how long it could take to get with child the last time she visited him for her lessons, but she had feared too much to speak. She would ask him the next time. Her next lesson would be next week. She also wanted to ask him something else.

Tyrion was a dwarf. What if their children…? Sansa wanted children. Deep within herself, she wanted them, but she was afraid. Afraid of what may happen during the pregnancy. Afraid of what may happen during the childbirth. Afraid her children could be dwarves. She didn’t know what Tyrion thought about it. They never talked about having children, but she knew they would need some one day. How would Tyrion react if they were like him? How would she react herself? Sansa didn’t know. Things that had seemed so natural to her when she left Winterfell had turned so complicated. She needed answers. She would ask the maester, and order him to not talk about this with Tyrion. She would need another conversation with her husband on these matters. But not tonight. Sansa had enough problems for today, and she longed for a fine dinner and a good night of sleep. Well, not a night only with sleep.

This thought lifted Sansa’s spirit and she managed to get rid of unpleasant reflections. She had enough work and problems during the day as lady of this castle. There was no need to add more
concerns for the evening. Her feet brought her without thinking to the huge golden doors where
Brienne stood. Sansa stopped before her.

“Lady Brienne.”

“Lady Sansa.” As always, Brienne bowed before her.

“You may leave. I don’t think I need your protection for tonight.”

“As you wish, my lady.”

The lady knight left without any other word. Sansa had started to dismiss her from some of her guard
duties a few weeks ago. Since Brienne told her two weeks ago about the noises she heard one night,
Sansa had decided it was useless to have guards before her rooms during the night. There were
already guards at the extremities of the corridors and it was more than enough. No one could reach
the rooms she shared with Tyrion without meeting at least one of them, and these guards would
unlikely hear something.

Sansa pushed slowly the huge doors, trying to make no sound. If Tyrion was already there, she could
make him a surprise. Sadly, he hadn’t come back yet. Most of the time, it was like that. Tyrion
always had more work to do than her and arrived for dinner after her almost every day. Sansa picked
a book from Tyrion’s library on economic matters. Creylen encouraged her to read about this to
understand the matter better. *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* by
Archmaester Maynard was easy to read for her now after months of lessons, but she had discovered
it was one of the easiest to understand. Other works about financial matters and economics were far
more difficult.

Her handmaidens brought their dinner a few minutes later and put it on the table of the living room.
Sansa waited for Tyrion to show up. He told her a few times she could eat before him if he took too
much time, but she wouldn’t. Time passed and Sansa wondered what was going on. Tyrion didn’t
come. She found it strange. He didn’t take so much time usually, and when he did, he sent Podrick to
tell her he would be late. No one came this time. She summoned one of her handmaidens to summon
Tyrion here. She came back saying Lord Tyrion had very important matters to attend to and
wouldn’t be able to come until the middle of the night. Sansa wasn’t pleased by that. In the end, she
couldn’t keep waiting. Her stomach was grumbling. She ate without her husband for the first time
in… a very long time. She thought it was probably the first time she didn’t dine with Tyrion ever
since he left the cells of King’s Landing.

Sansa went to take a bath and tried to relax. She had some lemon perfume put into the water. She
liked the scent. She slipped on a dressing gown and went to sit in a chair in their bedchamber. There
she waited. What could take so much time to Tyrion? She heard a door screeching and woke up
from her dozing. She nearly fell asleep. What time was it? The candles had almost burned out and
only a very dim light was left in their bedchamber. She saw the shape of her husband walking
through the living room toward their chamber. He was walking slowly, making very few noise.
Sansa thought he probably removed his boots to not make so much noise. She smiled in the darkness
and rose from her seat as he entered the room.

“You’re late,” she said on a false accusing tone.

She thought she saw Tyrion jump in the near darkness. He hadn’t noticed her. “Sansa. I… I thought
you would be sleeping.”

“Why are so surprised? Did you want to awake me the same way you did this morning three days
ago?”
“Hmm… well… I just… didn’t expect to find you awake.”

He was stammering. Sansa found it strange, but decided to not care about it. They were late. He was probably tired. “Well, now that you’re here, we can go to sleep. After such a rough day, I think you need it.”

Sansa walked to their bed and started to undo her dress on the way, but before she could start to pull it off, Tyrion’s voice came from behind. “Sansa, stop. I need to tell you something.”

Sansa turned her head to look at him, but not her body. “Can’t it wait tomorrow?”

She noticed the serious look on Tyrion’s face. He shook his head slowly. “No. It can’t.” Sansa realized he had a strange expression on his face, as if he was asking for her forgiveness. As if he had done something terrible. She tied back her gown and turned completely to face him.

“What is it? What happened?”

Tyrion averted his eyes from her. He walked on his left, then on his right, closing on her, then withdrawing, putting his hand on the covers of their bed before removing it, never looking at her. She found his behavior stranger each minute that passed. She never saw him like this before, not even when he told her about Tysha.

“We’ll need some wine. And some light. I’ll light the candles.”

He then began to light them. Sansa didn’t understand what he was doing, but she went to the table of their bedchamber and poured for each of them a cup of wine. When all the candles were lit again, Tyrion finally came to sit with her. He grabbed his cup immediately and almost emptied it in one single gulp.

“Much better.” Dawn came on her.

“You’re drunk.” That was a statement, nothing more. He wasn’t drunk very much. It took a lot of wine to have Tyrion really drunk. Sansa knew it from experience when they did a drinking contest one night. She wasn’t about to repeat it.

“Not much. The servants refused to bring me all the wine I asked for.” Sansa smiled and the beginning of a laugh escaped her throat. Her orders were followed.

Tyrion remained silent for a very long moment. Sansa didn’t pressure him to talk. She started to feel she wouldn’t like what she would hear. Finally, Tyrion seemed to gather enough courage will to speak.

“Sansa, I received news from the North this afternoon. Good news and bad news at the same time.”

What news could put Tyrion in that state? “What news?” she asked.

“I’ll give you the good one first. Your sister is alive.”

Sansa remained there, mouth wide open as she tried to understand what Tyrion just said. “Wh… What?”

“Your sister Arya is alive.”

Sansa’s mind began to realize what he just said. Arya was alive. Arya, her little sister she believed dead. “Arya? Are you sure? She’s alive?” Her breathing quickened.
“Yes. She is.” Sansa let huge exclamation escape from her lips. Without realizing it, she was running to her husband and hugging him while he was still sitting in his chair. Tears filled her eyes. Tears of joy.

Sansa broke the embrace after a long moment and looked at her husband. “That’s wonderful. Why didn’t you tell me before? Is she alright? Where is she?”

Tyrion was looking away from her again. He hadn’t returned her embrace. “She’s alive, Sansa.” He looked into her eyes. His own seemed pained when they met hers. “At Winterfell.”

Sansa froze immediately. It was her who stammered now. “Win... Winterfell?” How was it possible?

Tyrion pulled something from his doublet. It was a small piece of paper, a raven scroll. “Creylen received it last week, but he had too much work. He only learned about the content today and brought it to me as soon as he knew.”

Sansa’s eyes went from the scroll to her husband’s face, then to the scroll again. She snatched it from Tyrion’s hands and walked away to read it.


Roose Bolton betrothed her to his son Ramsay. Wants to consolidate his hold on the North. Wedding to take place in two moons.

Man at Winter Town

The scroll had many gashes and the ink looked old judging by the color. Thoughts ran wildly through Sansa’s mind. Her sister was alive, at Winterfell. She was a prisoner. She was to marry Ramsay Bolton. Her little sister would marry a monster. And it would happen in two moons.

Sansa looked at Tyrion, panicked. “How did she arrive in Winterfell? Everyone thought she was dead.” She was nearly yelling.

“We don’t know,” Tyrion answered. “No one knows. My man at the Winter Town gave no detail about it. He probably doesn’t know it himself.”

The marriage was to take place in two moons. Ramsay Bolton. After what Sansa heard about him... No, she couldn’t let that happen. “We must do something. We can’t let that happen. We... We must write to Winterfell. Tell them to send Arya back here. She was the Crown’s ward just like me. We can order it to Roose Bolton. He’ll be forced to obey.”

She started to walk towards the huge doors to go to Creylen’s tower when Tyrion’s voice stopped her. “Sansa. Wait.” She stopped and wanted to reply they had no time to lose, but Tyrion spoke before she could. “It’s too late.”

Tyrion had left his chair. Not that it made a great difference of height. “What do you mean, too late?”

“The message came from the spy we had in the Winter Town outside Winterfell. He couldn’t send it by raven. He had to send a rider to White Harbor for Lord Manderly to send it to us. And it waited a week in Creylen’s scrolls before he opened it. Look at the date on the message.”

Sansa had rumpled the scroll in her fist. She smoothed it the best she could and looked at the date on it. Her heart bumped into her chest. The message was old of almost three moons. Three moons. She
read the message over. *Wedding to take place in two moons.* She read it another time. *Roose Bolton betrothed her to his son Ramsay.*

The wedding already took place. Memories of another scroll Sansa read not long ago came to her mind. *Ramsay Bolton imprisons women and tortures them. He starves them, peels their skin off a few of their fingers, beats them, rapes them and inflicts them many other horrible things. After a few months or a few weeks, he releases them and hunts them with his dogs in the woods once he’s tired of torturing them. If he catches them, his dogs eat them.* Sansa felt her legs shivering. She burst into tears as she fell on the floor. She heard someone calling her name, but she couldn’t care about it. The only thing that mattered was Arya. She screamed uncontrollably and lost all coherent thoughts. Her sister was alive, and she was wed to a monster. A real monster.

Chapter End Notes

I must admit the beginning of the chapter was a lot much happier than the end. However, there is one thing I want you to know: I never write stories with bad endings. My endings are never perfect like in fairy tales, but they are happy. At most, they will be bittersweet, like GRRM once said "A Song of Ice and Fire" would end.

Please review

Next chapter: Doran
The body was cold, lying in a bed before them. Caleotte had tried everything to save her, but it was useless. Doran’s brother had studied at the Citadel, forging six links before he grew bored of the studies. Caleotte knew about poisons too, but not as much as Oberyn. Doran’s little brother had travelled through the Free Cities, learning much more about poisons during this time, and Caleotte didn’t have the knowledge of the cure to some of the poisons Oberyn learned about there. And sadly, Oberyn had passed his knowledge to his daughters. If Oberyn had known how they would use it…

The result of all this was right before them. Doran was sitting away in his wheelchair, Hotah behind him as always, on guard, while Trystane was crying on his knees, holding her hand. Doran had seen them walking through the Water Gardens each day, holding each other’s hand, discussing, smiling, laughing, kissing. All it took to ruin it was a little cut from one of Tyene’s daggers. The poison took some time to take effect, but a few hours after the supposed failed attack, blood had begun to run out from Princess Myrcella’s nose. A minute later, she was dead. There was nothing Caleotte could have done, even if he had arrived before the princess was dead.

Her body now rested here, under the eyes of the three men. Doran looked at Hotah. He showed nothing right now, but Doran knew Hotah was blaming himself for this. Doran had sent him to stop the Sand Snakes as soon as they began their attack on Trystane and the princess. Their goal was still unknown to Doran, but he knew it was nothing good. They probably wanted to torture her, to send her one finger at a time to her mother like Ellaria suggested not long ago, and eventually kill her. In the end, it hadn’t mattered. Trystane had taken his sword to fight his cousins and managed to hold them in respect with a few guards that happened to be there at the moment, and Hotah arrived in time with reinforcements to end this folly. Sadly, Tyene had cut the princess on her left arm right before she was arrested, causing her death a few hours later. The Sand Snakes and Ellaria were now under arrest, but the damage was done.

Princess Myrcella dead, five of my guards killed, the Sand Snakes and Ellaria in prison. It’s a catastrophe. Doran looked at his son weeping next to the body of the young woman he had come to love. That wasn’t what Doran had wanted. He never wanted the girl to die or suffer, no more than he wanted his son to suffer. It wasn’t supposed to be this way. An innocent child was dead, his son was heartbroken, and the plans he worked on for years were in danger.

“I will avenge you.” The voice of Doran’s son resonated in the piece. “I will avenge you, Myrcella. I swear it. Those who killed you will pay.”

Doran turned to look at Hotah. With a sign of head, he made him understand he wasn’t to allow that to happen. The bearded priest nodded, confirming he understood the order. With another sign with his hand, Doran commanded the captain to give the necessary orders to the other guards. After a
short hesitation, Hotah left to carry out his duty. Doran found himself alone with his second son and heir. He lost a sister long ago, along with a nephew and a niece, then he lost a son, and a wife, and more recently a brother. He couldn’t take the risk to lose another son. He couldn’t conceive to lose his last living son. And yet, he knew he would have to take that risk. You couldn’t be cautious all the time. In order to win, you had to make a decisive move when the time came, and any decisive move was risky by nature.

Trystane rose from his kneeling position and faced his father. “I want their heads. Ellaria, Obara, Nymeria, Tyene. All of them.” Doran could see the hatred in the eyes of his son. The same hatred and lust for vengeance Oberyn once had when he was alive. The same hatred that got him killed.

Doran tried to appease him. “To kill them will not bring back your love, my son.”

“No, but at least she will get the revenge for what they did to her. The people who killed her will be dead.”

“Oberyn wanted vengeance for Elia,” Doran explained carefully. “He got killed for that. Ellaria, Obara, Nymeria and Tyene wanted vengeance for him, and for that they killed the woman you love. Now you want death for the four of them. They have five sisters. Sarella, Obella, Elia, Dorea, Loreza. Three of them share the same mother than Tyene. They worship their older sisters. If they must die, should their five sisters seek vengeance for them? Is that how it goes, round and round forever? Tell me. Where does it end?”

“This is not vengeance. This is justice.” His son was still crying. Trystane knew what his father said was true. Doran gave him his principles for ruling, but his son didn’t want to admit it. He was desperate, in pain. He just lost the woman he loved. Doran couldn’t blame him. His son would come to accept he couldn’t avenge his love, but for now he needed his father more than ever to stay in the right way.

“As much as it will be justice for Sarella, Obella, Elia, Dorea and Loreza when they will try to avenge their sisters by killing you. You are the heir to Sunspear. A prince of Dorne. A prince doesn’t live to satisfy his personal desires. He lives for his people. For the people he has the responsibility to rule. And what will four heads bring to you? Can you take a skull with you to bed? Can you give it comfort in the night? Will it make you laugh? Will you write songs for it? Will it care for you when you are old and sick? Just as I am now?”

The eyes of his son were full of water now. “I loved her, Father. I loved her.” His son burst and fell on his knees. Doran had never been a father to hug his children or to kiss them, but he loved them like any father should. It pained him to see his son in this state, much more than the gout he suffered of. With great effort, he got up from his chair and slowly walked to put a hand on his son’s head. Trystane lifted it to look at his father, tears streaming on his eyes.

“I wish I could give you what you want, my son. But I can’t. They are my nieces. And they are your cousins. We do not slaughter our own family in Dorne. Now while I rule. I’m sorry.”

Doran was. His son bobbed his head. He kept crying. The pain in his legs became insufferable for Doran, but he wouldn’t go back to his chair, not while his son knelt on the floor, broken. Caleotte arrived not long after with Hotah. Doran instructed him to bring the prince to his chambers and to give him some essence of nightshade if needed. In the meantime, Hotah brought him back into his wheelchair and led him to his chamber for the night. Caleotte allowed him to take some milk of the poppy for the pain and Doran managed to sleep.

Next morning, Doran was brought to the cell of the woman who organized the murder. He had put her and all the Sand Snakes in separate tower cells where they had everything they needed. For more
safety, he even put the four ones who were in the Water Gardens or in Sunspear and who took no part in the plot, in case they would try something. They were given the same advantages than their mother and sisters. Only Sarella wasn’t imprisoned since she was in Oldtown. Doran had no control on her movements, and as long as she stayed outside of Dorne, he had no reason to worry about her actions. Who knew what new trouble she was running into right now?

He entered the cell with Hotah standing next to him, holding his axe in guard position, ready to act at the first sign of danger for Doran. The door of the cell closed behind him. Ellaria Sand stood from her chair when he entered, a defiant look on her face. Her cell was well furnished with a featherbed, a table with a Cyvasse game in a corner, another table with fruits at the center, a window with bars that allowed the sun to fill the place, and a bathtub. Most of the prisoners couldn’t pretend to such comfort.

“Have you come to tell me you’ll finally go to war?” That was the first question she asked. “Or do you mean to continue to sit in a chair doing nothing and staring at the empty Water Gardens?”

“I haven’t come to receive questions from you. I’m not the one who murdered an innocent girl. What would you say if I murdered Tyene? Or Obella? Or Elia?”

Horror came to Ellaria’s face. “You wouldn’t dare. You are weak. You’ll never do what’s necessary.”

“For Dorne, I will do whatever is necessary,” Doran replied. “What is the life of one of your daughters before the lives of thousands of people? My people. The people I swore to watch over and to care for. What do you think will be the first demand of Cersei Lannister when she will learn you assassinated her only daughter? She will ask for the head of one of your daughters if she is kind. And if she’s not, which is very possible, she will ask for the heads of all your daughters, and all Oberyn’s daughters. And yours as well.”

“And you would give her?” Her voice was full of scorn and hatred again.

“As I told you, what is the life of the eight daughters of Oberyn, and yours, compared to the thousands of lives I would save by preventing a conflict we are bound to lose.”

“You won’t dare.” She said on a convincing tone.

“Are you sure you want to test my determination? I wouldn’t if I were you. Your daughters are my nieces. I love them very much, but you share no blood with me. For their sake, I would hope to live a long and happy life if I were you.”

Uncertainty appeared again on the face of the woman who loved his brother, but Doran wasn’t over with her. “Tywin Lannister is dead. So are Robert Baratheon and Gregor Clegane, all those who had a hand in murdering Elia and her children. Even Joffrey, who was not yet born when Elia died. You saw the boy perish with your own eyes, clawing at his throat as he tried to draw a breath. Who else is there to kill? Did Myrcella need to die so the shade of Rhaenys could be at rest? Does Tommen need to die for Aegon’s shade as well? Have thousands of people to die so Oberyn could be avenged? Where does it end?”

“It ends in blood, as it began. It ends when Casterly Rock is cracked open, so the sun can shine on the maggots and the worms within. It ends with the utter ruin of Tywin Lannister and all his works.”

“The man died. His wretched son took his place. The same son who gave us Ser Gregor’s head.”

“After Oberyn died!” Ellaria yelled. Hotah tensed beside Doran, ready for action. “I was there when
he died. You weren’t there when the Mountain crushed his head with his hands. I was! I saw him
die! The man I loved. Your own brother.”

“You don’t need to remind me who he was. I know very well who he was. If you believe I did
nothing to avenge Elia, then this means you know nothing of me. You pretend to know Oberyn, but
you didn’t know him as I knew him, or as he knew me. He knew what I was doing.”

Ellaria looked questioningly at him. “What were you doing? You’ve been sitting in your chair for
years, doing nothing.”

“That’s what you think. Oberyn was the snake, and I was the grass. But have you ever wondered
why Oberyn could live like he lived? Travel through the world, taste the finest men and women there
were, fight when he wanted and when he liked, drink as much as he wanted, have daughters with all
the women he wanted? Do you know why he could be so unpredictable? It was because I was
predictable. Because I was the grass that hid him. Because I was predictable in the eyes of all the
Seven Kingdoms. Because I looked quiet, when in fact I conspired all these years to undermine
Tywin Lannister’s influence and power.”

“By doing what? By sitting in a chair and looking at the sky?”

“By letting the Lannisters weaken themselves in the War of the Five Kings. I didn’t engage our
people in this war because we had nothing to gain from that. I let the other houses ruin themselves in
their conflicts for the Iron Throne. I accepted the betrothal of Trystane to Princess Myrcella so we
could have a hostage that would make the Lannisters think twice before they attacked us. I kept our
people safe and strong for when the time would come.”

“When the time would come?”

Doran sighed. “A good ruler never starts a war he cannot hope to win. The good general is not the
one who can win all the battles, but the one who knows when he can fight and when he cannot. I
was waiting for the good time to strike, nothing more, nothing less.”

“And when would that time be? You waited for twenty years.”

“Better to wait twenty years to get our revenge, than to seek it immediately and to get ourselves
killed. Seeking something is quite useless when we can’t get it. And revenge means nothing when all
our people are dead.” Doran paused, choosing well his words before he spoke. “There is someone
across the Narrow Sea. Someone who has the same enemies than us. The Lannisters, the Baratheons,
the Starks. She was going to come to Westeros. With her forces allied to ours, we would have been
able to defeat the Lannisters, and to get the revenge we wanted. A revenge we couldn’t hope to have
only with our armies. I never told Oberyn, but he knew I was preparing something. He understood I
would never let my sister’s murder go unpunished.”

Some realization seemed to come on Ellaria’s face. “Myrcella was meant to be a way to pressure the
Lannisters? When this… friend would come?”

“Yes. And if you hadn’t killed her, we could have used her when time would have come. But now
she’s dead. And our friend across the Narrow Sea is not coming yet. What do you think the
Lannisters will do when they’ll learn we killed their princess? I could send them your head, but that
wouldn’t be enough. They would ask for Tyene’s head too at least. And I’m not going to give it to
them. They will declare war upon us as soon as they learn what happened to Princess Myrcella.
They will march against us with the full power of the Reach, the Westerlands, King’s Landing and
the Stormlands. Do you really think we can fight that many enemies and get out of it victorious? Or
alive? Who will support us? The Tullys, clinging to life while hiding in their fortresses? The
Northerners, stuck with the coming winter? Stannis Baratheon, who’s at the other side of the world? The Arryns, who hide behind their mountains and refuse to be involved in this war in any way? What do you think the Lannisters will do to your children when they take Sunspear? Will you still like the taste of revenge when you’ll see the dead bodies of your four girls and their sisters hanging from the walls?"

Oberyn’s lover was now playing with her fingers and looked around for a moment. “Why didn’t you tell us? I wouldn’t have done anything if I was aware?”

“And you would have told all of it to your daughters. And they would have told it to their other sisters. They would have said it to their lovers and their friends, and these friends would have told their friends, and so on. My plans needed to be kept secret. When they see the grass moving, people are afraid. I needed to remain unmoving in appearance so the viper could strike in time.”

“What are you going to do now?”

“We’re not ready yet. We need more time. We cannot hold against the Tyrells and the Lannisters united. I will hide the princess’s death for as long as I can, but sooner or later, the Crown will discover the truth. We cannot delay things indefinitely anymore. I will send Tyene to King’s Landing, just like Nymeria. Obara will go to Oldtown. You will remain here in this cell, and the other Sand Snakes will remain here under guard as well. I will allow you to have some time with your daughters every day. I can even arrange for you to have a larger common cell. You will serve as a gage so the others may perform their tasks well.”

“What tasks?”

“I’m afraid I can’t tell you. You know why. You want revenge for Oberyn? You’ll have it, but not with destruction of Dorne as a price. If the Sand Snakes play their parts well, everything will be alright.”

“And if everything doesn’t go as you planned?”

“Then you should pray, and regret you killed the Princess Myrcella. If you hadn’t killed her, I wouldn’t be obliged to take such risks. If you have need of anything, ask my men. They’ll see that you are satisfied.”

Doran left, helped by Hotah like always. He was stuck to this wheelchair most of the time. He couldn’t walk without the help of someone else and high doses of milk of the poppy. However, that didn’t mean he couldn’t be dangerous. Unbowed, Unbent, Unbroken. Despite being attached to the chair, Doran was still the three things the Martell’s words said they were. After visiting Ellaria, Doran went to see the first of his nieces, Tyene. She was the one who poisoned and thus caused the death of the princess. After dealing with the mind of the revolt, it was always better to deal with the sword.

The young woman rose as soon as he entered her own cell. “Where are my sisters?”

“They are all here, and well,” Doran reassured her. “Except Sarella who is still in Oldtown as far as I know.”


“Myrcella wasn’t even born when your aunt died, and she had nothing to do with your father’s death in Ser Gregor’s hands. You killed an innocent girl. Your father would never have approved that. We
may have had our differences, Oberyn and I, but we agreed on many things all the same. And one of our shared views was that we don’t kill little girls in Dorne.”

“Little girl, my eye. She was almost a woman.”

“That doesn’t change anything to the fact she had nothing to do with your father’s death, and that Oberyn would have disapproved killing her. You dishonored your father with what you did. You committed atrocities he would never have done or approved. You brought us to the low level of our enemies. You acted in no better way than Tywin Lannister.”

“My father died. I avenged him.”

“And do you feel better? Did killing Myrcella bring your father back? Did it kill Cersei Lannister? Or Ser Kevan? Or the Imp? Did it kill anyone who may have a hand in Oberyn’s death? Or in Elia’s death?”

“At least, they will know what it costs to kill Dornishmen.”

“And they will declare war upon us.”

“Good. I will be waiting for them. We will fight. And we will avenge my father for real.”

“No,” Doran denied. “We will fight, and we will be defeated. The historians of the Seven Kingdoms and the Targaryen monarchs have grown the number of our troops so their failed conquests wouldn’t look as shameful, but that doesn’t change the reality. We don’t have the men to defeat the Lannisters, the Tyrells and the Baratheons together. There is no vengeance to get in a war we cannot win, and you may just have sentenced tens of thousands men, women and children to support a horrible war. A war we can no longer escape.”

“That’s all too good. Finally, you’ll get out of this chair and fight instead of doing nothing.”

I have been sitting in this chair and doing everything to avenge my sister and her children for twenty years. “There will be a war. We won’t be able to avoid it. You precipitated this war with your stupidity, that’s all. But since you caused this, you will also make sure we win this war.” Doran took a threatening look. “Your sisters and your mother will be kept here. As long as you do what I order you, nothing will happen to them. And if you do as I say, you will get the revenge you want so much for your father, and I will get my own for my brother, my sister and her children.”

Tyene had a skeptical expression now. “What do you want me to do?”

“We are not ready for a war. I am waiting for friends to support us. I will hide Princess Myrcella’s death as long as I can. In the meantime, you will go to King’s Landing.”

“King’s Landing?”

“You are good to pose as a septa. You know the Seven-Pointed Star by heart. The Crown has troubles right now with a group of fanatics who call themselves the Sparrows in the capital. You will go there and infiltrate them. Befriend their leaders. Bring them to spread chaos in the city. When the time comes for war, the chaos in the capital will make it difficult for the Lannisters to move against us.”

She still looked uncertain. “Do I have your permission to kill any Lannister I could meet?”

“When the war is declared, you may kill as you want. But not before. For now, we hide in the grass, and you will hide too. Leave your hiding when the war starts. Then you will have the revenge you’re
seeking.”

Doran went to see Nymeria next. She was the second daughter of Oberyn, and the daughter of a noblewoman from Volantis. She was as beautiful as she was deadly, just like Tyene. To the opposite of her half-sister, she didn’t stand up when Doran entered. She stayed quiet on her bed.

“You leave for King’s Landing.” Doran went straight this time. He didn’t feel the necessity to repeat what he already said to Tyene or Ellaria to Nym.

“Well, that’s not something I expected. I thought you would execute us yourself.”

“I would never execute you. You are my nieces. My own blood. And I wouldn’t send you to be killed either. You will go in King’s Landing to occupy the vacant seat Tywin Lannister granted to your father on the small council. You are better than all your sisters for politics.”

She rose now. “You want me to work with the people who murdered my father and his sister?”

“Just like your father did. Yes. But more than everything, I want you to do in the Red Keep what Tyene will do in the streets. She’s leaving for the capital just like you while your other sisters will remain here under arrest. When the Lannisters will discover Myrcella was killed, I will tell them Tyene did this and make them believe I executed her. In the meantime, your sister will be spreading chaos in the streets of the capital.

I want you to do the same in Maegor’s Holdfast. Undermine the alliance between the Lannisters and the Tyrells. Make them up against each other. Put mistrust between the two families. When the news of Myrcella’s death will arrive, their alliance must be weakened. Only then we will be able to defeat them in a war. I will let you see your sister before you leave.”

The last of the Sand Snakes Doran had to talk with was Obara. Doran ordered her to go to Oldtown and to find her sister Sarella and try to convince her to come back. In fact, Doran mostly wanted to send Obara away from Dorne so she wouldn’t cause any trouble. When the war would start, he would summon her back to lead men. She would prove useful then, and Sarella may have uses as well. Doran visited his four other nieces, the youngest ones, last to reassure them and allowed them to visit their mother and their sisters who would remain behind.

Obara left secretly in the evening for Oldtown. Doran also had a conversation with Tyene and Nymeria before they left for the capital. Doran would send a raven to the king, explaining Oberyn’s daughter would take his place on the small council, and Nymeria would leave in a few days with an important retinue. Tyene would be part of the retinue, disguised as an itinerant septa, but would leave them as soon as they entered the capital to mix with the Sparrows. Doran gave them general tasks and more specific ones. They were to do exactly as he said and to let no one know about Myrcella’s death until time was ripe for war.

Later, when the night was about to fall and as Hotah was leading him to his chambers, Doran thought it was time to speak with his Captain of the Guard. “You feel responsible, Hotah. Don’t deny it, I know you do.”

“You charged me to protect the princess, my prince, and I failed. She died.” Doran could perceive the sadness and the regret in the voice of the Norvosi. Instead of leaving with Mellario when she went back to Norvos, he stayed behind. His loyalty to Doran was unquestioning.

“We both failed her, Hotah. I should have taken more precautions against my nieces and Ellaria. Let me share my part of the burden.”

“You gave me this burden when you ordered me to protect the little princess, my prince. I’m the one
who failed her. And I failed you at the same occasion.”

“No, Hotah. You didn’t fail me.”

“Yes, I did, my prince.”

There was no way to convince the bearded priest he wasn’t responsible of this. *Serve, Obey, Protect. Simple vows for a simple man*, the tall man once told him. They arrived at Doran’s chamber. Hotah helped him to get into his bed. As Doran took place to sleep, Caleotte arrived with milk of the poppy.

“For the sleep, my prince,” the maester simply said.

“Thank you, Caleotte. Could you fetch my son? I would like to speak with him before I fall asleep.”

“Yes, my prince.”

The maester left and Doran was alone with his captain. Hotah stood there on guard like always. He wouldn’t leave before Doran gave him the order. He knew the Norvosi would sharpen his axe before he slept once in his small chamber, but for now he stayed with Doran. He needed his presence, not for his personal protection, but more as a moral support. He would need it. The man suffering from the gout and the bearded priest stayed there together in silence, the prince sitting in his bed as pain journeyed through his body, the guard standing ready for anything that would put the life of the prince in danger. Doran looked at the milk of the poppy in the little bowl next to his bed. After looking at it for a moment, considering drinking it, he chose not to. He needed all his senses for the discussion to come.

Trystane arrived. His eyes were still red from the tears he shed for the princess. Doran knew the pain of the gout was nothing compared to the pain his son was feeling right now. Trystane stood before his father, his head bowed.

“Father.”

“Trystane.”

“Father, I apologize for what I said yesterday. You’re right. I cannot kill them. I cannot kill my cousins.”

“No. You cannot kill them.” Doran kept his voice firm. He didn’t want to be imperious with his son right now, but he would rule Dorne one day. He couldn’t allow his son to put desires of vengeance before their people. The Sand Snakes did it, and the consequences could be terrible for the whole country. All the same, he felt how it was difficult for his son to renounce it. Doran was never able to renounce his will to avenge Elia. He wondered if his son would succeed where he failed.

“Myrcella is dead.” It was obvious Trystane was trying to fight back the tears that threatened to leave his eyes, but Doran couldn’t blame him.

“Do you remember when your mother left?” Trystane nodded to mean he remembered. “I kept doing my duties as Prince of Dorne despite everything. Not because I wanted to, but because I had to. All I wanted was to lock myself in my chambers to see no one, or to sail across the Narrow Sea to beg her to come back. But I didn’t. I couldn’t abandon the people of Dorne, not even for the woman I loved and for the mother of my children. I still wish things had been different, that I could have convinced your mother to stay. She didn’t die, but I lost her. Just like you lost Myrcella.”

Trystane walked to a chair and sat in it. He looked utterly destroyed, and Doran knew he was. “What are you going to do with the Sand Snakes? And Ellaria?”
“Obara already left for Oldtown. She’s going to find Sarella. Tyene and Nymeria will leave for King’s Landing very soon. Ellaria and the other daughters of Oberyn will remain here under guard.”

Trystane looked at his father, astonished. “You’re sending them away? You’re releasing them? After what they did?”

Doran looked at his legs. “The Lannisters will learn about Myrcella’s death sooner or later. I need them to carry out special missions. Tyene and Nymeria will spread chaos in the capital and between the Tyrells and the Lannisters. This could make the difference between survival and destruction for Dorne.”

“They killed Myrcella! She was a girl! And I loved her! How can you tell Dorne needs them?”

“I can tell this because it’s the truth, my son. Remember you’re speaking to your father and your prince.”

Trystane calmed down. “Sorry, Father. But… it’s unfair. Myrcella did nothing wrong. She was a sweet girl. Nothing like her monster of a brother. I will never forgive them what they did. Ellaria, Tyene, Obara, Nymeria… I will never forgive them.”

“Neither will I. Neither did I ever forgive the Lannisters and the Baratheons for killing Elia and my nephew and niece. Neither Oberyn could ever forgive them. We cannot forgive that, and we cannot forget it. But we must think about Dorne first. And right now this is what I need you to do. You cannot allow yourself to think about vengeance against your cousins during your journey.”

“My journey? What are you talking about?” Confusion was plain on his son’s face.

“I sent Obara to Oldtown and Tyene and Nymeria to King’s Landing. I’m sending you somewhere else, across the Narrow Sea, to find allies that will allow us to defeat the Lannisters once and for all, and to save our country.”

“Where?”

“In Slavor’s Bay. You will leave for Planky Town tomorrow, pretending to visit Lord Dalt at Lemonwood. From there you will take a ship that will bring you to Meereen. There you will meet Daenerys Targaryen and offer her the spears of Dorne to support her claim on the Iron Throne. You will convince her to come to Westeros at once, and you will bring her a proposal to unite House Martell to House Targaryen through marriage.”

Trystane’s facial expression showed he slowly understood what Doran meant. He jumped from his chair. “You can’t be serious! Myrcella just died and you want me to marry another woman right away, like she never existed!”

“Sit, my son.” Doran spoke quietly. He would need to choose his words well for what would come. “Trystane, I must be honest with you. I should have been before. I should have been before. I should have told you at the very moment I saw you develop feelings for your betrothed.”

“What do you mean, Father?”

“I never meant to have you married to Princess Myrcella. I accepted the alliance Tyrion Lannister offered us to keep Dorne out of the War of the Five Kings. But I never wanted you to marry Myrcella Baratheon. The betrothal was never supposed to end with marriage. I’ve been planning to marry you to the last daughter of the Mad King for years now. This was always my intention after your brother Quentyn died. Your betrothal with Myrcella was only an act.”
Doran then explained everything to his son. For the first time in twenty years, Doran shared his plans with someone. Not even Oberyn had known about this. His brother had known he was preparing something, but he had never known exactly what Doran plotted all these years. He made a pact long ago to marry Quentyn to Daenerys Targaryen and to support Viserys Targaryen when he would come back to Westeros. Oberyn had been the one to sign the secret pact, though he had ignored if his brother would really fulfill it. Now that Quentyn was dead, it fell on Trystane to honor the contract. He would be King of Westeros and Prince of Dorne one day. Daenerys would come to Westeros and Dorne would support her claim. But they needed her to come immediately, and to convince her that if she stayed too long in Essos, Dorne could be defeated and she wouldn’t be able to take back her father’s throne without the support of the south.

Trystane was agape before everything his father told him. Doran understood it was a lot to take at the same time. He explained it very carefully, wanting his son to understand why he did this and how. When he was over with his explanations, Trystane looked at him, pained.

“You would never have let me marry Myrcella?”

Doran shook his head, almost closing his eyes. He feared his son’s reaction. “I’m sorry, Trystane. Never. You are a prince of Dorne. She was no fit to marry you.”

“Myrcella was a princess, just as much as Daenerys Targaryen when you made this pact.”

“No, Trystane. Myrcella is no princess. I have always been loyal to the Targaryens. House Baratheon has no right on the Iron Throne, no more than House Lannister. Myrcella is no princess here in Dorne in the eyes of the Targaryens. She is not even a lady. The rumors are true.”

“What rumors?” Dorn could see fear in his son’s eyes. Trystane surely knew what was coming.

“Myrcella is not Robert Baratheon’s daughter. Her father is Jaime Lannister, the Kingslayer. She is of noble birth, but she is a bastard. Even worse, she is born of incest. I could never have let you marry her.”

“But… but… that’s impossible. That can’t be.”

“My sources are clear. Lord Varys investigated on Robert’s bastard children. They all have black hair and blue eyes like him, and every marriage between Lannisters and Barathens produced children with the Baratheon’s features. Myrcella had the green eyes and the golden hair of her mother and her father. What Stannis Baratheon said was true. Everything is true. My own men confirmed the information from the Spider.”

“No. No… No.” Trystane took his face into his hands. Doran knew that this time he was really crying. He wished he could reach his son. What have I done? Is revenge worth all this?

Doran allowed his son to weep as long as he wanted. When Trystane could finally get his face into the light, his eyes were red from the water they still contained. Doran resumed. “You must leave tomorrow. You have to reach Meereen as quickly as possible. The fate of thousands of Dornishmen may depend on your mission.”

Doran didn’t know what else to tell his son. Trystane rose from his seat. Doran could decipher a mix of despair and hatred in his son’s eyes. Right now he looked very much like his mother.

“You lied to me. All these years, you lied to me.”

It was no question, and anyway Doran couldn’t have refuted it. “Yes, I did. I wish I hadn’t.” He didn’t look at his son. He couldn’t look at these eyes who came from Mellario.
“Would you have killed her?”

Doran gathered the courage to look back and to support the eyes. The gout looked so easy to endure right now. “No. We don’t kill little girls here in Dorne. I never lied about it.”

“And yet you take Oberyn’s youngest daughters in hostage. And you send those who killed Myrcella to do your dirty work. You let them escape punishment. You always taught me about justice. Is that justice?”

Doran averted his eyes again. “It’s what needs to be done if we want justice.” For Elia. For Vengeance. Justice. Fire and Blood.

“I don’t call it justice. I call it indifference.” A silence fell in the room, a silence that lingered for a very long time. Doran felt the eyes of his son on him, but he couldn’t return his gaze. Finally his son broke the silence. “I’ll leave tomorrow. And pray for that I don’t meet any of my cousins before a long time. Because when I see them, I will deliver justice. For Myrcella.”

His son left. Doran got back his eyes on him just in time to see Trystane leave. He had sent his last son on a dangerous mission. Would he come back alive? Doran didn’t know. He remained there in Hotah’s company. The priest had stood still all this time, as if he ignored the conversation that had been going on. Doran knew he heard everything, and that Hotah was worried. His stance may be rigid, but Doran could decipher the guard’s emotions.

“Do you think I did well, Hotah?”

The Norvosi looked at him, a stern face with sorry eyes. “It is not my place to question your decisions, my prince.”

Doran wished Hotah could tell him if he had been right or not. No matter the answer, it would have brought him some reassurance. He wished Mellario was there too, though he knew very well she would disapprove. But Mellario was far away, and Hotah would never criticize him for his actions. Probably he couldn’t criticize them. Doran whined at the pain through his legs, though it wasn’t the worst.

“Captain, fetch the maester. I need to speak with him.”

Hotah bowed and let Doran alone. He came back a few minutes later with the man who had served as maester of Sunspear ever since the time Doran’s mother ruled Dorne. Caleotte worried about Doran’s state, but Doran pushed the subject aside. He refused to drink the milk before he gave his final instructions to the maester. He told him everything that needed to be told to Trystane before he left on the morning, and everything his son would need for his journey. Doran wouldn’t see his son before he left. That would do no good for both of them. The maester bowed when he left with Doran’s orders. Doran gave orders to Hotah about the protection of Ellaria and Oberyn’s children who would stay in Dorne, then sent him to sleep. The bearded priest deserved to sleep. The Prince of Dorne drank the milk of the poppy next to his bed and fell asleep. In his dreams, they were all there. Elia, Mellario, Quentyn, Oberyn, all those he loved. All those he lost. In the semi-consciousness he was, Doran prayed Trystane wouldn’t come to join them.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for everyone who wanted me to keep Myrcella alive. However, with the absence
of Jaime and Bronn to fight the Sand Snakes, that changed a few things in Dorne. The Sand Snakes are unlikely to kill Doran and Trystane the way they did in the show. I don’t think the showrunners did their work well with killing Hotah, Doran and Trystane. That seemed so unrealistic. Doran will be more like in the books now.

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
Okay, the last time we were in Casterly Rock, Sansa just received news that Arya was married to Ramsay Bolton. I'm afraid this chapter is not a happy one. However, it starts a new part of the story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Okay, the last time we were in Casterly Rock, Sansa just received news that Arya was married to Ramsay Bolton. I'm afraid this chapter is not a happy one. However, it starts a new part of the story.

For the fifteenth consecutive day, Tyrion had asked the question to Creylen, and the answer was still the same than the first day. He sighed, just like he did each time he received the negative answer, twice a day.

“I swear that I will warn you as soon as the raven will arrive. I check the rockery regularly and read every scroll as soon as it arrives. You'll be informed the moment the reply will come.”

“I would have liked to be informed about the marriage of my sister-in-law when the new arrived, not a week later,” Tyrion replied angrily.

Creylen closed his eyes. Tyrion knew he regretted to not have read the infamous message immediately, but right now it couldn’t make Tyrion more sympathetic to the maester. Sansa had locked herself in their chamber for the last two weeks and no one managed to convince her to leave them. She scarcely ate, rarely left her bed, seldom talked and spent most of her time looking blankly when she wasn’t crying and sobbing. Tyrion felt powerless just like when her brother and her mother were killed.

Things had been so good between Tyrion and his wife ever since they arrived at the Rock, especially during the last month. All of it was gone now, destroyed by the Boltons. Tyrion wanted to chop the heads of all the Boltons only for this, and he wanted to revive his father so he could kill him himself. None of this would have happened if his father hadn’t organized the Red Wedding and given the North to Roose Bolton. Just when his relationship with Sansa really flowered, it had to be crushed by his father’s doings. Even dead, Tywin Lannister was ruining his life.

“I know how you feel, Tyrion. But all we can do for now is to wait.” Creylen’s words looked foreign to his ears.

“How could you know how I feel?” Tyrion spoke harshly.

“Because you have the same attitude than when you came back from this journey all over the Westerlands. You acted the same way back then when you visited me.”

Creylen’s words didn’t make him happier. He remembered this journey when he was sixteen. It was on his way back to Casterly Rock that he met Tysha. “The maesters are supposed to advise the lords they serve. Do you have any advice to give me, Creylen?”
The maester he spent so much time with when he was young gave him a sorry look. “I’m not married. But if I was at your place Tyrion, considering what happened the last time, I would stay close to my wife. I would try to be there for her.”

Tyrion nodded and left the maester’s rooms. Creylen knew Tyrion very well. Tyrion was the one who spent more time than anyone else with the maester when he was a lad. Being a dwarf, what other choice did he have but to study and learn? Tyrion reflected on his advice. He wanted to spend more time with his wife, but like the last time when she lost who she thought to be the last living members of her family, he didn’t know what he could do. His family put House Bolton at the head of the North. If Arya Stark was married to Ramsay Bolton, it was in part his own fault. He remembered the little girl from Winterfell. She looked more like a Stark than Sansa with her brown hair and her grey eyes. He saw her eyeing her brothers sparring in the courtyards quite often, and saw Jon Snow ruffling her hair once. The bastard looked much closer to her than Sansa. Even on the tapestry he ordered for Sansa’s name day, Tyrion told to have Jon Snow ruffling the wolf girl while she held a sword. Tyrion had thought for a moment sending a raven to Castleblack to warn the Lord Commander about his sister’s fate, but in the end he chose not to. It would do no good if Jon Snow rode to Winterfell and broke his vows in a foolish attempt to save his little sister. Sansa would never forgive him if he caused the death of another brother. And Tyrion didn’t want Jon Snow to blame him too for Arya Stark’s captivity. Sansa wasn’t blaming Tyrion, not openly, but he felt he was to blame all the same, and he didn’t want the lad to hold him responsible for this. It was a selfish thought, but he couldn’t help but feel that way.

Tyrion went back to his solar where he tried to work. Lord Reginald Lannister of Lannisport still sent him reports about his son Serion’s attempts to cause trouble into his family. Yroan’s reports on the mining activities were waiting for him to examine them. Tyrion tried to look at them, but after a few minutes he pushed them away. How could he focus on such petty matters like gold digging when the sister of his wife was being raped by a psychopath? When his own wife spent her whole days weeping? Tyrion should be with her, consoling her, or at least trying to do so. What kind of husband was he? He read the scrolls from the bannermen who returned the ravens he sent two weeks ago, but as long as he didn’t have the answer he was waiting for, it was useless.

Tyrion left his solar, but as he walked to his rooms, his courage to face his wife faded and he found himself walking to the Stone Garden. He didn’t know why his legs brought him there, but he found himself in the godswood all the same. He walked through it to the dead weirwood tree and found himself before it. He remained there, looking at the huge thing with eyes and mouth. He had stopped to believe in the Seven a long time ago, and despite Sansa’s faith in the gods of her father, Tyrion didn’t believe in them. But he needed to release his anger and his frustration, and who better to release them on than the gods who pretended themselves to be good.

“Can you tell me what is just in that? Perhaps I’m a monster. I killed my mother when I came into the world. I wished my father and my sister dead more often that I can recall. I had people executed because they disobeyed the laws of a mad king. I killed thousands of people to defend a king who didn’t deserve to live. I have blood on my hands. If you want to punish me, then so be it. I probably deserve it. But Sansa… she did nothing. She is innocent. All she did for years was to suffer because of monsters, and right when she starts to be happy again… Can you tell me, if you gods are so just, then me why is the world so full of injustice? Why?” Tyrion looked at the face of the tree. “TELL ME WHAT IS JUST IN THAT!”

Tyrion just stood there, looking at the face who didn’t answer. If there were gods, they didn’t listen to prayers. They only watched people suffer, and they did nothing about that. Tyrion didn’t see why he should pray for such gods, no matter their names. Gods who allowed innocent girls to be beaten, raped and killed didn’t deserve to be worshipped. Tyrion turned around and left the stupid tree behind him. That was just a tree with a face, nothing more.
Tyrion noticed the wind got stronger for a moment. He thought he heard something behind him. *I rode.* Tyrion turned and looked at the weirwood tree. There was no sound. Surely he mistook the wind for something else. But he heard another sound from the opposite direction.

“Uncle Tyrion?”

Tyrion looked to find his uncle Gerion’s daughter before him. “Ah, Joy. Your name couldn’t be more fitting than in this moment. Joy is what I would need right now.”

She was looking at him with a worried face. “I heard you shouting. Is there something wrong?”

Joy was already taller than him, but Tyrion could see she was afraid. He sighed. He didn’t want Joy to be afraid because he was angry at everything because of Sansa’s despair. “Sorry. That’s nothing. Just a little anger I needed to spit out. I’m not angry at you, or at anyone in particular.”

“How is Sansa?” Joy asked. “I didn’t see her for days. I tried to invite her to pray with me, but she wouldn’t. She wasn’t even there for my name day.”

The Red Wedding consequences were repeating. Sansa stopped to pray, both to the Seven and to the Old Gods. And it was true she didn’t come to the celebrations for Joy’s name day. After weeks of preparations, Sansa hadn’t wanted to assist the festivities she organized herself. Everyone else had been present, including Tyrion, but Sansa’s absence had been noticed very much. It hadn’t been the same without her. Joy didn’t know why Sansa remained hidden in her rooms day and night. Tyrion thought it was better to hide it to her. She had become so close of Sansa during the previous months and she was so sweet and innocent that Tyrion didn’t want her to be destroyed when she would hear what happened to Arya Stark.

“Sansa hasn’t been feeling well recently. I’m afraid she’ll stay in her chambers for a long time.”

Joy looked sad. “I’ll pray for her. Cerenna told me she cried all day. Blessed are those who mourn, they shall be comforted.”

Joy went her way and knelt before the tree. Tyrion recognized these words from the Book of the Father. It was one of the beatitudes. Contrarily to him, Joy still had faith. Tyrion hoped she would keep it along with her innocence. He walked away, leaving his cousin to pray for Sansa. If he had been less than sixteen, he would probably have joined her, but Tyrion was no more the lad who dreamed of being High Septon. He was the Lord of Casterly Rock, a dwarf, and a husband who couldn’t manage to console his wife. Tyrion walked to his and Sansa’s rooms, for real this time.

Two guards stood before the doors. They let Tyrion enter without question. Slowly, fearing what would come next, Tyrion walked to their bedchamber where he knew his wife was. A handmaiden was staying with her all the time, just in case she would have a new panic attack or try something foolish. Tyrion sometimes feared Sansa would try to jump from their balcony, just like she thought about jumping from a tower of the Red Keep after her father’s death. That was why the handmaiden always sat in a chair positioned on the way between the bed and the balcony.

When Tyrion entered the chamber, Sansa wasn’t alone with the handmaiden. She sat in their bed, her back against the headboard, the blankets covering her body up to her hips, wearing a nightgown, her eyes fixed straight in front of her, her look empty. His cousin Cerenna was there as well, trying to talk to her. There was a plate with food near the bed and Cerenna was trying to convince Sansa to swallow some lemon cakes. It looked exactly like in King’s Landing after the Red Wedding, and Tyrion didn’t feel any better than back in this time.

“You have to eat something, Sansa. I beg you.”
“I don’t want to eat.” Sansa’s voice could have been the one of a dead woman. Tyrion felt Cerenna’s pleas would be useless. His cousin noticed his presence at this moment and rose to greet him, just like the handmaiden.

“My lord, tell her she must eat.” Cerenna’s request really gave him the impression to be back one year ago. He remembered Shae, and that made him feel even worse.

“My lady, she’s right. You need to eat,” Tyrion tried. Sansa looked at him for a moment, then stared again before her. Tyrion wondered what she could be looking at. He turned to Cerenna and the other girl. “Please leave us alone. I would like to be alone with my wife.”

Cerenna and the handmaiden left. The best friend Sansa made since she arrived at Casterly Rock closed the door behind her. Tyrion was alone with his wife who still stared blankly at nothing. Tyrion advanced awkwardly to his wife. She spent most of her days in the bed, doing nothing, barely eating anything. Creylen had come to examine her state a few times. Not only Sansa barely ate, but what few she ate threatened to be vomited only a few minutes later. He could only advise she needed to eat more. Sansa had lost weight again, her body getting thinner. She looked more fragile than Tyrion ever saw her, and that only made him love her more. She’s heartbroken, her sister was forced to marry a psychopath, and here I am, reflecting how she looks beautiful in these moments.

Her right hand was lying on the covers. Slowly and hesitantly, Tyrion took it into his own. The last time he did it in King’s Landing, she had pulled away. This time she didn’t, but she didn’t turn to look at him either. He climbed on the bed to kneel beside her.

“Sansa.” He called for her, softly, but got no reaction. What could he do? “Sansa, you know I can’t let you starve. No more than the last time.”

He regretted immediately what he said. That could only bring more dark memories. But Sansa didn’t react. She kept staring right before her, unflinching, pale. All Tyrion could do was to stay there, her hand in his own, looking at her from time to time, hoping she would do something, say something. He could only stay there and nothing more.

“Jeyne used to call her Horseface,” she said after what looked like an eternity. “She said it in a hushed voice, but Arya could always hear her. I laughed with Jeyne almost each time she said it, and in the evening I would find my bed stinking.” It wasn’t difficult for Tyrion to know why Sansa’s bed was stinking after she laughed at her sister. Sheepshift, Sansa once called it. He smiled a little, but Sansa didn’t. Her eyes were still hollow.

“Do you know what was the last thing I told her?” Her voice was trembling. “I told her she was horrible. I said she should marry Hodor. That she was just like him. Stupid, hairy and ugly. I told her they should have killed her instead of Lady.”

Sansa burst into tears. They were streaming all over her face as she leaned forward. Tyrion managed to put a hand on her shoulder before she could fall on the bedcover and held her the best he could. Slowly, he led her face on his shoulder. She sobbed for a very long time, and all Tyrion could do was to hold her. There were times he thought Sansa tried to say something, but she didn’t. She only kept weeping.

Tyrion didn’t know for how long they remained in that position, but in the end they were both lying in the bed, Sansa with her head resting in his lap while he passed his hand through her red hair. She normally liked it when he did this, but right now nothing seemed able to console her or lift up her mood. Sansa continued to cry, though silently. Sometimes a sob escaped her mouth. They were late in the afternoon when Tyrion had come to their chamber and he wasn’t hungry. Even wine didn’t have much lure for him right now. He stayed with Sansa, only leaving the bed a moment when night
came to put on nightclothes. He had started again to wear them after the new about Arya’s wedding arrived. A week after he and Sansa began to share their bed as man and wife, Sansa had stopped to sleep with clothes and Tyrion had imitated her. Tyrion sometimes regretted he couldn’t take her clothes off anymore. But after they learned what happened to her sister, they started again to sleep with clothes.

Sansa managed to fall asleep during the night. Tyrion on his side couldn’t sleep. His mind was working. He cursed his father, Roose Bolton and his bastard son, the morons in King’s Landing, his own family, the northern lords, and himself. They were responsible for what happened. He even cursed Jaime who pushed the Stark boy from the window. What was he doing, fucking Cersei in that damn broken tower? Did he really expect no one to see them? Without the fall of Brandon Stark, Joffrey would never have sent a man to kill him, and all this war and all its consequences would never have happened. Tyrion could almost forgive everything to his brother, but right in this moment he felt he couldn’t forgive him. His brother started the chain of events that led to the War of the Five Kings, and this war shattered Sansa’s family before it almost destroyed it. And now, the last outcome of this war was the marriage of her only sister to a monster even worse than Joffrey.

Tyrion looked at his wife. While sleeping, Sansa seemed calm, but he knew her sleep was troubled by nightmares. He had to calm her by holding her firmly in his arms a few times this night. Her lips didn’t display the smile she had most of the time while asleep. Tyrion had wanted so much for her to be happy, and all that was broken by a few words brought by a raven. He saw the remnants of a tear on the corner of her left eye. He had to find a way. He couldn’t let things go like this.

When dawn was about to appear at the horizon, Tyrion left the bed and rested his wife’s head softly on the pillows, hoping she would have a few more hours of sleep. Even now, he could only marvel at her beauty. He passed a hand through a strand of her hair and kissed her brow. He missed the nights before the dire new arrived, when they would kiss, fondle, lick and fuck. He remembered how she moaned and whimpered the first time they did it. And he remembered how she screamed his name the next times. It had only been two weeks ago, and it already felt like it happened in another life. Perhaps all that had only been a dream. There was always a part of him that feared all of this was only a dream.

Tyrion left their rooms after ordering a handmaiden to look after Sansa. He walked to the top of the castle to make his first daily visit to Creylen. Like always, he entered without knocking. Creylen wasn’t in his solar and the door of his bedchamber was closed. He was probably still asleep. Tyrion decided after thinking about it to not disturb the maester. It wasn’t because of Creylen if Sansa was spending all her days crying in her bed or if Arya Stark was probably being raped right now. The vision of another rape a long time ago came to Tyrion’s mind. He pushed it away with great difficulty. In the end, he climbed the stairs to the rockery with the ravens. Creylen showed him how to take care of ravens when he was young, back when the maester still hoped to send him to the Citadel. Tywin Lannister hadn’t even wanted his son to become a maester. Not even the Citadel was to laugh at him for his second son.

The ravens started to croak when Tyrion entered. He remembered Creylen told him the ravens were quieter with people they were used to, and Tyrion wasn’t one of them. He saw that two ravens had a scroll attached to their feet. They probably arrived during the night if Creylen hadn’t taken care of them yet. Tyrion detached the messages, not without a few scratches from the unhappy birds. One came from the Golden Tooth and bore the seal of House Lefford. The other one came from King’s Landing. It had the seal of the Hand of the King.

Tyrion left the rockery and the raven’s cries. Quickly he broke the seal of a first scroll when he arrived in the maester’s solar. He realized it wasn’t the good one. Lady Alysanne Lefford only wrote to tell him the preparations were going well at the Tooth. Tyrion cast it aside and opened the other
scroll. He read the few words his uncle put in it. For the first time in two weeks, Tyrion felt some pressure leaving his shoulders. He sighed in relief. He could take action now.

Tyrion went directly to Creylen’s chamber and drummed on the door for more than a minute until the old man opened it. He looked half-asleep, but he didn’t seem surprised to see Tyrion there. The Lord of Casterly Rock didn’t allow him to speak first.

“Kevan answered.” These two words meant everything. Creylen looked like he was waking up.

“He answered?”

“He did,” Tyrion confirmed.

“So?”

“He agreed. I need you to send ravens, and to write an important paper. Now.”

Creylen gathered his senses and was soon ready to work, sitting behind his solar. First Tyrion read out the paper he wanted him to prepare. The maester stopped in the middle of his writing, looking at him with a queer look.

“Tyrion, are you sure this is wise?”

“I was given full authority on this matter. Keep writing.”

Reluctantly, the maester went back to writing the words Tyrion recited. When it was over, he handed the parchment to Tyrion. The Lord of Casterly Rock ordered the maester to send ravens to many bannermen. Tyrion left with the paper and went to his solar. There, he wrote and signed many documents assigning functions, charges, responsibilities and instructions. He gave a look at his family’s accounts and resources, and to the resources accounts of all the Westerlands. While he fulfilled these tasks, he noticed the scroll that arrived a few days ago to confirm the wedding between Arya Stark and Ramsay Bolton. Tyrion put it in a safe place.

At the end of the morning, he went to see his aunt, Lady Genna Frey. She was busy giving orders to her husband like she ordered her handmaidens all around when he entered their rooms. Once Tyrion told her they had to talk, she sent both Ser Emmon and the girls outside. Tyrion was alone with his aunt. He knew that would be the hardest part, but he had to do it. He had no choice. He stood against his father, so he would be able to stand before his aunt as well. Without saying anything, he handed her the paper Creylen prepared a few hours ago. Genna took it without question and read. Her face showed no emotion, but she was obviously unhappy when she talked.

“So, that’s how you thank your aunt for her help?”

“Don’t get me wrong, Genna. What I’m doing is for House Lannister as well as for the Realm.”

“Really? You strip Emmon and my children from their rights over the Riverlands and you say it’s for the good of the family?”

“Genna, you were always almost clever as my father. You know very well Riverrun is a poisoned gift for you and your children. They bear the name of the people who broke the guest rights and murdered people under their roof. Everyone in the Seven Kingdoms hate them, and the river lords more than the rest. If there was to be another war, and we should expect one in the future, if not in the near future, who do you think the Lords of the Riverlands will fight for? For Emmon? For Cleos? The Freys inspire nothing good. The other lords have no love, no respect, no fear of them. They’re not able to hold the Riverlands on their own. Riverrun, Seagard, Raventree, they all resist their rule.
Do you think Emmon or Cleos will be able to enforce their rule? Especially since Edmure Tully has a son?"

Genna nodded faintly after a silence. “I know that very well, Tyrion. I’m not blind. And even without everything you said, there is still Robin Arryn. He’s the son of Lysa Tully and thus has a claim on Riverrun just like Lord Edmure’s son. I know Riverrun is a dangerous gift. Especially now with Freys dying all over the Riverlands because of this Brotherhood Without Banners. I would rather receive Darry than Riverrun. We could marry Ty to Amerei. But Riverrun was given to me and Emmon and it’s the only thing I have for my children.”

“I will never abandon your children. I may not have liked my father, but I understand like him how family is important. If there’s a lesson I kept from him, it’s this one.” Tyrion tried to take a reassuring voice.

“Is that necessary?” There was no plea in Genna’s voice. It was a simple question, nothing more.

“We need to pacify the Riverlands,” Tyrion explained. “For the long term. We cannot pacify this kingdom with House Frey ruling it. The other lords will never follow a Frey. That’s necessary.”

Genna shrugged. She signed the paper. “I’ll have to force Emmon to sign it. He will complain, but I’ll force him to. He will comply. That’s not as if he was anytime soon to get the castle anyway.”

“Thank you, Genna.” Tyrion’s aunt made a little move with her head to show she appreciated the thanks.

“Don’t you think you could grant Darry to Ty? He would only have to marry Amerei Frey instead of Lancel.”

“It’s already decided, dear aunt. Daven will marry Lady Amerei. I prefer to limit the links between our house and the Freys. If Daven is to marry a Frey, better the one who’ll give him Darry. And I don’t want to give Walder Frey the pleasure to have a lesser branch of his house in Darry.”

“You’re probably right,” Genna said, resigned. “Best to have the Lannister name on Darry than the Frey name. I’ve been carrying this name for decades, and not a single second I liked it. You should go now. You have many things to prepare.”

Indeed, Tyrion had a lot of things to prepare. “My lady.”

“My lord.”

Tyrion left, letting his aunt with the pleasant task to have Ser Emmon sign the paper by which he would give up his rights over Riverrun. The Hand of the King gave Tyrion full power to put an end to the war in the Riverlands, and Tyrion would use this authority. He would put an end to this farce once and for all. The Freys had proven to be incompetent fools, unable to restore peace in the kingdom the king granted to them, and anyway they were turncloaks, traitors and oathbreakers. Tyrion would put someone better at the head of the Riverlands.

Tyrion then went to visit the next person he needed to talk with. She was now sitting on a chair, looking outside the windows, but away from the balcony. Tyrion told the servants to not allow Sansa close enough to it. Tyrion dismissed the handmaiden that kept her company. When the girl had left, Sansa turned to face him for a moment before she looked away again. The corners of her mouth twitched an instant, as if she was trying to smile, but if she tried she failed miserably. Well, that’s a start.

“How are you?” The question he asked seemed unnatural.
“Fine.” He knew she wasn’t fine, but better to say we were in these circumstances. Tyrion approached her a little.

“Do you want something, Sansa? If you have need of anything, you only have to ask.”

“No. That’s alright.” Her voice was weak, but less than yesterday. Tyrion hoped it wasn’t temporary. For the first time since his trial, he would need Sansa for a very important task.

“Sansa, there’s something I must tell you.” He took a pause before he said it. Sansa was still staring at the sky. “I’m leaving.”

For the first time in two weeks, Sansa reacted to his words and looked back at him. “What?”

“I’m leaving Casterly Rock. The siege of Riverrun takes too much time, and there are two other strongholds that still resist in the Riverlands. I’m going to put an end to all of this before winter comes.” His wife’s eyes showed complete incomprehension. “Then I will march on the North.”

Sansa looked as if she just received a punch in the stomach. “You will… march on the North?” she asked incredulously.

Tyrion came right before her and gave her the scroll he received from King’s Landing this morning. “Kevan sent me this.” Sansa slowly took the message and started to read it. Her eyes were going from one side of the scroll to the other, incomprehension still plain over her face.

“How?” she just asked.

“Two days after I received the news about your sister, I wrote to Kevan and Tommen. I told them they had the choice between letting me handle the situation in the Riverlands and the North in my own way with their approval, or to see me do the same without their approval.”

Sansa returned her eyes to the paper and read aloud. “To Tyrion Lannister, Lord of Casterly Rock, Lord of the Westerlands and Warden of the West. King Tommen Baratheon, the First of His Name, gives you all power and authority to end the fighting in the Riverlands and bring a lasting peace to this region. Once this duty is performed, you will march on the North to take it back from House Bolton. The Boltons will be stripped of all their lands and titles once the Riverlands are pacified. Do quickly before winter comes. Ser Kevan Lannister, Hand of the King.” Sansa’s eyes had widened. “But… How did you do it? Do they know?”

“I told them. They know what happened to your sister. Arya Stark can be considered a ward of the king, so Roose Bolton had no right to marry her to his son. And with the things Ramsay Bolton is probably doing… All this can be considered treason. The Boltons will be declared rebels to the Crown, but first we must put an end to the war in the Riverlands. Most of our forces are still at Riverrun. I’m gathering new levies, but that won’t be enough. The siege of Riverrun must end, and all the others too. Once it’s done, we will march on the North.”

Sansa was still looking at him in utter surprise, as if she couldn’t understand what was going on. “You… you’re going to…?”

Tyrion nodded. He walked to a chair and sat in it, facing his wife. “I cannot bring back the members of your family who are dead, Sansa. But if your sister Arya is alive, then I have to do something. I can’t just stay here doing nothing. My father started a war when I was arrested by your mother. If he did it for me, the family’s embarrassment, who would I be if I don’t do the same for your sister? And the Boltons slaughtered your family. I don’t want them to rule the North. I cannot allow it. And I don’t want to see another innocent girl mistreated by a monster. Even if Kevan hadn’t agreed to my
plans, I would have gone all the same.”

Sansa looked back at the message. “You must first pacify the Riverlands. That will take too much time. Probably months. Arya will remain in this bastard’s hands in the meantime. We should go North immediately.”

That was the point in his plan Tyrion wasn’t sure about, but he had no choice. “Most of the Lannister forces are at Riverrun under Daven’s command with the forces of House Frey and the other river lords who rallied the Crown after… No matter. These forces cannot leave the castle until it surrenders. If they were to leave, the Freys and the other river lords would probably kill each other. Not that I would mind if some Freys died. They are far too many. But that would resume the war for real in the Riverlands, and in the fields this time, not only around a few besieged castles. I cannot leave the Riverlands in chaos as I march on Winterfell.”

“You could raise more troops,” Sansa suggested.

“Not many. The War of the Five Kings exhausted the Westerlands. Of the three armies my father raised, one was entirely destroyed and scattered at the Whispering Wood, only a few remnants are left of the second defeated at Oxcross, and the other one who saved King’s Landing from Stannis took heavy losses. We don’t lack gold, but there’s a limit to the number of men we can muster. I could only ask for five thousand men to march with me to Riverrun. I have to keep man power in reserve in case the Ironmen would attack us and to invade their islands eventually. The new levies are gathering at the Golden Tooth. Many could die of disease and cold, and even starvation during our campaign in the North. We’ll need the forces at Riverrun. And we’ll need Riverrun to maintain our supply lines. If I leave the Riverlands in war behind me, we have no chance to seize back the North. And the war could restart in an even worse way.”

“What about the Tyrells? They could help us. And the other northern houses? They are loyal to my family. They will fight for us.”

Tyrion sighed. “I wish I could be sure they would side with us. House Manderly will fight with us, surely. Lord Wyman is the one to inform me the most. But the Boltons have spread so much terror in the North that many lords could hesitate to rebel. Most of them don’t have much forces left. They lost nearly all during the war. And even though the Northerners hate the Boltons, they are still Northerners. Many will see us as invaders of the North, not as saviors of the North.”

“But I’m the Lady of Winterfell. I am the daughter of Eddard Stark. They will fight for me.”

Tyrion regretted what he said next, but he had to. “Your name is Sansa Lannister, now. They might not see you as the daughter of their liege lord. Some will see you as a traitor. And with your sister married to Roose Bolton’s son, House Bolton has a Stark on its side too.”

“But he’s raping her! They forced her to marry him!”

“Just like my family forced you to marry me,” Tyrion replied bitterly.

Sansa seemed to calm a little. “And the Tyrells? I could convince Margaery to give us men.”

Tyrion shook his head. “The Tyrells won’t send troops in the North. They’re not used to winter, and they’re already fighting at Storm’s End and Dragonstone. They have no interest in the North and nothing to gain there. The North is yours, not theirs. We have to take it with our own forces. Do you think Olenna Tyrell will send us troops out of kindness because you’re her granddaughter’s friend?”

Sansa had nothing to reply there. But her face was moving all around. “How will you end the
fighting in the Riverlands?”

Tyrion rose from his seat and started to pace all around the room. “It’s Riverrun we need. It occupies a strategic position on the River Road. As long as it stands, we cannot invade the North.”

“But Riverrun has been under siege for… what, more than a year now.”

“Yes. And according to what I know, the castle has stores enough to gather two years of supplies. This means the garrison there can still hold many more months. I’m afraid we don’t have that time to wait. At least, your sister doesn’t have that time.”

Sansa remained silent for a moment. “Ser Brynden Tully is the one commanding Riverrun, isn’t he?” Tyrion nodded and looked away from his wife. “He is my granduncle.”

“Yes. And from the little I know about him, he’s more than stubborn. I’m afraid he won’t give up Riverrun so easily. He will fight to the end to keep it.”

He looked back at his wife who was staring at him. “You’re going to kill him?”

Tyrion pressed his lips together. “I hope that won’t come to that.”

“But… you say he won’t give up Riverrun.”

“No, indeed. He will never surrender the castle. Not to me. Nor to the Freys, nor to any Lannister. That’s why I will need you.”

“Me?”

“You are his grandniece, Sansa. If there is a single chance for the Blackfish to listen to someone, it’s to you. We need him to bend the knee to Tommen and to give up Riverrun.”

Sansa looked uncertain. “I haven’t met him for years. I was probably only six the last time he saw me. He may not even recognize me. And my mother told me he was stubborn and determined. I don’t think he will listen to me.”

“Perhaps. Perhaps he won’t listen to you, Sansa, but he will be much more receptive to you than to me or anyone else.” Tyrion approached until he was next to his wife. “Sansa, I don’t want other people to die because of this stupid war. This war was a mistake and a foolishness since the beginning. But I will need you. You can stay here at the Rock if you want and cry for your sister. To be honest I won’t blame you for that. But if you want to help her, and to help the members of your mother’s family who are still alive, you must come. They need you. I know one thing, your mother wouldn’t want you to remain here. She would want you to fight.”

Sansa seemed to think about Tyrion’s words for a moment. “I’ll come. But I’m not sure I’ll succeed to convince my uncle.”

“I hope you’ll succeed.” Tyrion really hoped she would.

“And if I fail?”

Tyrion sighed heavily. “We will have the choice between resuming the siege and take the risk for winter to surprise us, or to storm the castle immediately. If we were to choose the first option, well… I don’t think it would be in your sister’s interest. Let’s hope we won’t have to make this choice.” Let’s hope the Blackfish will accept the terms I’ll present.
“When do we leave?”

“Tomorrow. At dawn. I have a lot of things to prepare. I’ll join you in the night, late.”

Tyrion left Sansa. He found himself in a situation where he could have to choose between sacrificing the Tullys or Arya Stark. He didn’t enjoy any of these prospects. The worse was that Sansa would have to face the same choice. How could he ask her to choose between her mother’s family and her little sister? And yet, they both had no choice. What would Tyrion do if he was given the choice between sacrificing Jaime or one of his cousins? He knew very well what choice he would make. The decision would be much easier to take if he was to choose between Cersei and any other member of House Lannister. Tyrion could only hope the Blackfish would listen to Sansa and surrender Riverrun.

Tyrion spent the rest of the day making preparations. He gave instructions to Damion who would act again as castellan in his absence, to Cleos who would command the Lannister fleet when the time would come to attack the Iron Islands, to the supervisors of the mines, and to anyone else who was to take care of important tasks while he was fighting. In the end, he went to see Genna who had summoned him. She was the only one who could summon him here in Casterly Rock without fear he would refuse. Well, Sansa could summon him as well and he would obey, but she never did.

As soon as he entered his aunt’s room, she threw the rolled and sealed paper to him and Tyrion managed to catch it at the last moment. “Everything is in order,” she declared. “Emmon complained, as we expected, but he signed. Now you can put your plan in motion.”

His aunt’s voice wasn’t without scorn. Tyrion felt remorseful in some way. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. You’re right. Better to have no castle at all than to have a castle that will get you killed later. Perhaps this is one of the things Tywin never understood and that you do. If he hadn’t wanted so much a queen for a daughter and a king for a grandson, perhaps we wouldn’t be in all that mud today.”

“It’s certain that Cersei was never made to be queen.”

“No,” Genna recognized. “It saddens me to tell that, but the Mad King probably took the right decision when he refused the betrothal your father offered between Cersei and Rhaegar. She’s my niece, but that doesn’t mean I cannot see her flaws. Or yours.”

Tyrion looked skeptical at his aunt. “And what are my flaws?”

Genna smiled kindly. “You have your father’s intelligence and cunning, Tyrion, and you have compassion. That is quite rare within a single person. Some people would say these two traits cannot coexist. And yet here you are, riding to war against the North to save your wife’s sister while seizing it for your children. But I’m afraid this is more the love you have for Sansa that led you to take these decisions. And even though Tywin wasn’t right on everything, he may not have been entirely wrong when he said love was useless. Or perhaps he would have been right if he said it another way. Love blinds us, and it brings us to make things we wouldn’t judge reasonable in other circumstances. I just hope it doesn’t blind you too much and that your plan with the Blackfish will work out well. If it doesn’t, I don’t want to imagine what will be the repercussions for House Lannister.”

Tyrion remembered something his uncle told him in King’s Landing. You once told me you weren’t your father, Tyrion. It’s true, you’re not Tywin. But now I realize that of all his children, you’re the one who looks the most like him. “What would my father have done, if a sister of my mother was being raped, skinned and beaten by the son of another lord?”
Genna seemed to reflect about it. “It would have depended on your mother’s reaction to this. If she had reacted like Sansa, he would have gone to war just like you.”

Tyrion straightened himself. “Farewell, Genna.”

“Good luck, Tyrion.” As Tyrion left the rooms, he heard the last words he would hear from his aunt for a very long time. “If the Blackfish refuses, you know what to do.” Tyrion knew it only too well.

It was late in the night when Tyrion came back to his chambers. He was tired from the day, and he would need to wake up early in the morning to leave Casterly Rock. He longed for his bed, but thought it would be better to wash himself a little before the long journey he would start. He went to the bathroom and was surprised to find his wife already in the tub. Her eyes were half-closed and her breathing deep and steady.

“A strange hour for the bath,” he commented.

“That will be a long time before I can take another one. And I couldn’t sleep.”

Sansa didn’t seem bothered by his presence. She talked to him as if they were talking of the weather while breaking their fast. A situation like this one would have been unbelievable for them last year. Tyrion felt his eyes drawn to her body he could see through the water. He tried to not look at it, but it was difficult.

“Care if I join you?” he asked, trying to think about something else, but not without success.

“No.” He saw the beginning of a smile on her lips, but it didn’t remain there for long.

Tyrion got rid of his clothes and joined Sansa in the bathtub. He shivered as he entered it, the water having turned colder after the time Sansa spent in it. All the same, it was a good feeling and it brought him comfort. Sansa’s knees came to rest around his body. The tub wasn’t large enough.

“One of the few advantages to be married to a dwarf. You have a lot of place for yourself.” He only tried to lighten the mood and the beginning of a laugh escaped from his wife. She was beautiful when she laughed. She was always beautiful, no matter how she felt and how she dressed.

They remained silent for a long moment, just relaxing, their legs touching the ones of the other. Tyrion’s uncertainty and fears left his mind for a moment and he closed his eyes, just savoring the time being. After what looked to be an eternity, he opened his eyes again to see Sansa looking at the side of the tub. Her expression troubled him.

“Are you afraid?” That was a stupid question to ask, but he asked it all the same. Sansa nodded.

“Good. You’re in the great game now. And the great game is terrifying.”

“You’re not very helpful,” Sansa replied, still looking away.

“No. I suppose not. I’m terrible at consoling.”

Sansa smiled a little. “Sometimes, yes, you are.”

Tyrion didn’t say anything more. He only kept looking at his wife while she remained in a half-asleep state. He marvelled at the fine shape of her body. She slimmed for the past two weeks, but it took nothing of her beauty away. She was still the most beautiful woman Tyrion had ever met.

It wasn’t the first time they found themselves together in the same bath, and even less the first time he saw his wife in the tub without any clothes. However, the previous times had been in much better
circumstances and in lighter moods. Despite this, Tyrion found his cock stirring and arousing. He sighed in silence. He didn’t want Sansa to see it when he would leave the tub. He tried to relax himself, but it proved to be difficult with the woman he loved naked right before him and her legs and feet brushing his legs and chest. The fact they didn’t share a bed in two weeks didn’t help either.

Finally, Sansa got out of the tub, and while she was dressing and looking away, Tyrion seized the opportunity to leave the tub as well and hid everything down his hips with a towel. They both put on dressing gowns. The sparse visions of Sansa’s legs through the opening of her dress didn’t help in softening his cock. Couldn’t he think about something else? They both got in the bed, but neither of them managed to find sleep. Tyrion knew it from the unsteady breathe Sansa let escape from the other side of the bed. He already had the impression the night was getting clearer. He hoped they would manage to sleep better once on the River Road.

He felt Sansa moving next to him. They both had their back turn on each other as they tried to sleep, but suddenly he felt her head resting on his shoulder from behind. Immediately his cock awoke again. It had taken a lot of time and control to convince it to relax, all for nothing. It was back. Sansa did nothing else than staying there with her head nearly on his, but it was enough to double the size of his manhood and to make it stay that way. Nothing could make it quiet again.

“Do you really think we can save her? I mean, even if we took back Winterfell, do you think we can save Arya?”

Tyrion noticed the fear in his wife’s voice. He wished he could hold her and reassure her by telling he was sure they would save her sister, but it would have been a lie, and he wasn’t in a position to hold her right now. “I don’t know,” he finally confessed. “There’s only one thing I’m sure of. If we don’t try something, Arya Stark is lost.”

They remained silent for a long moment afterwards. Then Sansa kissed him on the cheek and wrapped one of her legs around his own. “I love you, Tyrion.” Her breathe was deeper than before, and less steady. Tyrion could feel her body getting closer and tighter with his. His cock kept stiffening. How long since he had her for the last time? Sansa’s whole body was shivering against him.

“You remember what you did to me? On our first morning here?” she said in a low voice. It’s wasn’t a voice made for desire. It was a voice full of sadness, and regret, but for Tyrion there was nothing worse than this. It only drew him to want her even more.

“How could I forget?”

He remembered this morning just like he remembered their first night as man and wife. Sansa wore a fine nightgown made of silk that was so thin that it was as if she wore water as clothes. Tyrion had wanted her this morning, but he had relented. He swore he wouldn’t share her bed as long as she didn’t want him to, and she hadn’t. But that changed nothing to the fact he had wanted her more than he had ever wanted up to this moment. She had whimpered. She had seemed so delicate, and welcoming. She had looked to appreciate it. It had been more than difficult for Tyrion to stop touching her, but not as hard as it would be to stop this night he thought.

“I wish I could go back to this moment. There was only you and me back then. That was the moment I felt… well.” Her voice was still low and sad. “For once everything seemed perfect.”

She stuck her face against his cheek. There was nothing Tyrion could do. She probably didn’t want to do it, just like him. How could they think about it when her sister was in danger? But at the same time they wanted to do it. Sansa enjoyed their nights together just like he enjoyed them and it had been two weeks now since they did it for the last time. But it was no time for this. They only
remained in the same position and didn’t sleep a single moment in the end. When dawn came, they were both exhausted by the lack of sleep. A quick bath, a short breakfast and running preparations made them leave only an hour later at the head of a column of a thousand soldiers. They were heading for the Golden Tooth to rally the other recent levies, then they would ride for Riverrun, Raventree Hall, Seagard and, if the gods existed and were with them for once, to the North. Tyrion Lannister and Sansa Stark were marching with an army against the flayed man.

Chapter End Notes

Here ends the arc of Casterly Rock. We won't see Joy, Cerenna, Creylen or Genna before long. However, since Tyrion and Sansa are going to Riverrun, we will see new people appear in the story.

When I started this fic, my objective was to imagine how things could have been different with a single change in the show, Tywin's death in this case. The fic up to now mostly limited the effects of Tywin's premature death to King's Landing on the political plan. It didn't change the general events in Slavor's Bay, or at the Wall, or in Dorne, or in the Riverlands. However, now the story starts to move forward for real. To resume the consequences of Tywin's different death:

-Tyrion and Sansa are in love (and let's say they are some form of power couple now)
-Tyrion is Lord of Casterly Rock and has the riches and the forces of the Westerlands at his disposal
-Sansa is acknowledged by more than half of Westeros as the legitimate Lady of Winterfell and future Wardeness of the North
-Arya didn't go in Braavos and is still in Westeros (the last time we saw her she was at Greywater Watch with Howland Reed)
-Myrcella died sooner and Dorne is now preparing a real war against the Lannisters
-The Sand Snakes are travelling through Westeros to spread chaos
-Trystane is on his way to Meereen to meet Daenerys and make an alliance with her
-The Lannister army is now about to invade the North
-Mira Forrester is now married to a Hightower (change from Telltale Game)
-Kevan rules in King's Landing instead of Cersei

Up to now, the story has mostly been centered on the growing love between Tyrion and Sansa, and we have seen what it changed in the politics of the Seven Kingdoms. However, for the average people living in Westeros, nothing really changed. The same wars were still fought, without much difference from the initial scenario. However, now, things are really going to change for the people, with new alliances taking place and characters meeting when they never did up to now.

-Trystane is going to Meereen, which means Dorne will get involved in the politics of Slavor's Bay and that he could meet Daenerys, Grey worm, Missandei...
-Two Sand snakes are going to King's Landing, which could occasion some tensions with the Lannisters and the Tyrells (imagine Nymeria or Tyene meeting Margaery, Tommen, Kevan, Varys...)
-Obara is heading for Oldtown to see Sarella, and Mira is in Oldtown
-Sansa and Tyrion are going to Riverrun, then to the North (meeting with Brynden Tully, Edmure, Daven, Jon Snow, Davos, Melisandre, Ramsay, Roose...?)
-Also, ask yourself a question: Where Arya really is? At Winterfell? At Greywater Watch? Or somewhere else?
Finally, with the new development of the story and the effects of the change really coming out, we will see more of Jon, Davos, Daenerys, Kevan, Margaery and Arya, and their POV chapters won’t be mostly repetitions of the show anymore. Cersei and Jaime will make new appearances as well. There are also two new POVs who will start in Meereen as the story moves this way.

Please review

Next chapter: Mira
“This is the biggest library in the Seven Kingdoms,” Gerold told her.

“Yes, I know,” Mira replied. “But we need to see it to realize how big it is.”

They were within the walls of the Citadel, in the great library of the maesters and their novices. Mira had heard about this library, of course, but she never thought it would be so huge. The little library they had at Ironrath was a simple box in comparison. Even the one in King’s Landing was small when compared to it. The shelves went so high they needed ladders tens of feet long to reach the top. The height of the shelves was nothing aside the surface the library covered in the Citadel. Mira wasn’t sure Highgarden would be large enough to contain it.

“I should have made you visit this place before. I know you love books. But it’s not very easy to convince the archmaesters to let a woman enter this place.”

Gerold was right. No woman was allowed inside the Citadel. Maester Ortengryn told her back at Ironrath. He spoke a few times of the Citadel where he studied, but nothing could have prepared Mira to this. In fact, she couldn’t have been prepared to anything in Oldtown. The city was entirely different from King’s Landing and there were many more interesting places to visit than in the capital. Mira had spent the last month visiting the Hightower and the different districts of Oldtown. The septs, the docks, the wharves, the markets, and now the Citadel.

Mira looked all around at the shelves. All the books you could think about were there, often in multiple copies. She travelled through the shelves between maesters and novices copying, reading or searching for different works. Most of them looked very surprised to see her here. They weren’t used to see a woman in the Citadel. The secretary at the entrance hadn’t wanted to let her come in, until Gerold showed him a paper signed by the Seneschal, authorizing Lady Mira Hightower to visit the Citadel. The maesters could hardly refuse something to House Hightower.

Mira and her husband remained a long time walking through the library. They both took books to read. Mira was mostly interested by a *History of the Northern Houses* by Publius Tacitus. The work contained beautiful images of the seats of all northern houses, including Ironrath. When Mira showed it to her husband, he was agape. She had tried to describe it to him before, but it was difficult to make him imagine her home when he spent most of his life in the Hightower and on cobbled streets between stone houses. He found the seat of House Forrester quite beautiful. Mira read the section about her family. The author had written it a few decades ago, back when her grandfather was the
heir to Ironrath. Even her father wasn’t mentioned in it. Perhaps she could ask Gerold if it was possible to ask a maester to write an updated version. Mira kept reading about the northern houses while Gerold tried to read a book about the great knights of the Seven Kingdoms. Mira thought he didn’t try very hard since he kept his eyes on her most of the time. She blushed the times she felt his gaze upon her. Weeks after their marriage, the favorite pastime of her husband still seemed to be looking at her. Unless his favorite pastime was instead the things they did at night. That was another subject that caused Mira to redden.

After some time, Gerold got up on his feet. “Excuse me, Mira, but we need to go back to the Hightower. I promised to spar with Altos this afternoon. We’ll be late if we don’t leave now.”

Mira didn’t want to leave right now. She didn’t think she would have the right to enter the Citadel again before a very long time. “I would rather stay here, Gerold. If it doesn’t bother you.”

Gerold didn’t look happy about it, but he was more sad than angry from what Mira could say. “Alright. I’ll tell our litter to stay here and to bring you back.”

“Oh, that’s not necessary. I’ll come back walking. Just leave a guard to escort me.”

“As you wish. I’ll see at dinner, my love.” Gerold kissed her and left.

Mira looked at her husband going away. She had become quite fond of him during the last weeks. There was nothing extraordinary about him. He was a decent fighter with a sword, could shoot arrows well enough, wasn’t stupid though not a genius either and behaved decently. He was kind and very attentive to her. It wasn’t difficult to see he loved her. She had married a good man.

“Well, it is rare to see a woman here.” Mira turned to look at the novice who just made this comment. “And it is also rare to see two people kissing here, though not as rare as some could think.”

The intruder was a young man with dark brown skin, curly and short black hair and widow’s peak. He wasn’t neither tall nor short. He wore the robe of the novices and had a chain with three links around his neck.

“I don’t have the pleasure to know who you are,” said Mira.

“And that’s a problem, I know.” He said it seriously, but Mira didn’t feel he was serious. “My name is Alleras. I’m a novice here at the Citadel.”

“My name is Mira. Mira Hightower.” Even weeks after her marriage, it still felt very odd to Mira to say another name than the one she was born with.

“Hightower? That explains why you’re admitted here. Only women from House Hightower could ever be allowed here, and only for visiting. None could train.”

Mira thought she caught some bitterness in the novice’s voice. “Is that a problem?”

The young man smiled. “No. May I know what you’re reading, my lady?” Mira moved the book so he could see the cover. “History of the Northern Houses. Tacitus is not the best author there is, but his work is quite complete. He pretends the Northerners are stronger than the people of the other kingdoms and could defeat them all one day because they live in simple ways.”

“I am a Northerner,” Mira revealed.

“Oh. So you’re the young lady who married a Hightower. Well, welcome to the Citadel, my lady.”
“Thank you, Alleras.”

The novice looked around him, as if to verify no one was listening. “If you want, I can manage to give you a copy of this book so you could bring it with you in secret. I know the maester in charge of these tomes. He won’t notice the absence of a lone copy.”

Mira was quite shocked by this. He was ready to steal a book. She didn’t think it was a good idea. Sera once stole something in King’s Landing, and it gave her problems. “Thank you, but that won’t be necessary.”

“Why? I’m offering it to you. Don’t tell me you’re going to refuse.”

“It’s very kind of you, Alleras, but really, I don’t want you to steal something.” She said it in a whisper so no one would hear them. “Just leave me alone and go back to your studies.”

Mira dedicated her attention again to the History of Tacitus and started to read the part about House Stark. Without surprise, it was the house with the most pages dedicated to it, its story from Bran the Builder to Lord Rickard Stark, Lord Eddard’s father, written in detail. She also read about House Glover, the family to which her own house was sworn, until she realized she was a Hightower and was no longer linked to the Glovers, about House Mormont, House Bolton, House Karstark, House Manderly, House Whitehill, House Cerwyn, House Umber and many others. Mira finally set the work aside and left the library. When she arrived outside, her handmaiden was waiting for her. She had a huge book in her hands and Mira recognized the title of the one she just read.

“What are you doing with this?” Mira asked.

“This is a novice. A young man with black hair and brown skin. He just came over me and game this. Said it was for you, my lady.”

It seemed Alleras had decided to not care about her refusal. Mira shrugged. There was nothing they could do about it now. She couldn’t bring the copy back inside without awakening suspicions towards the novice. A Hightower guard stood close to Mira’s handmaiden and he escorted them through the cobbled streets of Oldtown to the Hightower. However, as they left the sector of the Citadel, Ser Garlan Hightower, her brother-in-law, arrived to escort them. He had thought Mira would appreciate another man to escort her. Soon, Mira took the lead with Ser Garlan at her side while her handmaiden and the guard remained a little behind. The streets of Oldtown were much safer than those of King’s Landing, as long as you remained in the principal arteries.

“You look radiant, Lady Mira.”

“Thank you, Ser Garlan.”

“The colors of House Hightower suit you well, my lady.”

Mira nodded slightly. After the wedding, she had thought it would be better if she identified herself more to her new family. When she was in Margaery’s service, she had come to wear clothes proper for the Reach, but still kept colors that reminded of her belonging to House Forrester. Now that she was married to a Hightower, she had decided to bear the colors of this family. As a consequence, she wore red and white gowns now. However, she always kept a part of the gown with black and white, whether it was a small section on her shoulders or under them, around her hips or at the hem. She was a Hightower, but she didn’t forget her origins.

She and Ser Garlan remained silent for a moment before he spoke again. “I’m very happy you’re here, my lady. You had a very good influence on my brother. He changed a lot since you arrived.”
“Really?”

“Yes. You don’t know how much you helped him. He was bitter, gloomy, frustrated… very often before he met you. Even more after our grandfather announced him he would marry you.” Mira didn’t know how to react to this. “You must know, my lady, that being a thirdborn son, my brother didn’t have much to expect. He was always set aside in some way. Not that our mother and our father neglected him. They love all of us. Me, Altos, Gerold, Elys. But Altos is to be the Lord of Hightower one day, and I will probably be his right arm. I’m very good for leading men. Altos, my father, and even my grandfather rely on me for leading the Hightower armies. But Gerold… I’m sad to say that, but he has not been gifted with anything special. He has nothing to make his place in the world.”

“That’s wrong! Your brother isn’t… He isn’t a fool, or an incompetent. He’s capable, and decent at everything.”

“Yes, I know, and that’s the problem.” Mira didn’t understand what he meant. “My brother is decent at fighting, studying, leading, and almost at everything. If he had been the firstborn he would have made a perfect lord one day. The problem is he is not the firstborn son. Gerold is good at everything, just like you said, but he’s not exceptional at anything. That’s his problem. His name didn’t help either. He was named after our grandfather’s uncle, the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, and Gerold cannot match his skills with a sword. That’s why life didn’t promise him much, and Altos and Elys mocked him for this reason. Altos in an evil way sometimes, Elys only because she mocks everything and everyone. But because he was always set aside, Gerold never learnt to take Elys’s mockeries with humour. I think it’s probably why my grandfather accepted the betrothal when the queen and Lady Alerie proposed it. It gave him a chance.” Ser Garlan stared at the cobbles under his feet as they kept walking. “Sadly Gerold didn’t see it that way first. You wouldn’t have wanted to be there when my grandfather told him he would marry you. I never saw him so angry.”

“Why was he angry?” Mira didn’t know about the facts Garlan Hightower was telling her.

“He thought we wanted to send him far in the North to get rid of him. He entered such a fury. I think he let go most of his frustration at this moment. He accused us to have always ignored him and put him at the lowest level because he was born last. He said he was never given any consideration. He was angry that we were to marry him with some ugly and stinking girl from the North with a beard.” Mira was about to react quite harshly to these revelations, but Ser Garlan put on a compassionate smile. “I don’t think he meant it. He was very angry. And there are a lot of prejudices against the Northerners here in Oldtown. People don’t know you very much. Gerold really thought our grandfather was trying to humiliate him. I could barely manage to calm him this evening.”

“I didn’t know about this.” That was all Mira could say.

“Please don’t tell my brother that I told you. It’s not something he’s very proud of. And his opinion changed a lot after your arrival.”

“What made him change his mind?” Mira was curious.

“Well, first he realized his family didn’t arrange him a marriage with some ugly and stinking girl with a beard when he saw you.” They both chuckled at this. “And then I don’t know, but he changed all of a sudden. Gerold has never been good with women. They weren’t interested by him, or perhaps he didn’t try to have them interested in him. So he watched you from afar, and believe me when I tell you that, because he talked to me a lot during your first times here, before the wedding, and he fell madly in love with you. Each day he came back talking to me about how beautiful and fantastic you were. I think he was nearly ashamed to marry a woman who could stand up before his own sister when he couldn’t do it himself.” New barks of laugh followed this comment.
However, Ser Garlan took a more serious expression. “You’ve been very good for my brother, Lady Mira. I never saw him so happy since the day he was born. He loves you. I never saw him like this before, ready to do everything for someone else. And he always tells me how wonderful you are. I would like you to take care of him. He needs you. You’re probably everything that gives him happiness in this world now. And he will always be devoted to you.”

“Don’t worry, Ser Garlan. I appreciate your brother very much. And this is not the first time I have to confront prejudices against people of the North. I met a lot of these since I left my home. I’ll take care of your brother. I’m his wife, after all.”

“Thank you, my lady.”

They spent the rest of the way to Hightower talking about the Citadel that Mira just visited. She used the opportunity to thank Ser Garlan for the work of Lomas Longstrider he offered her for her wedding. Her brother-in-law had noticed she had an exemplary in her personal belongings and had thought she would like a better version of it. They parted ways once inside the Hightower and Mira went to her chambers.

Her husband was probably still sparring in the courtyard. She might have gone to see him, but right now she wanted some time alone. Gerold could be among the kindest men she ever met, but he almost wanted to spend every minute of every day with her, and she longed for some solitude. She went to her personal desk and saw the letter she received this morning. It was from the queen and arrived by ship from King’s Landing yesterday, but it took some time before the officers at the docks sent it to her. Mira took the letter and read it again.

My dear Mira,

You don’t know how much I miss you. I lost a friend when I sent you away to Oldtown, and this time I want to blame you not for betraying me, but for leaving me alone among lions. Your advice and your cunning would be much appreciated right now. Tommen is very kind with me, but I don’t think the Hand shares his feelings. Since I arranged your marriage, he is much more prudent and ill-disposed. He’s trying to get Tommen a little far away from me, though he cannot completely succeed. After all, he cannot prevent Tommen from sharing his bed with me.

I do hope you are happy at Oldtown. The Hightowers will help you in time to claim what is yours by right if you are convincing enough with them. I would like you to remember what I have done for you Mira. This caused me a few problems in the capital and problems don’t lack right now in King’s Landing. The Sparrows are causing trouble in the streets, and they seem to grow bolder. Some of the people seem to be on their side. You probably left the city at the right time, though I wish you were there. If it doesn’t bother you, I would like Sera to come back immediately if she hasn’t left yet. I miss you two greatly.

Don’t forget you owe me something. There may come a day when I will need you. Enjoy life at the Hightower and with your husband. Be happy with him. I hope you are happier with him than I am with mine.

Margaery

Mira knew very well she owed a lot to Margaery. She knew Ser Kevan hadn’t appreciated the fact Margaery arranged a marriage for her when he tried to do the same. He wouldn’t forget it easily. Mira may never have found a place in Highgarden, or in King’s Landing, without the queen, and she would never have married Gerold. Mira wondered what problems the Sparrows could cause. They didn’t look much of a threat when she left. They forced people to walk naked in the streets, but they didn’t cause riots or started uprisings. Most of them lived in misery with their brothers near the Great
Sept and tried to help the poor. Did they change after she left? The rivalry between Margaery and Ser Kevan was preoccupying as well, though Mira didn’t think they had to be too much concerned. Ser Kevan was a good man overall, and he knew the Lannisters needed the Tyrells to maintain their hold on the Seven Kingdoms. He would try to limit Margaery’s influence on Tommen, but nothing more. The knight wasn’t Cersei.

Mira took some ink and paper to write a reply to Margaery’s letter. She had enough time before Gerold came back for dinner and she would be able to send the letter with a ship heading to King’s Landing before the day was over with some luck.

My queen,

I was glad to receive of your news. My husband is very kind and caring about me. Perhaps a little too much. Overall, I cannot complain. We both know we could have married much worse. Life at Oldtown is very pleasant and I don’t have time to get bored. I and Lady Elys, my new sister-in-law, get along quite well. She could compete with Lady Olenna for her sharpness. Ser Garlan, Ser Baelor’s second son, is very gentle with me as well. The eldest son, Ser Altos, is somewhat arrogant and mocking, but my husband’s parents behave very well with me.

I’m sorry I left you, your Grace. I wish I could have stayed, but I’m afraid I could only choose how to leave. I’m sorry for the problems I caused with Ser Kevan. When I asked you to intervene in my family’s favor before Joffrey, I told you I would be forever in your debt. This hasn’t changed. You’ve been very good to me ever since the day I arrived at Highgarden, and I will never forget everything you’ve done to me. You can count on my help whenever you need it. I once said I was loyal to you before Cersei. I meant it, and I still mean it.

Sera left Oldtown last week as I’m writing to you. She should have arrived in the capital when this letter will reach you. I wish you well, your Grace. I hope we’ll meet again soon.

Mira Hightower

Mira called her handmaiden. Her name was Saryn and she came from a minor house sworn to the Hightowers. She was only thirteen and had just arrived, so she was quite shy, even before Mira who was a newcomer just like her. Mira liked the girl, though they didn’t grow very close. She regretted Sera’s departure. Elys was of good company, but sometimes her comments and mockeries turned annoying after you listened to them for hours. Mira commanded Saryn to bring her letter to the harbour tomorrow and to find a ship that would bring it to King’s Landing. She also ordered her to prepare a bath. Mira took one and brushed her hair herself afterwards. When Sera was still there, she was the one to brush Mira’s hair. It allowed them to spend more time together. However, after Sera left, Mira decided she would brush her hair herself, just like she did in King’s Landing. It removed a duty from Saryn’s shoulders this way. When Mira was satisfied with her hair, she went to continue reading the book Alleras stole for her. If it was stolen, better to have it stolen for a reason.

She consulted with more caution the chapters concerning House Forrester and House Whitehill. When she read again the passages about the origins of each family, she realized both claimed to descend from a man called Regald Ironwood, the last lord of a forgotten House Ironwood. The family lines couldn’t lead directly to this man in both cases since there were missing lords in the timeline of both families, but Tacitus emitted the theory that both houses once formed only one, and that for a reason or another, they were separated one day. The Forresters made their seat at the borders of the Wolfswood, which allowed them to harvest ironwood, while the Whitehills settled in the hills between the Wolfswood and the northern mountains. In the end, both families had a great fortress almost impossible to penetrate, but the Forresters learned to work ironwood better than the Whitehills, which made them richer than their former cousins. For Mira, it was quite a surprise to
learn Forresters and Whitehills may have been a single family a long time ago. That wasn’t something she could conceive easily after everything that happened between them.

Mira got lost in her reading, trying to find as much as she could about her house, House Whitehill, House Glover and House Bolton. It could prove useful when the time would come to go in the North. Suddenly she felt arms wrapping around her hips and lips kissing the side of her neck. She giggled in surprise.

“Hi, my love,” a low voice said in her ear.

Mira couldn’t help but smile. She was probably too lost in her reading and didn’t hear her husband who had come back. Gerold liked to surprise her like that from behind and to kiss her neck, and Mira had to admit she didn’t hate that.

“Gerold.” Mira could only say his name as he nearly nibbled her skin. “How did the practice go?”

“I defeated Altos.” He sounded very happy about that. Mira knew why. Gerold didn’t get along quite well with his eldest brother.

“It seems I missed something then.” Mira laughed again as he kept trailing kisses from her neck to her cheek, but he stopped all of a sudden.

“What’s this?”

Gerold was looking at the image on the first page of the chapter about House Whitehill. “It’s Highpoint. The seat of House Whitehill,” she explained.

“It looks like a ruin. I don’t understand how these people could defeat your family. Ironrath was entirely different.”

Gerold still had a lot to learn. “The castle doesn’t make the power. And appearances can be misleading.”

“Yes. I’m sorry. That was a stupid thought. I think I’m going for a bath.”

He walked to the bathroom. “I’ll be waiting for you,” she told him before he entered the other room. He half returned the smile. Still weeks after their wedding, Gerold was still shy from time to time in her presence. Mira noticed he was shy around all women, even around his own wife. No wonder he only talked with her a single time before their wedding. Mira turned her attention to her book again. She had talked about her family to her husband, and also to the other Hightowers, and about Ironrath as well. She needed to do it if they were to help her to claim it one day. One night, Gerold had sworn to her he would give her back her family’s home. Perhaps after seeing images of Ironrath today he would be more motivated. Mira had to subtly convince Gerold and his family to support her. She watched Margaery do it long enough to master this art well enough herself. She learned from the best.

Gerold returned washed and clean some time later. They dined together and talked about their visit of the Citadel today. Mira told him how she liked it and asked him questions about how he defeated the future heir to the Hightower in single combat. Gerold obviously enjoyed telling her and Mira told him tales about the times she saw her two older brothers spar against each other at Ironrath, when she was younger. Their dinner was however disturbed by the sudden arrival of Elys who came to tell in her own way about the fight between Gerold and Altos in the sparring ground today. Gerold was obviously irritated by his sister’s irruption, but Mira let her sister-in-law talk long enough before she drove her away much more diplomatically than her husband would have ever done.
“Thank you,” Gerold told her as Mira closed the door behind Elys Hightower. “I thought she would never leave us alone.”

“Her recital of the duel was quite entertaining, but I think she should make it shorter,” Mira commented.

“I’m tired of this. Of her mockeries. I already have too much with Altos. Only Garlan is alright with me.”

Mira sat again and put her hand on his. “Your sister is not evil, Gerold. She’s laughing at everything. She’s like that. We cannot help it. She doesn’t hate you.”

Gerold sighed. “I wish Father could marry her so she would leave Hightower, but up to now she managed to chase every suitor who was presented to her. They never came back asking for her hand. As a result I must continue to suffer her.”

Mira smiled sadly. Her husband was too touchy. “You just beat your brother. Don’t let your sister ruin it. Enjoy the moment.”

He smiled back at her. “You’re right. As always, my love.”

Later in the night, Mira was resting her head on his chest as they both laid in their bed. Mira hadn’t known what it was to sleep with a man before her wedding night, but now that she knew what it was, she didn’t want it to stop. She closed her eyes and kept her body on his, just enjoying the feeling of calm and serenity the position gave her. Gerold was passing his hand through her hair or caressing her back. Mira didn’t move, simply not wishing this to stop.

Gerold brought his lips to her hair and kissed the top of her head. “I love you, Mira.” Mira knew that. Everyone who had eyes or ears or even only a nose could realize her husband loved her. “I would do anything for you.”

“Anything?” She wasn’t sure if she should believe him and nearly laughed at the declaration.

“Anything.”

Mira didn’t care what it meant, but she was happy to be married to a man who loved her. She may have lost a family, but there were other people who loved her in this world, and the man who held her in his arms and kissed her in that very moment was among them.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was mostly about knowing more about Mira's husband, and also to see how her marriage is going. Ser Garlan Hightower is mostly the equivalent of Garlan Tyrell. I really regret they didn’t include him in the show only to keep Loras as Margaery's sole brother, so I decided to bring him into this fic under another name.

Please review

Next chapter: Brienne
Brienne II

Chapter Notes

Here begins the arc of the War in the North. This arc of the story will see more chaos, more treachery, more fighting, more battles and more uncertainty than there were up to now. People are going to die, people we love and people we hate, sometimes people we love to hate too. Despite its name, this arc will not only be about the war in the North. The action will be centered mostly around the Lannister army marching on the North (with Tyrion and Sansa leading it), King’s Landing and Meereen. The great game of this fic starts.

This chapter is the first of a round of five chapters whose action is taking place around Riverrun. Since the events of Riverrun will only take place in three days at most, these chapters will be updated two days from each other, instead of my usual schedule with two updates per week.

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BRIENNE II

They had left Casterly Rock less than a month ago. Their speed of travel had been much greater than the one they had when they had left King’s Landing. There was no carriage with them this time, though carts followed them, carrying supplies, weapons, clothes, gold and silver for the campaign that announced itself. They were about five thousand men, most of them on feet. The Lannister cavalry was almost entirely already at Riverrun. This little troop that accompanied Lord Tyrion and Lady Sansa in the Riverlands wasn’t much when compared to the army that was waiting for them before the seat of House Tully. They would reach Riverrun tomorrow. For Brienne, they weren’t quick enough. They were lucky the rains didn’t slow down their march, and they would need more luck to move from Riverrun to Winterfell quickly enough.

It had been a great shock for Brienne to learn that Arya Stark was still alive, but it had been horrible when she learned the Lady Arya was forced to marry Roose Bolton’s son. Brienne had sworn to Lady Catelyn that she would protect her daughters and bring them back to safety. Brienne had succeeded with the Lady Sansa. Well, maybe she didn’t have much to do. It was Ser Bronn who mostly saved her from Ser Dontos in King’s Landing, and afterwards Brienne only had to serve as her guard. Sansa was safe at Casterly Rock and didn’t really need any protection, but Brienne remained at her side all the same. She swore a vow to Lady Catelyn, and now she had a vow binding her to her daughter. She wouldn’t leave her service.

Everything had changed when the news about Arya Stark reached them. Everyone assumed she was dead, and now all of a sudden she was alive. Brienne had sworn to Lady Catelyn to keep both her daughters safe, and not only one. When Lady Sansa told her about her sister, and about the horrible things Ramsay Bolton did to women, she had wanted to ride immediately to Winterfell and to rescue the other Stark girl. However, Podrick, the squire in Lord Tyrion’s service and who she began to teach how to fight with a sword at Casterly Rock, reminded her she was bound to Lady Sansa’s service, and that her chances to free Arya Stark alone were meager. In the end, after a great conflict
with herself, Brienne had decided to remain at Lady Sansa’s side. It didn’t prove to be such a wrong choice since her husband decided to ride for the North. Brienne would be more useful in the army than on her own.

Brienne was however afraid about the fact Lady Sansa came with the army. Brienne was glad to ride to save Arya Stark, despite the fact they were still going too slow for her taste, but she didn’t think it was a good idea to bring Lady Sansa with them. She should have stayed at Casterly Rock. After her initial reluctance and mistrust towards the Lannisters, she had come to trust them if not appreciate them. Their arrogance was still something she couldn’t support, but Lord Tyrion and Ser Jaime had proven themselves worthy of trust, and the rest of their family at Casterly Rock had revealed themselves to be quite decent people. Lady Sansa would have been safe at Casterly Rock, protected by the Lannisters, as strange as it may seem, but on the road she could be in danger anytime, even with an army around her. Brienne had voiced her concerns to the lady, but she had refused to listen to her. Before the Lannister troops could travel North, they had to put an end to the siege of Riverrun. As for Brienne, the Lannisters should simply give it back with the Riverlands to House Tully, Lady Catelyn’s house, make peace with Ser Brynden, and then head to Winterfell. They would lose less time this way, and that would be only fair. However, Lady Sansa said she might be the only one capable of persuading her granduncle to surrender Riverrun and to bend the knee to Tommen. Even worse, she was determined to follow the army when they would march on the North. She wanted to be there when they would free Winterfell and her sister. Brienne could recognize the same courage her mother had, but she was afraid this courage might get her killed. Lady Sansa remained deaf to her words and was decided to go to the North.

Brienne thought there could be another reason why Lady Sansa wanted to follow the army, and this reason didn’t reassure her, quite the opposite. Brienne was well aware of what was going between the young lady and her husband at night. She had informed Lady Sansa about it after a night she was guarding their chambers and she had heard very loud noises from the other side of the doors. Considering how heavy were the doors, that said a lot. After this, Lady Sansa banned guards from before their doors at night. And since they left Casterly Rock, there had been a night when Brienne was guarding their tent when she heard her mistress’s moans. The good thing was that it only happened once, as far as Brienne knew, and the noises were far less loud than back at the castle. Brienne still didn’t know what to make of it. She had come to have quite a good opinion of Tyrion Lannister, just like for his brother. What enhanced the most her esteem for the Imp was his constant refusal to bed Lady Sansa without her consent. Brienne also witnessed he really tried to protect her. The opinion people had on him were as false as the one they had on Ser Jaime. However, he still had a crude language and remembered her of his father from time to time. And since Lady Sansa started to share her bed with him… Brienne didn’t know when it began exactly, but it wasn’t far from Lady Sansa’s sixteenth name day when Brienne won the tourney against a knight of the Vale. She really didn’t know what to make of it. On one side, Lord Tyrion didn’t mistreat Lady Sansa at all, quite the opposite. She rarely saw a man so devoted to his wife, but she wondered what would Lady Catelyn say of that if she was still alive. If she learned that her eldest daughter had fallen in love and spent her nights with the Imp.

The army established a camp for the night as the light of the day was beginning to fade. Brienne hate away from the other soldiers, but as it often happened the sellsword Bronn came to join her.

“Hi.” He sat on the same stump than her with his bowl of stew and his tankard of ale.

“Ser Bronn.” Brienne didn’t lift her eyes from her bowl.

“No need to call me this way. You’re more a knight than me.” Brienne wouldn’t argue against it.

The man was a sellsword and would always be a sellsword, though he didn’t behave differently from
some other knights in this army. “Or him.”

Bronn pointed a man with blond hair eating not far from them with other men. His armor bore the sigil of a gold lion on a crimson field with water at the bottom. “He shouldn’t be there,” Brienne simply stated.

“Well, the dwarf believes it’s better to have him away from Lannisport. He caused enough problems in his family.”

“He will cause problems here as well.” Brienne didn’t trust Serion Lannister from what she saw at Casterly Rock. He always tried to spread chaos in his own house, the Lannisters of Lannisport.

“Well, let’s hope then he will die in battle. In the meantime, we should both watch him. Who knows what he might try?” Brienne could agree on that. “You’re shit at talking. I’ll go and drink with my men. Just remember to keep an eye on this guy.”

“I will.”

Ser Bronn of Blackwater left and Brienne was alone again. She didn’t like the sellsword, but he protected Lord Tyrion, and his wife as a consequence, so Brienne was ready to work with him when it came to protect Lady Sansa. He was entirely loyal to Lord Tyrion, as much as a sellsword could be and maybe more since Lord Tyrion authorized and approved his marriage with a girl who was formerly a whore, so Brienne grudgingly accepted to work with him, though she wouldn’t like him more for that.

When she was done, Brienne went to see Podrick so they could practice his swordplay like they did each evening. The boy showed some progress since she started to teach him at Casterly Rock. He wanted to become a knight, but no one wanted to teach him how to fight, so Brienne had begun to show him and kept practicing with him after they left the castle. However, it wasn’t Brienne who found Podrick but Podrick who came to find her.

“My lady, Lord Tyrion would like to speak to you. He asked me to fetch you to his tent.”

Brienne followed Podrick to Lord Tyrion’s tent, the tent that was that was also Lady Sansa’s. The tent was well furnished with a featherbed, cushions, furs on the ground, a desk with ink, paper, maps, quills and candles on it, tables and many books. Lord Tyrion was looking at a map when Brienne entered, but lifted his eyes from it when she came in.

“Lady Brienne.”

“Lord Tyrion.” Brienne bowed. “You wanted to see me.”

“Yes, I did.”

“Where is Lady Sansa?” Brienne found it strange she wasn’t there. Lady Sansa was almost all the time with her husband since they left Casterly Rock.

“She’s talking with Lord Westerling. That’s why I asked you to come. She’s not here for the moment. I want you to keep an eye on Sansa in all circumstances. Tomorrow we will reach the encampment of the army besieging Riverrun. Or to be more precise, the armies. The Freys have considerable forces there, but also many lords of the Riverlands are there. I need you to be with Sansa all the time, without exception. These people could hurt her.”

“The lords of the Riverlands would never dare anything against Lady Sansa. Her mother was the daughter of their liege lord.” Brienne understood she had to watch the Freys, but the men of the
“Unless you forgot, Lady Brienne, Sansa is a Lannister now.” Brienne wanted to argue on this, but Lord Tyrion didn’t give her the time. “She bears the name of the family who organized the Red Wedding. They could see her as a traitor, despite her Tully looks. Her red hair and her blue eyes may even make things worse for the river lords. They would see her a greater traitor for that probably. Even my own men may not look at her very well. Most of the Lannister soldiers at Riverrun are seasoned soldiers who fought in my father’s army or in Stafford’s army. They fought against the Starks and Sansa’s brother. Some lost their friends or members of their family, or have been close to die in northern hands. You must stay at her side all the time. All the time. Do you understand?”

Brienne nodded. He was right. She didn’t consider these things. All the men in these camps would have something to reproach to Lady Sansa. Brienne would stay close to her. She swore to protect Sansa Stark, both to Sansa Stark and to her mother.

“Good. You may go. She doesn’t leave your sight a single moment from next morning.”

Brienne bowed and left. Podrick, who had remained outside at the entrance of the tent, asked her if they could train and Brienne said they would. They went to the place where they organized a practice ground and took practice swords. Podrick was slowly getting better, but he was getting better all the same. He might make a good knight one day with enough time. Ser Bronn was practicing not far away from them with his own men, beating them very easily. It was more a lesson he was giving them than an actual practice and many had cuts and bruises from the hits they took. It was a luck they fought with practice swords, or else they would all be dead.

After a time, Brienne noticed Lady Sansa was watching them spar. When she realized it, she turned to face her and knelt on her knee. “My lady.”

“It’s alright, Lady Brienne. You can rise.” Brienne did so. “Please follow me. I would like to walk a little and some company would do me some good.”

Brienne turned to Podrick with a sorry look and the squire brought back his practice sword to its place before he walked toward his lord’s tent. Brienne put back into its place her sword as well and followed Lady Sansa away from the camp. Her face showed nothing of the happiness Brienne had seen in the previous months after Lord Tyrion was cleared at his trial. The emotions painted on her face and displayed by her eyes were much alike those her mother showed back when Brienne was at her service. She looked very much like Lady Catelyn Stark in this moment. When they were at some distance from the camp, though not too far, Sansa began to talk.

“Do you have any brothers or sisters, Brienne? I never asked you before.”

“I had once, my lady,” she answered shortly.

“Once?”

“I had a brother, Galladon. He died drowning when I was eight. I also had two sisters but I never had the chance to see them. They died while still in their cradle.”

“I’m sorry, Brienne.” Lady Sansa kept walking forward, her eyes fixed right before her. Brienne thought she ought to say something.

“I don’t remember who my mother was, Lady Sansa. I was so young when she died that I can’t even remember her face. I was eight when my brother died. I may have been young, but I had a good idea of death all the same. I have an idea how you may feel.”
Lady Sansa didn’t answer immediately, but after a moment she asked a question that had no link with the previous subject. “You are the only living child of your father, aren’t you?”

“Yes, my lady.”

“So you are the heir to Evenfall.”

“I am, my lady,” Brienne confirmed.

“No man ever wanted to marry you?”

That wasn’t a matter Brienne wanted to talk about, but the lady she swore to serve asked her a question. “My father organized me three betrothals. The first time, the boy caught a chill and died before I flowered. The second one gave me a rose when we met and told me it would be all I would have of him. The third ordered me to behave like a woman should once we would be married.”

“And what happened?”

“I was sixteen at the time. I told him I would only accept his demand if he could beat me in combat. He left Evenfall with four broken things: three ribs and a betrothal.”

Lady Sansa laughed lightly at the story and Brienne had to smile as well. Lady Sansa barely smiled since she learned the fate of her sister. To make her laugh was almost an impossible task these times. Even her husband couldn’t succeed, and he normally succeeded.

“I guess there were no other betrothals afterwards,” her lady asked.

“None,” Brienne confirmed. She fell in love in the end, with a kind man, but Renly could never return the love she had for him.

“I wish I could have done the same to Joffrey. We were both unlucky in our betrothals. Before marrying Tyrion, I was promised to a monster, then to a man who preferred sleeping with men than women.”

“Lord Tyrion is a good man, Lady Sansa. He treats you well.” Just like Renly treated me well. “And he loves you.” Renly could never love me. You had more luck than me, my lady.

“Yes, he does love me. And I love him.” A sad smile appeared on the young lady’s lips. It reminded Brienne of Lady Catelyn’s smile. “Have you ever met Lord Edmure or Ser Brynden, Brienne?”

“No, my lady,” Brienne confessed. “They weren’t with the army when your mother released Ser Jaime and charged me to escort him to King’s Landing. I never saw them.”

“I’m afraid. Tyrion believes I may be able to convince them to surrender Riverrun, but I never met my uncle and I haven’t seen my granduncle for years. I could have been seven the last time I saw him. And I will see them tomorrow. They will probably not recognize me.”

There was something Brienne had on her mind that she needed to tell to Lady Sansa. “My lady, if you allow me, I think we should just leave Riverrun behind and head north right now. You shouldn’t fight against your family. We shouldn’t. I swore to keep you and your sister safe, not to fight against House Tully. Your mother was from this house. The Boltons are the true enemies, not the Tullys. The Lannisters started this war. They have no right to take Riverrun.”

Lady Sansa looked thoughtful for a moment. “If you had a sister who was being raped, beaten and worse Brienne, and that you needed to fight your own family to save her, what would you do?”
“We don’t have to fight them, my lady.”

“We cannot leave Riverrun behind. We need to secure the way from Casterly Rock to the North, and Riverrun is on the path. We need my granduncle to surrender the castle.”

“And if he doesn’t?” Brienne asked.

Lady Sansa looked down. “Arya is in danger. That’s all that matters. Let’s go back to the camp. It’s getting cold.”

It was getting cold, indeed. Brienne accompanied Lady Catelyn’s daughter to the tent she shared with her husband. Brienne took the guard for tonight. Lord Tyrion ordered her to watch Sansa Stark all the time, and Brienne agreed it was the right thing to do. The night was quiet and eventless. They rode early in the morrow the next day. Lord Tyrion and Lady Sansa rode alongside the army, observing their troops and the country, sometimes talking but often in silence. Ser Bronn was the one doing most of the talking. He followed the Lord and the Lady of Casterly Rock just like Brienne. Bronn was in charge of Lord Tyrion’s safety (he had even more chances to being killed before Riverrun than his wife) while Brienne was in charge of Lady Sansa’s safety. They arrived in the castle’s sight in the middle of the day.

From the top of a hill, they could see Riverrun standing tall like an island, surrounded by the water the Red Fork and the Tumblestone River brought where they met. Brienne could see why the castle held the siege for more than a year. To take it by force wasn’t far from invading an island without boats. Below, they could see the banners all around the castle, surrounding it everywhere, dispersed. If an army had come to the rescue of Riverrun, Brienne didn’t see how the besiegers would be able to fight back in their current positions. Brienne could see banners of House Frey covering the north of the Tumblestone. South of the Red Fork was a mix of Frey and Lannister banners with many others, some Brienne recognized to be bannermen of House Tully, now former bannermen. Between the rivers only Lannister banners and red tents stood, facing the gates of Riverrun. The castle was entirely surrounded, and yet it resisted.

“It’s the first time you see it?” Lord Tyrion was talking to his wife.

“Yes.” A long silence followed Lady Sansa’s answer. “This is the place where my mother grew up. She was born in there.”

“Let’s hope we can keep it intact.”

On these words of the Lord of the Westerlands, the two women and the two men rode forward, taking the lead of their army. They approached the camp only made of red before the gates of Riverrun and entered it with their men. The camp was well organized, even better organized than the ones Brienne lived in when in Renly’s service and the one where she went with Lady Stark before they released Ser Jaime. Brienne wondered what he could be doing right now in King’s Landing.

They stopped before a tent that was larger than the other ones, but simple at the same time. A man was waiting for them before it with some twenty men in full red armor behind him. He had a bristling beard, a bushy mustache and sidewhiskers thick as a hedgerow. His hair was long and unkempt, all yellow, and his eyes hazel. A pug nose managed to find his way out of this bush of hair.

“My lord! Tyrion.” The man walked towards them as they dismounted. “The rumors were false. You still have a nose!”

“Yes, coz. I didn’t lose a nose, but I gained a scar,” Lord Tyrion replied as he walked toward him.
“Good. Without scar, no one would ever believe you fought in battle. And you’re more handsome with it.”

“I wish I could say the same about your mane. Did some outlaw steal your razor?”

“I vowed I would not let my hair be cut until my father was avenged. But someone rubbed me of my vengeance. But I like a bit of hair. The nights grow colder, and a little foliage helps to keep your face warm. Perhaps, you should let a beard grow you too.”

Tyrion Lannister seemed thoughtful about it for a moment, then turned to Lady Sansa who had remained behind, out of the conversation, after she dismounted. “What do you think about it, my lady? Should I have a beard?”

“No, I think not.” A timid smile appeared on Lady Sansa’s smile and her husband returned it.

“The Lady of Casterly Rock spoke.” He turned back his face to the man who was now looking at the Lady Sansa. “Daven, I present you my wife, Sansa. Sansa, this is my cousin, Ser Daven Lannister.”

Ser Daven walked toward Lady Sansa. Brienne tensed, ready to react. Ser Daven Lannister was the son of Ser Stafford Lannister, the commander of the Lannister army who was killed at the Battle of Oxcross by Lord Karstark. His sisters may be friends of Lady Sansa now, but she couldn’t be sure about their brother. Ser Daven stopped at a respectful distance from Lady Sansa and bowed.

“Lady Sansa. It’s a pleasure to meet you, finally.”

“It’s a pleasure for me too, ser. Your sisters talked very highly of you,” said Lady Sansa.

“They probably exaggerated then. I received a letter from Cerenna a few months ago. She seemed to appreciate you very much.”

Lady Sansa smiled. “Yes, she’s a very good friend. Your other sister Myrielle as well.”

“Really? That’s good news. I fought against your brother during the war. The only thing I have to blame him for is that he killed Lord Karstark in my stead.”

Lady Sansa nodded. “I think all of us here agree on the fact Lord Karstark deserved to die.” Sansa turned her eyes towards Brienne. “This is Lady Brienne, Ser Daven. She’s the one who brought back Ser Jaime Lannister to King’s Landing on my mother’s orders. She saved him from Lord Karstark at the same occasion. He wanted to kill him.”

Ser Daven looked at her strangely, as if he wasn’t really sure if Brienne really stood before him. Brienne was used to this kind of reaction. “Well, you have my thanks then, my lady. Thank you for saving my cousin.”

“I obeyed to the order Lady Stark gave to me,” Brienne stated as an answer, before she added something else. “Ser Jaime saved me during our journey to King’s Landing. He’s a good man.”

“He saved you?” The knight was quite astonished by this. He looked back at Lord Tyrion. “How many surprises like this do you have in store for me?”

“Many more,” the dwarf answered. “But for now I would like to know how the siege is going on.”

“Let’s go into my tent.” He went to the tent and Lord Tyrion turned to his wife, inviting her to follow him with a sign of his head when they heard noises coming from the castle, something that looked
like a gathering crowd. Ser Daven turned to the direction where the noise came from. “Again? They do it every day.”

“What are they doing? Who are you talking about?” Lord Tyrion asked.

“It’s those damn Freys. Whilst I’ve been building rams and siege towers, they raised a gibbet. And they do the same every day. They bring Edmure Tully, drape a noose around his neck, threaten to hang him unless the castle yields.”

“What?” Everyone turned to Sansa whom the outcry came from.

Ser Daven turned to her and tried to reassure her. “Don’t worry, my lady. They’ve been doing so every day for a year and they never executed the threat. Sometimes they threaten to hang him, other times to slice his throat, and they even threatened to geld him a few times, or to take a hand, a finger, a foot, everything you can imagine. Each time they don’t carry out the threat. It’s more tiresome than anything else now. Wait! My lady!”

Sansa Stark had started to walk toward the gates where the shouts came from, and to walk very quickly. Brienne followed her immediately. She had to protect her. Behind her back she heard Lord Tyrion tell his men to follow him. After getting through the whole camp, they arrived before the gibbet where a dozen men wearing the sigil of House Frey stood. Two men stood on the gibbet, their backs turned on Brienne, one in rags, the other one in chainmail. The one in chainmail had a dagger in his right hand on the other man’s throat. He was shouting in the direction of Riverrun.

“Come out and face, you Blackfish. Yield the castle or your nephew will die. You think I won’t do it, old man? I sliced your niece’s throat from here to here. I won’t hesitate to do the same to your nephew. Yield the castle or I’ll slice his throat.”

Lord Edmure was the one in these rags with a knife on his throat. Before Brienne could do anything or someone inside Riverrun could reply to the threat, someone else screamed. “STOP IT! HOW DARE YOU, SON OF A WHORE!” Lady Sansa pushed aside one of the Frey men, walked furiously to the gibbet and climbed its steps. The man threatening Lord Edmure turned to face her, anger plain on his face.

“Who called me this? The one who said that…”

The man who held Lord Edmure didn’t have the opportunity to say anything else and stumbled from the gibbet, falling heavily on the ground. Just like everyone else who was present, Brienne was stunned by the event they just witnessed.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa (discover what Brienne just witnessed)
Sansa XXI

Chapter Notes

Second Riverrun chapter. Discover what happened at the end of the previous chapter that let Brienne stunned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

SANSA XXI

The pain was great in Sansa’s right hand after she slapped the man in the face. He had threatened to kill her uncle, her mother’s brother, so she had to put an end to it. She had allowed her anger to guide her and instead of stopping him with words, she stopped him with her fists. That was the first time she did it. Sansa turned to look on her left. A man all dirty with dust and mud was looking with an astonished look.

“Cat?” Then his mouth opened and his eyes widened. “Sansa? It’s you?”

“Arghhhhh! Dirty bitch! I’m going to kill her.” The man she just slapped had come back on his feet and was now walking toward her with an angry look, but before he could approach her enough with his knife, a sword appeared at his throat.

“One more step, and you die.” Brienne’s voice wasn’t as angry as the man’s voice, but it was much more threatening with a sword on his throat. The man stopped and laughed as he looked at Brienne. Sansa recognized from his general appearance that he was a Frey. She saw enough of Cleos, Tion, Red Walder and Tywin Frey at Casterly Rock to recognize any Frey at first sight.

“What’s this? An ugly woman or a man who looks like a woman?”

“This is Lady Brienne of Tarth.” Tyrion intervened. “She was sworn to Catelyn Stark before your family murdered her, and now she serves her daughter. And you just threatened her daughter. Her daughter who just happens to be my wife.”

The Frey looked at Tyrion, but Sansa couldn’t see his expression. However, another man with limping legs approached Tyrion at this moment. He was a Frey as well. “Lord Tyrion. We didn’t know you were coming.”

“Yes, it’s quite obvious. Since you’re limping, I suppose you are Lame Lothar Frey.”

“At your service, my lord.”

“I don’t want your service, and I don’t need it. The last time I met someone like you who murdered children, I sent him to the Wall, though I would rather order my men to cut you in half this time.” The smile on the man’s face faded as quickly as he had appeared. Tyrion turned to his men. “Have Lord Edmure bathed and fed. And untie him.”

“Wow!” The other Frey who threatened to kill Sansa’s uncle tried to walk toward Tyrion, only to be stopped again by Brienne’s sword. He tried to duck it but Brienne knocked him on the ground.
Tyrion walked to the man sitting in the mud. He towered him in their positions. Bronn unsheathed his sword and put it on the man’s throat.

“You were saying?” the sellsword asked.

Tyrion looked intently to the Frey. “Who are you? I don’t have the pleasure to know your name.”

It was Lothar Frey who answered. “It’s my brother. Walder Rivers.”

Sansa looked at this man closely. Walder Rivers, a bastard son of Walder Frey, also known as Black Walder, was the man who killed her mother at the Red Wedding. Sansa also knew Lothar Frey was the one to plunge a knife in Robb’s wife while she was with child. These two men were right here, before her, alive and well, while her mother and her brother were dead. Sansa wanted to order Brienne to kill them both.

“Then you’re lucky this is not Lady Brienne who’s pointing the sword at you. Or else you would probably be dead, bastard.” Black Walder tried to stand up when Tyrion called him a bastard, but Bronn’s sword prevented him from doing so. Tyrion turned his head away from the man lying on the ground, but Bronn kept his sword near his throat. He talked in Lothar’s direction. “I’m here by the king’s command to take back this castle. The siege is now under my command. And I command you to go back to your camp and to never appear in this camp unless I say otherwise. Bring your brother and all your men with you. None of your men is to ever enter this camp without my leave. If they do, I’ll let my wife decide their fate. And considering how you treated her family when they were your guests, I wouldn’t expect her to be merciful if I were you.”

“Yes, my lord.” Lame Lothar didn’t lose time to obey the order. His men followed him, and after a moment, Bronn let go Black Walder. Sansa didn’t know if she was happy about it. She would like to see this man die. He killed her mother. She almost hoped the Freys would disobey Tyrion’s order.

“Lord Edmure.” Tyrion had advanced towards her uncle. Sansa looked at him. Her uncle’s face was completely dirty and unwashed, but his disgust and revulsion was quite obvious.

“Lord Tyrion.”

Tyrion turned again to his men. “Give him a proper tent with everything he needs. Put guards around it. Have him bathed and fed. And untie him.”

Tyrion’s men came to execute their orders and brought her uncle with them after untying the ropes around his hands. Her uncle massaged his hands as he was escorted somewhere else, not looking at her while she kept looking at him as he walked away. She realized Tyrion had approached her, the same sorry look he had on his face almost all the time lately. “The reunion wasn’t what you hoped, I suppose.”

Sansa couldn’t deny it. “No.”

“You could dine with him this evening. Alone. It would be better if I wasn’t present. He may be in better spirit then.”

Sansa nodded slightly. She followed Tyrion as he invited her without words to come with him. Sansa had noticed the queer looks the Lannister soldiers gave her when they arrived in the camp, but now she thought they looked at her even more queerly than before. Ser Daven had acted courteously enough with her when he welcomed them. After all, he knew Sansa was a friend of at least one of his sisters, even a friend for both his sisters now, but his men probably saw in her the sister of Robb Stark, the man who fought them and defeated them at Oxcross.
It took a few minutes before their tent was raised. When it was ready, Sansa let herself drop into a chair. Her whole body was shaking from everything that just happened. Her uncle was close to being killed right before her, she slapped a man and met two people who murdered her family at the Twins. Tyrion gave her a cup of mulled wine. She thanked him and took a gulp while he poured himself another cup.

“Well, that was an arrival. I would pay to see that again.”

“What are you talking about?” Sansa asked her husband.

“You. Slapping Black Walder. That was impressing. Bronn would like to see that again too, I bet.”

Sansa didn’t have any heart for jesting. “He killed my mother. I should have killed him. I should have planted a knife in his heart, or tear off his eyes from his face. My family is dead, and this man lives, as if he did nothing. And his brothers too. And their father too.”

Tyrion dropped his gaze on the ground. Sansa kept drinking her cup, slowly. They remained in an awkward silence for some time, until Bronn entered the tent. “They’ve all been warned.”

“Good. Thank you, Bronn.” The former sellsword left. “Are you ready, Sansa?”

She nodded to show she was, though in reality she didn’t know at all. Sansa and Tyrion had discussed about what they would do once at Riverrun. They had planned everything. They knew the situation wasn’t good between the Lannisters, the Freys and the former Tully bannermen who besieged Riverrun. Tyrion was to speak to the Frey and the Lannister commanders to re-establish order, while Sansa would do the same with the river lords. Tyrion thought Sansa would have more success than him with the bannermen of her mother’s family, but Sansa wasn’t so sure about that.

She felt the hand of her husband on hers. “Everything is going to be alright, Sansa.” The green eyes she had come to love were looking at her, trying to comfort her, but ever since the news about Arya reached Casterly Rock, even Tyrion was barely able to lift her mind.

“I never did this, Tyrion. I never met these men.”

“Sansa, you managed to put Cersei out of King’s Landing, and you’ve acted as Lady of Casterly Rock for months now. You are capable of doing so. These lords of the Riverlands won’t listen to me, but they will listen to you. You’re half a Tully, remember.”

Sansa wished she could believe it, but she didn’t voice her doubts. She knew she had to do it. It could be their only chance to save Arya. They had no time to lose. She already despaired about the time they lost by stopping at Riverrun, but she had to admit Tyrion had been right. They needed the men besieging it to march on the North and save Arya. Sansa had to do it. For Arya. She finished her wine and stood up. She and Tyrion went to the camp south of the Red Fork where all banners cohabited. Frey, Lannister and river lords colors were all together in this camp, but when she and Tyrion entered it she quickly noticed this was no united camp. It was mostly a camp divided in multiple camps, each river lord staying away from Lannisters and Freys, and Lannisters stood away from the Freys as well. This camp was disorganized when Ser Daven’s camp was almost organized like a city. Frey men were drinking and laughing loudly, animals wee wandering everywhere without anyone to watch them. It was as if the Freys took King’s Landing as a model for their camp. Tyrion and Sansa were followed by Lady Brienne, Bronn, Podrick, Ser Daven and about fifty Lannister soldiers. At some point, they parted ways and Sansa headed to the south of the camp where the banners of Tully bannermen stood while Tyrion headed for the north. Brienne and about thirty men followed her.
As they walked among the banners of the river lords, Sansa noticed the way their men looked at her. They didn’t look at her in a much different way than the Lannister soldiers she saw when they arrived. She thought she saw surprise on some of the men’s faces, but mostly she saw hostile glares and disdain. *They don’t see me as Lady Stark’s daughter. Or as their king’s sister. They see the Lady of Casterly Rock. They see Sansa Lannister, not Sansa Stark.* Perhaps Sansa should have made a change of clothes. She had a red gown on her when they arrived, hoping this would make the Lannister soldiers better disposed toward her. It didn’t seem to succeed with them, but she had forgotten to change her gown after the encounter with the Freys and her uncle. She also had her necklace that could make it worse, but she wouldn’t go without it. There was no way to argue about this.

They reached the tent where an officer of the Lannister army told her the lords of the Riverlands gathered. This man came with them from the Westerlands and seemed to have a decent opinion of Sansa since he travelled with her and Tyrion through the Westerlands. Furthermore, he was sworn directly to Casterly Rock, not to a bannerman of House Lannister. Tyrion had made sure the men to escort them were loyal. Sansa took a deep breath and opened the flap of the tent. Only Brienne accompanied her inside. The most important lords of the Riverlands who had bent the knee to Tommen were almost all there. Sansa knew Lord Tytos Blackwood and Lord Jason Mallister wouldn’t be there nor would they have any representative since they were still fighting against the Iron Throne. Tytos Blackwood had never bent the knee after the Red Wedding, while the Mallisters rebelled recently after initially bending the knee. Lord Jonos Bracken wasn’t there either, occupied at besieging Raventree Hall. As for the men who were present, Sansa didn’t know them. She never met any of the river lords before.

“*My lords,*” Sansa said as greeting, trying to look impassive.

Most of them got up when she entered. “Lady Sansa,” some of them said as they bowed. Sansa noticed one of them didn’t bow.

The lords of the Riverlands started by presenting themselves. Norbert Vance, Lord of Atranta, was blind and needed help from the other Vance to stand on his feet. Ser Karyl Vance, Lord of Wayfarer’s Rest, with brown hair and a winestain birthmark on his face, had a melancholy look as he said his name. Clement Piper, Lord of Pinkmaiden, was a short man, fat, bowlegged, with red hair. He was the one to not stand up when Sansa had entered and he didn’t rise either when he presented himself. His eyes were clearly hostile. Lord Lymond Lychester was very old, almost as old as Grand Maester Pycelle Sansa would say, with a half-bald head and a tired face. Edmun Roote, Lord of Harroway’s Town, was a man of middle age with a black beard. He didn’t look very friendly. Ser Lyman Goodbrook represented House Goodbrook. Lord Theomar Smallwood of Acorn Hall was tall with side whiskers and a blond moustache. House Smallford was represented by their heir, Ser Leo Smallford, since his father was too old and sick to come himself. They behaved decently, but Sansa could see for some of them they had no joy to be here, though some looked sorry and deeply respectful.

“*My lords,*” Sansa began after they all took their place around the table, “I think you probably know why I am here. Lord Tyrion and I have come here on the orders of the king to put an end to this siege that has dragged far too long. We hope to end it without spilling blood.”

“*With all your respect, Lady Lannister,*” Lord Roote said, putting much emphasis on the family name, “the Blackfish will never surrender Riverrun. He took all the food from the surrounding lands and only kept the necessary mouths to hold the castle. They still have enough food to last a year, and Ser Brynden will never give up his home.”

“I have known Brynden Tully since we were squires together, in service of Lord Darry,” said
Norbert Vance. “If it pleases my lady, if you want to end this siege peacefully, let me go speak with him and try to make him understand the hopelessness of his position.”

“He understands that well enough,” said Lord Piper. “The man’s not bloody stupid, Norbert. He has eyes… and too much to yield to Freys. Or to Lannisters.” He looked at Sansa as he spoke the last words. Sansa tried to keep her composure.

“I thank you for your offer, Lord Vance, but that won’t be necessary. Lord Tyrion and I will negotiate with my granduncle tomorrow and put an end to this.”

“He won’t even accept to speak with you,” Lord Piper almost shouted. “Ser Brynden will never deal with Lannisters after everything you did. Everyone knows who’s behind the wedding at the Twins. My son Marq went there with five knights and twenty men-at-arms. They were guests under their roof.”

“My lady.” Karyl Vance interfered. “Lord Piper is speaking out of grief. Ser Marq Piper is his heir and all the knights accompanying him were nephews and cousins.” The Lord of Wayfarer’s Rest turned to the Lord of Pinkmaiden. “Your son and the knights are only hostages at the Twins, my lord. They are alive and well.”

“Let me doubt it when we look at Lord Edmure’s state,” Clement Piper countered. “You broke the guest rights, you and your Frey allies. The Blackfish has nothing to do with you, and I agree with him. Freys and Lannisters, they’re all the same. Even the women, Lady Lannister.”

Anger rose in Sansa. “Lord Piper, is your son alive?” she quietly asked.

“He is a hostage!” he almost burst.

“Don’t start to tell me that. Until very recently, I was a hostage as well in King’s Landing. I know what it is.”

“I don’t see a hostage here,” replied the Lord of Pinkmaiden. “I only see a girl wearing the Lannister colors and serving them, cooperating with turncloaks who broke the guest rights and murdered our sons, our brothers and our friends.”

“Your son may be a hostage, Lord Piper, but he’s still alive. Are my mother and my brother alive?” Sansa asked harshly. No one answered. “They were murdered. I know very well who the Freys are. I lost not only my mother and Robb this day, but I also lost a sister-in-law I never got to know, and a nephew or a niece who never had the chance to see the light of day. Before that, I lost my two youngest brothers to the Ironmen who burned my home. And before, I lost my father. I was there when he was assassinated. I watched him die.” And now my sister is being tortured by a monster she was forced to marry. And my only brother left is at the Wall, in danger of being attacked by dead men. “How many of you have seen people of your family die before them, or lost all their family, my lords?”

No one said anything. Many looked down. Sansa was angry that they saw her as a Lannister. No, in fact, she wasn’t angry about that. She was angry they saw all the Lannisters as traitors. She thought about the sweet and young Joy. She thought about her friends Cerenna and Myrielle who lost their father. She thought about the kind Dorna who lost her three sons to this war. She thought of the little Janei, always trying to play with her hair. She thought of Genna, who helped her to be accepted at Casterly Rock, despite the fact she lost a son too against Sansa’s brother. She even thought about Genna’s other children and grandchildren, despised for the mere crime to be born with the Frey name. And she thought of Tyrion, the man she loved, the man who saved her.
Before she could stop herself, Sansa started again to speak. “When I was in King’s Landing, do you know what I had to endure, my lords? I was being beaten and hit by the knights of the Kingsguard on Joffrey’s orders. Once I was even stripped of my clothes and beaten naked in front of the whole court. The only man who stood up for me, who protected me, was my husband. Lord Tyrion Lannister tried to make peace with you and my brother while he was Hand of the King. He spoke for the North and the Riverlands on the small council. The only thing he wants, just like me, is to put an end to this useless war without violence. And if you really want to know, then yes, I confirm it, Tywin Lannister is the mind behind the Red Wedding. But Tywin Lannister is dead. Joffrey is dead. Are you going to continue this war, to have your lands destroyed, to have your families shattered and butchered, all that for getting revenge on men who are dead?”

Another silence lingered during which Sansa stared directly at each lord in turn, daring them to contradict her. Finally it was Ser Goodbrook who spoke.

“My lady, we understand what you mean. But with all the respect we owe you, many of us here still have kins held hostage by the Freys, or who were slain by the Freys. The Freys still live, and we are forced into working with them to besiege and take the castle of our liege lord. We don’t want anyone else to die, but you can’t hope for us to work the Freys hand in hand as if nothing happened.”

“I know, my lord,” Sansa said with a cooler voice. “I’m not asking you to forget the crimes the Freys committed. I’ll never forget them either. But I want you to think about your house’s interest. Too many people already died, and we must put an end to this. And for that, whether we like it or not, we must cooperate with House Frey.” Sansa didn’t like it, but she had no choice. For Arya, she had to do it.

“So you expect to do as if nothing happened?” asked Lord Piper. “After everything the Freys have done? And with the way they act now? They spit at us, insult us whenever we cross paths, keep all their food they bring from their lands and feast while our own men starve because our own lands were devastated. You ask us to keep quiet while they threaten to hang Lord Edmure every day.”

“They won’t do it again. I saw to it when I arrived. As for the other problems you have with the Freys, Lord Tyrion and I will see that they treat you and your men with respect up to now and that they share the supplies they bring from the Twins. You have my word. But you must behave well towards them in return as well.”

“We have the word of a Lannister,” Lord Piper mocked.

“Yes, you have the word of a Lannister, Lord Piper. And a Lannister always pays her debts. All her debts.” Sansa was exasperated by this man. “Can I count on your help to put an end to this siege?”

All the lords voiced their approval, some more reluctantly than others. Ser Goodbrook had something else to say however. “My lady, I think we all trust you here. All of us here, we fought for your brother and declared him our king. We respected your mother, and your uncle and your grandfather before him as our liege lords, but can we trust Tyrion Lannister? Your mother arrested him because he tried to have your brother, Brandon Stark, killed. A boy of ten. A cripple. How can we trust such a man? I find it hard to believe he has the best intentions for the Riverlands or that he really spoke for your family in King’s Landing.”

Again, Petyr Baelish’s lies came back to haunt them. All this war started because of him, because of a few lies he whispered in her mother’s ears. How could her mother have trusted such a man? How could Sansa have ever trusted such a man? Sansa closed her eyes and opened it again, sighing heavily. “Lord Tyrion never tried to kill my brother. This is a lie.”
“Your mother looked quite certain about the Imp’s culpability, Lady Sansa,” said Lord Karyl Vance.

“My mother was wrong. She probably told you that an assassin tried to kill my brother Bran while he was still unconscious after his fall. Then my mother went to King’s Landing in the hope she might try to find answers about the attempt of murder. She met Lord Petyr Baelish, a childhood friend who once was a ward at Riverrun, who revealed to her that the knife used against my brother once belonged to him. It was a very costly weapon made of Valyrian steel with a dragonbone hilt. Lord Baelish told her he had lost this dagger to Lord Tyrion in a bet during Prince Joffrey’s name day. My mother travelled along the Kingsroad to go back to Winterfell, and while she stayed in an inn for a night, she met my future husband and had him arrested for this crime. This arrest led to the war between the Riverlands and the Westerlands. This is the story you probably heard.”

Lord Lymond Lychester spoke for the first time. “We didn’t know about the role the Master of Coin played in this, Lady Sansa. But this only proves that Tyrion Lannister is most likely the one who hired this assassin, or at least that it was someone close to him who did it. The Lannisters are behind this.”

“There are only three things that make it much unlikely. First, my husband had no reason to kill my brother. Second, why would he try to kill him, and then give him the design of a special saddle so he could ride again not long after? And third, Lord Baelish claims Lord Tyrion won this dagger in a joust where Ser Loras Tyrell unhorsed Ser Jaime Lannister. My husband never bets against his brother.” The lords were silent. “Now, let me tell you what really happened. The dagger was never won by Lord Tyrion. Lord Baelish lost it, it’s true, but not to my husband. He lost it to King Robert.”

There were reactions of surprise all around the table. “That’s impossible,” said Lord Smallwood. “It can’t be.”

“It can.” Brienne stepped in the conversation. “It’s the truth.”

The lords looked queerly at her. “Who are you?” asked one of them.

“My name is Brienne of Tarth. I was the sworn shield to Lady Catelyn Stark before she died. Now I serve Lady Sansa. I was there when Lady Stark questioned Ser Jaime Lannister. He told his brother never bet against him, just like Lord Tyrion told her when he was her prisoner in the Vale. Ser Jaime told her King Robert had a dagger like this one after she described it to him.”

“The words of a kingslayer. You would have us believe the man who killed the king he swore to serve?” asked Lord Piper.

“He told the truth,” Brienne replied.

“Really? Let me doubt it. And why should we listen to you? I heard your name once. You were a kingsguard for Renly Baratheon. Some say you even killed him.”

“I didn’t kill him. I tried to save him.”

“Let me doubt it again,” Lord Piper repeated on a hateful and disdainful tone.

“My lords, this is irrelevant.” Sansa put an end to this quarrel. “We know who tried to kill my brother. It wasn’t Lord Tyrion. It was Joffrey.” New reactions of surprise. Sansa resumed. “King Robert said something about the fact people had no courage to deliver a final blow to a dying child like they could for a beast after my brother’s fall. Joffrey was a spoiled boy who looked for approval from his father. He imagined he would earn some admiration from the king if he did this. He hired a footpad and gave him this dagger his father brought with him. That’s the truth about the assassination...
The lords were appalled. “But my lady,” asked Ser Smallford, “if what you say is true, then why did Lord Baelish say otherwise to your mother?”

It was time for them to know the whole truth. “He wanted a war between the Starks and the Lannisters. As far as we know, that’s the reason.”

“But why? Lady Catelyn and he grew up together at Riverrun. They were friends. Why would he want to start a war?” asked the blind Lord Norbert Vance.

“For power. I don’t know what are Littlefinger’s real objectives, but he wants power, that’s all I know. Thanks to the war, he became Lord of Harrenhal, he married my aunt Lysa, and now that she is dead, he is the Regent of the Vale. He lied to my mother. He manipulated my father into trusting him while he served as Hand of the King, and when my father tried to arrest Joffrey and Cersei, Littlefinger turned the gold cloaks against him. He betrayed him. And he tried to kidnap me when I was in King’s Landing. He was in love with my mother when he was younger, and she refused him. He lost a duel against my uncle Brandon Stark for her hand. My mother was stupid to trust him.” As I was stupid to trust him. “She arrested an innocent man and triggered a war with this act. All this war, everything that came with it, the destructions of the Riverlands, my family’s slaughter, the Red Wedding, everything comes from this man. He started a war so he could rise higher.”

The lords were all talking to each other. Some of them cursed. Sansa let them speak for a time before she stood up. A silence followed. “My lords, I have no intention for people of the Riverlands to die because of the lies a brothelkeeper whispered into my father’s and my mother’s ears. I’m here to put an end to this siege and to this war. If you want to continue this war and to keep seeing your lands ravaged, your people slaughtered and your families murdered, then so be it. But if you want peace before winter comes, then I suggest you to stand with me. Do I have your support?”

One by one, the lords gave their support, beginning by the two Vances and ending with Lord Piper. Sansa made them swear to not repeat what she just told them about Petyr Baelish, and then she took her leave. Things had gone better than she had hoped. She hoped it would go well with her granduncle too. For now, she had someone else to meet. Brienne and her guards followed her back to the Lannister encampment. The sun was already coming down when Sansa arrived before the tent.

She stayed there for a moment, balking before what she would find on the other side. Lord Edmure Tully had been given this tent after they rescued him from the Freys. After travelling through two camps with suspicious eyes on her and the meeting with the river lords who treated her like a Lannister, she was afraid how her uncle would react before her. Perhaps she should really take a change of clothes. But it would seem stupid if she went back to her own tent only to come back some time later with a different gown. Sansa took a deep breath and went inside, Brienne the only one following her.

Her uncle’s new residence was surely far better than the one the Freys had given him considering the state she found him earlier. He was sitting in a chair near a table full of food, but it was obvious he ate nothing. He wore clean and fresh clothes. His back was turned on her and he didn’t turn to face her when she entered.

“I don’t need more food. There’s already more than I could eat.”

Sansa slowly approached him until she was almost standing before him, but he didn’t look at her.

“Uncle Edmure?”

He seemed to wake up suddenly and lifted his eyes. He didn’t seem to recognize her. He stood up
and kept looking at her with an expression she couldn’t decipher. “You’re Sansa? Cat’s daughter?”

He wasn’t sure of who she was.

Sansa couldn’t hold anymore. She was happy to see him, no matter if it was the first time. She threw her arms around him and put her head on his shoulder. After some hesitation, he put his hands in her back as well. For the first time in years, Sansa saw someone of her family. She was happy, even if he wasn’t happy to see her. They broke their embrace after some time and her uncle kept staring at her until the beginning of a smile appeared on his face.

“You look a lot like your mother. But Cat was right. You grew to be more beautiful than her.”

He laughed lightly and Sansa followed him. They remained in an awkward silence for some time. Sansa looked at the table. None of the plates were touched.

“Are you hungry?”

Her uncle looked at the table. There was regret on his face. “I fear the Freys may poison me.”

“You’re no longer in the Frey’s custody. It’s over. You have nothing to fear here.”

“Nothing to fear?” He didn’t believe her. She tried to speak about something else. That’s not how she imagined her meeting with her uncle. Well, in fact, she hadn’t tried to imagine how it would be.

“Are you sure you don’t want to eat?” He looked again at all the food beside him. There was envy in his eyes. Sansa took a piece of bread and swallowed it right before his eyes. “It’s not poisoned. I told you. You’re safe here.”

Finally, Edmure Tully gave up, sat and took lots of food in his plate. He really was hungry. Sansa wondered how the Freys fed him while he was their prisoner. Sansa joined him but took smaller portions than him. There was wine as well and Sansa poured some for both of them. He almost swallowed an entire cup before Sansa began to drink her own.

“Are you alright?” she asked him, trying to start a conversation.

“Alright? My father is dead. My sister and my king were murdered on my wedding night. I am married, to a wife I haven’t seen since this very night. I have a son, a son I never met. I spent the last year in a cage at night and on a gibbet during the day. And now my home has been given to the people who massacred my family, and when they take it, my uncle will die. Yes, I’m alright.”

That was a stupid question to ask. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry for everything that happened. I’m sorry.” Tears nearly climbed to her eyes. Her uncle seemed to realize it.

“I’m sorry, Sansa. I shouldn’t be harsh on you. We both lost a lot. And now you’re married to the Imp. Cat would be destroyed if she knew this.”

“It’s alright. Tyrion doesn’t mistreat me. He’s a good man.”

Her uncle stared oddly at her. “A good man? He’s a Lannister! He tried to kill your brother Bran. I know it. Cat told me when she was at Riverrun.”

“That’s not what you think. That’s… that’s not what happened.” She burst into tears. She revealed everything. From the day on the Kingsroad when Lady died to the day Tyrion decided to leave Casterly Rock to save Arya. She told him everything. All the horrors she endured in the capital, her marriage, the trial, but also the time she spent in Casterly Rock and how she came to trust, then to love Tyrion. Her uncle asked her many questions as she told her tale and seemed to barely believe
everything she told him. He was horrified by what Joffrey did near Castle Darry and by her father’s death, and also by the way Joffrey tortured her. Each time she told him about Tyrion’s kindness, her uncle didn’t seem to believe her and she had to repeat it very often before he finally considered her husband may not be a monster. He was utterly surprised when she told him Tyrion refused to consummate their marriage on their wedding night, and much more surprised when she told him they had consummated the marriage two months ago. In the end, her uncle looked as if he didn’t know what to think about all this.

“So, your sister Arya, she is at Winterfell?” Sansa confirmed with a nod. She had told him that too. “And she was forced to marry the son of Roose Bolton. That’s why you came here?”

“We must put an end to the siege of Riverrun to go in the North, or else we may never be able to free Arya. We cannot let the Riverlands in war behind us. And most of the Lannister soldiers are here. We cannot bring more from the Westerlands. We need them to face the Ironmen.” Could he understand why she had to do it?

Her uncle looked at her with a sorry look. “I’m sorry.” He sighed. “What would Cat think of it? One of her daughters married to a rapist, the other one to a dwarf.” Before Sansa’s angry eyes, Lord Edmure quickly corrected his words. “Though it seems to have worked out quite well for you. I wish it could work out well with Arya. We all thought she was dead.”

“She’s not. Maybe it would be better if she was dead. But I can’t stay hidden at the Rock while my little sister is being tortured by a monster. I was tortured by a monster before I met Tyrion, and these were the worst times of my life. I don’t want Arya to suffer like I suffered. I can’t allow that.”

“That’s really the reason why you came here, you and your husband?”

“We must take back the North from the Boltons. They murdered my family. They do horrible things there. And my sister is their prisoner.”

“But, that would give the North to the Lannisters. Is that really what you want?”

Sansa looked back defiantly at her uncle. “I prefer to see Winterfell in Tyrion’s hands or in my son’s hands than to see it in Bolton hands.”

Her uncle looked utterly unbelieving at her. “Your son’s hands?”

“I’m not pregnant. But once we have children, the second in line will be Lord of Winterfell.”

Her uncle seemed to need some time to recover his senses. “Alright. I understand. But what’s going to happen to us?”

Sansa had to make him understand. “Riverrun must surrender. Tyrion won’t kill anybody, but all the Riverlands must bend the knee to Tommen. And quickly. Each day, each hour we lose is one more day, one more hour that Arya is kept prisoner. We have no time to lose.”


“You could try to convince him,” suggested Sansa. Her uncle shook his head.

“He won’t listen. He will resist until the men inside the walls are starved. He will never give up Riverrun. Never. Neither I, nor you, nor the Imp, nor anyone will be able to change his mind. He will fight until the end. This castle is his home, and my home. The Freys won’t have it without losing blood. A lot of their blood.”
Sansa looked at her uncle. He didn’t want the Freys inside Riverrun, and she shared his wishes. Only, they couldn’t allow themselves to storm the castle. They needed all the troops they could get. All the troops. She looked straight in the eyes of her uncle.

“And what if the Freys weren’t the ones to get Riverrun?”

Chapter End Notes

I know Black Walder would deserve more than a slap, but Sansa didn’t have a dagger on her to kill him, and she’s not yet at the stage where she can murder someone like that with her own hands. The objective here was more to make it comical to have Black Walder slapped by Sansa in front of dozens of people.

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
All the commanders were there. Tyrion was presiding the war council at the head of the table. Bronn was at his left, a cup of wine before him. Tyrion had one before him as well, half-emptied. Wine helped him to think clearly, no matter what Sansa said. Perhaps it was strange to have a sellsword recently converted into a landed knight sitting right next to him, but as strange as it seemed, Tyrion trusted Bronn more than most of the people here, except Podrick. His squire was staying behind, silent as always, away from the lords that had gathered under the tent. At Tyrion’s right sat Ser Daven Lannister, his cousin, the commander of the Lannister forces before Tyrion arrived. Daven had never been evil with Tyrion. In fact, Tyrion appreciated him quite a lot, even if they were never close. Daven was jovial with a talent to lighten the mood, but he was also competent and serious whenever the circumstances required it. If he held any grudge toward Tyrion for not sending him reinforcements when he asked for some or if he had any hatred towards Sansa because of his father’s death, he didn’t show it. Anyway, Daven had no love for the Freys, so in this tent, Tyrion could count on him as an ally. He wondered if Daven would still look so ready to follow him once he told him about his marriage. Ser Lyle Crakehall, the Strongbear, sat at Bronn’s left and Ser Forley Prester on Daven’s right. They represented the Westermen at this council. Farther at the table sat the representatives of House Frey, all sons or grandsons of Walder Frey. Tyrion wondered if all the army the Freys brought here came from the old man’s seed. Lame Lothar and Black Walder Rivers sat on the left side of the table while Ser Ryman, the heir to the Twins, and his eldest son Edwyn sat on the right side. Ser Ryman was obviously drunk. Here sat the commander of the Frey army. No wonder they did poorly at the siege.

“Sers, I think you all know by now why I’m here. I have come with the king’s command to put an end to this siege. This farce lasted long enough. The Blackfish kept you away from his walls for more than a year now. It’s time for this to end. I expect you to follow my orders in every time and every circumstances, or else you would be disobeying the king’s orders. Do you understand?”

Bronn was the first to react to Tyrion’s speech. “I don’t think this speech was for me. I had no part in the stupidities the men did here. I was at my keep with my wife and I would still be there her if these morons knew how to take a castle.” Then Bronn took a sip of his wine.

“My men are at your disposal, Lord Tyrion,” Daven said soberly.

“I am at your service, my lord,” said Ser Forley as well.

“I am as well, Lord Tyrion. If you allow me, I would challenge the Blackfish to single combat. Mace or axe or longsword, makes no matter. Ser Brynden Tully deserves a noble death, and I’m ready to give it to him.”
The Strongboar was quick on matters and started the council even before Tyrion wished it. “I will consider your suggestion, Ser Lyle. But first I would like to know the disposals House Frey. All House Frey.”

Lame Lothar was the first to answer. “We will do as you wish, Lord Tyrion.” His smile as he said it and bowed his head was the smile of a sycophant. At least he would pose no problem, but he wouldn’t be very useful. Tyrion preferred useful men like Bronn to lickspittles like Lothar Frey.

Black Walder, the bastard, reluctantly agreed. “As my brother said.” His voice’s tone and his angry look told the opposite. He hadn’t forgotten the slap he received from Sansa or Bronn’s threats. His eyes lingered on the former sellsword who kept drinking as if nothing was going on.

Edwyn Frey was the last to speak. “I can give you my word, my lord, that Riverrun will fall before we realize it.” Then we must need a lot of time to realize it.

Ser Ryman Frey didn’t speak, lost in his cups, drinking his second cup of wine since Tyrion entered the tent. He didn’t seem to know he was at a war council.

Tyrion addressed to the heir of the Twins. “Ser Ryman, did you hear me, or does wine take all your attention?”

Ser Edwyn stepped in to defend his father. “I will speak for House Frey, my lord. My father is quite indisposed.”

Ser Daven gave a snort. “Is he drunk, or just greensick from last night’s wine?”

Lord Edwyn wasn’t happy about the joke. “Lord Tyrion, must I suffer such discourtesy?”

“Is your father drunk, Ser Edwyn?” Tyrion simply asked.

The son looked at his father who still seemed unaware of what was going on right before him. “He… my father has a bad belly, my lord. Red wine helps him with his digestion.”

“He must be digesting a bloody mammoth,” said Ser Daven.

“A bloody mammoth? You mean two bloody mammoths.” Daven’s remark had already brought laughter to the Westermen, but Bronn’s addition made it even better.

Tyrion decided all the same to put an end to this. “We are here to take a castle, not to laugh at drunken fools. Bronn, accompany Lord Walder’s heir back to his tent. That’s the place he will be the less useless.”

Bronn carried out the order with great pleasure, pushing Ser Ryman Frey on the ground from his chair and almost forcing him to walk on four legs out of the tent. In the end, it took him so much time that Bronn seized him by the arms, only to throw him through the flap of the tent. They heard a splash outside as Ser Ryman fell on the ground again.

“With some hope, that will awake him a little,” said Bronn as he left too.

“Now that we only have those present of both body and mind here, we can start this war council. May I know how does it come that Riverrun still resists despite a siege that has lasted for more than a year now?”

Tyrion looked at the Freys as he said so. Daven hadn’t remained idle, building trebuchets, catapults, rams, siege towers, trenches, setting a strong perimeter around his own camp, while the Frey camps
were disorganized with animals and men wandering all alike, seeming to not know what to do. As for their commanders, they were stupid or drunk when they weren’t both. It was to them that he asked an explanation, though he doubted they would be able to give a good one.

“The Blackfish refused to surrender, my lord,” finally said Lame Lothar.

“That’s quite obvious. Everyone can see the Tully flags on Riverrun’s walls. Ryman Frey may be the only one unable to see them in his drunken state. The real question is, how does it come he didn’t surrender yet?”

“We did everything we could, my lord,” explained Lothar. “We threatened to hang Lord Edmure, but the Blackfish…”

“How many times have you threatened to hang Edmure Tully?” Tyrion interrupted him.

“Almost everyday. But the Blackfish…”

“Only a fool makes threats he’s not prepared to carry out. Whose idea was this threat?”


“And why didn’t you carry out this threat that the Lord of the Crossing and the Lord Paramount of the Riverlands suggested?”

“If we had hanged the man, then we would have no hostage. Have you considered that? Or did you only consider to treat you wife’s uncle like a guest? That won’t bring the Blackfish to surrender, Imp.”

“Imp?” You shouldn’t have said that, bastard. “Let me ask you a question, Walder Rivers. If I were to threaten to have one of my men hit your head on this very table until your face was all covered by blood and your nose broken, unless you shut your mouth, and you presumed to speak, what do you think I’d do, bastard?”

Tyrion had the reaction he expected. “You, son of a wh…” Walder Rivers’s head hit the table once, twice, thrice, until his nose was broken and his face all bloody. Bronn had come back from behind the Freys without being noticed and had carried out Tyrion’s threats with his usual efficiency. When Bronn had done smashing the bastard’s head on the table under the surprised expressions of everyone in the tent, Tyrion ordered Bronn to get him out as well.

“Bring him to a maester, if there is any here. For once he’ll have an injury to attend to.” Bronn brought the second Frey outside in the same way than the first one, though this one resisted a little. Tyrion turned to the two remaining Freys here. “Now, you know what happens to drunks and disrespectful fellows. I suppose I can count on you to remain sober and respectful.” Lothar and Edwyn nodded their head very quickly. “Good. Now, you made empty threats and the Blackfish knows it.”

“We couldn’t carry the threat out, my lord. Our father would never forgive us to sacrifice out only hostage,” pleaded the lame one.

“Then Lord Frey is as stupid as his sons, grandsons and great-grandsons. The king gave you the Riverlands so you could bring back peace to them. And not only you couldn’t manage to bring the peace back, but you managed to start new rebellions against the Crown. Riverrun still holds, Raventree Hall as well, you failed to get rid of the Brotherhood Without Banners and you let the Mallisters rise up against you. The other lords of the Riverlands neither fear nor respect you. They
fear the Lannisters. We gave you the Riverlands to hold the Riverlands. If we have to ride into them and take them back for you every time you lose them, why do we need you?”

“Lord Tyrion,” began Edwyn Frey, “if you mean to imply…”

“I’m implying nothing, Lord Edwyn. I’m only asking a question. Can you answer me, or are you also incapable of that? The Freys haven’t proved capable of much lately.”

“We fight for the king, my lord. We pledged our swords to King Joffrey, and then to King Tommen after him, and have fought valiantly for him…”

“If you ever fought valiantly, it was for Robb Stark. You declared for him, turning against your king in the hope that a Frey would be Queen in the North, and when you realized that would never happen, you turned your cloak again. That makes you twice as treacherous as all the other houses of the Riverlands. Your only notable achievement in this conflict was the butchery at the Twins where you murdered people under your own roof, while they were under the protection of the guest rights. Tell me. Who were the most difficult to kill? The drunken lords? The young king with about five bolts in the chest? Or the woman with child?”

He looked angrily at Lame Lothar when he mentioned the murder of Talisa Stark. The man whitened. Edwyn Frey spoke again. “Lady Frey died that day my lord. Lady Catelyn Stark, Robb Stark’s mother, killed her.”

“Yes, she did. After you stabbed her son in the heart right before her eyes. And I heard Lord Frey said something very interesting when Lady Stark said she would cut his wife’s throat if he didn’t let them go. I’ll find another. I think that’s what he said.” Tyrion put on his most threatening and angry expression. He hated the Freys for the traitors and turncloaks they were, for their smug pride, and for what they did to Sansa’s family. They reminded him of Cersei and Joffrey. None of them dared to speak now. “I’ll make things clear for you, Freys. My father promised you the Riverlands if you could keep them, and the Riverlands you will keep if you can indeed keep them, for a Lannister always pays his debts. However, since you’re unable to do anything of any use here, you will no longer be given the right to speak in the war councils or to attend them unless I wish you to. You will lead your men like real commanders and follow the orders you’ll receive from me and my men without discussion. If you refuse to follow them, you’ll be dealt with the same way we deal with soldiers refusing to obey orders like in every good army. I don’t want any incident between you and my soldiers, or the soldiers of the other river lords who are gathered here. If anything happens, you’ll be held accountable for that. And you will show to the other river lords as much as us the respect we deserve. Do you understand, or do you want my friend to give you an example of how we deal with mutineers?”

The two men realized at this moment that Bronn was at the other extremity of the table face to Tyrion, a large grin upon his face. For once, Freys were quick to understand.

“We’ll do as you please, my lord,” said Lame Lothar.

“As you please, my lord,” repeated Edwyn.

“Good. Now leave us. We have matters of war to discuss.” As the two Freys were leaving, Tyrion warned them. “In your stead, I would remain away from the Lannister camp. My wife is not really happy about how you treated her family when they were your guests. She would probably order any Frey she meets to be beheaded the moment she would recognize him as a Frey, and it wouldn’t take long since you all look alike. And I couldn’t stop her from having you executed. Nor would I want to. So stay away from the Lady Sansa. Lord Edmure will remain in Lannister’s custody, and as soon as your father gets sober enough, Edwyn Frey, have him send a message to the Twins. And send the
same message yourself. All the prisoners your father is keeping at the Twins are required by the Crown. They are to be delivered to us as soon as we will come to the Twins, in good health and sane.”

The Freys said again they would do as Tyrion wished. With some hope, the Freys wouldn’t pose a problem any longer. When they were all gone, Daven burst into laughs, soon joined by all the other men.

“I’ve been trying to bring the Freys to heel for a year, and you did it within a few minutes,” said Tyrion’s cousin. “Well done, coz. Let’s just hope this will last.”

“I think this calls for a drink,” said Bronn while taking one of Ser Ryman’s cups he left behind. “To the Imp.”

All the men raised their cups and drank. Tyrion joined them. When they had all put down their cups, he cleared his throat. “Now, to serious matters. What’s the situation with the siege?”

“Well, as I told you before, we’ve been building rams, siege towers, raising a well defended boom across the Red Fork,” said Ser Daven. “But while I keep our own men in order and working, the Freys spend their time feasting and whoring and mocking the other river lords. I tried to convince the others to attack, but the river lords are not eager to do that and the Freys prefer to linger here until the end of time.”

“The problems between the Freys and the other river lords might lower now after their little lesson. And Edmure Tully is no longer their hostage. That should help as well. Are we well supplied?”

“We receive food from the Westerlands. I also gave nets to my men to fish in the river, but when winter will come, we could starve. The horses will die first. The Freys refuse to share the food and fodder they bring from the Twins with us, so we must forage for ourselves. But the Blackfish picked this country clean. Half the men I send looking for food never return. Some are deserting, others are found ripening under trees, with ropes around their necks. Our supply lines are also attacked regularly by outlaws.”

“The Brotherhood Without Banners,” said Tyrion. “The hangings are probably their doing as well. We’ll have to take care of them in time. But first, we must take Riverrun, and then the other forts still resisting, Raventree Hall and Seagard. Then we will march to the Twins and get the people Walder Frey kept as guests after his wedding. After that, we will take care of the Brotherhood. What’s the situation for the besieged?”

“As I told you, the Blackfish only kept the necessary mouths. All the others he expelled from Riverrun.” A clever move. That’s the kind of things my father would have done. “He still has enough reserves of food to stand a year, and he keeps his men alert and ready to fight.”

“Is there any hope they could lower their guard? Or even turn against the Blackfish?” Tyrion knew the answer before it came.

“They may have lowered their guard, but not as much as our own men. They’re tired. This war lasted too long. They want to go back home for the winter.” This could be a problem. “The Blackfish’s men are within a castle, well fed and warm, while our own will soon starve and freeze.”

Tyrion took a sip of wine and put back the cup on the table. “Then we cannot wait for a year to starve the Tullys. We must take the castle. And we must take it now.”

“Then we must storm the castle. As I’ve been saying all along. Siege towers, scaling ladders, a ram
to break the gate, that’s what’s needed here.”

“I will lead the assault,” added Ser Lyle. “Give the fish a taste of steel and fire, that’s what I say.”

“We will lose many men if we try to storm the castle,” pointed out Ser Forley Prester.

“We will lose them as well if we remain outside waiting for winter,” countered Daven.

“You are both right, sers,” said Tyrion. “We cannot wait outside, but storming the walls would be very costly. Ser Brynden is no idiot. He’s a veteran of a hundred battles. He knows he’s doomed, but he will fight all the same. We murdered his family and gave Riverrun to the Freys. How would we feel if Casterly Rock or Crakehall or Feastfires was given to the Starks or the Tullys? Or to the Freys? He will fight and lose, for sure, but he will bring thousands of our men to the grave with him.”

“Then let’s send the Freys first,” suggested the knight of Feastfires. “Then we’ll send his bannermen’s men. And if that’s not enough, then we will send our own men to deal with what’s left of the garrison. We will reduce our losses, and these damn Freys will support them for once. The castle will be theirs after all, so their blood should the one to be spilled for it.”

“Riverrun was given to Lady Genna and her husband. She is a Lannister by blood. We get Riverrun as much as the Freys, and we should participate to its taking as well,” said Daven. Tyrion was tempted by Ser Forley’s proposition to let the Blackfish slaughter the Freys. There were so many that Walder Frey may not care for their death. However, he couldn’t allow that.

“I would rather use a tactic that doesn’t involve thousands of deaths,” Tyrion simply stated.

“Then let me challenge the Blackfish,” said Strongboar.

“Why would he deign to accept your challenge, ser?” asked Ser Forley Prester. “What could he gain from such a duel? Will we lift the siege if he should win? I do not believe that. Nor will he. A single combat would accomplish nought.”

“Do you have a better suggestion then, Prester?”

“We could send men inside the castle during a night without moon,” suggested Bronn. “We send them in silence to the walls and they escalate them with ropes and grappnels, then they would open the gates from the inside. I can lead them myself. I won’t need more than twenty good men for that.”

“Brynden Tully won’t be duped with such tricks. Storming the walls is the only option. There will be many deaths, but the sooner we attack the walls the better. The more we delay the assault, the more we will lose men to desertion, to outlaws and to the cold. We must take Riverrun. And we must take it now,” said Daven.

“I think we all agree Riverrun must fall now,” declared Tyrion. “This siege lasted for too long. However, none of you seems to have considered diplomacy. I intend to try this approach. Ser Daven, you will send a message to the Blackfish, asking for a parley at dawn tomorrow.”

“My lord, I doubt diplomacy will help us in any way,” commented Daven.

“The Blackfish won’t surrender. He won’t accept to speak with you,” supported Ser Forley.

“Have you tried?” Tyrion asked. The silence revealed the answer. “Then it’s time to try.”

“Wars are not won through parleys,” declared Strongboar. “Swords, shields and arrows win wars,
“Without diplomacy, we wouldn’t have the support of House Tyrell and House Martell, and we would probably all be dead right now. Diplomacy don’t win wars, I agree, but they can end them. Let’s try to end this war with it. If it doesn’t work, then we’ll settle for the military approach. In the meantime, I want you to make sure the Freys share their food and fodder with us, to keep a close eye on Riverrun and to make sure there is no incident between the Freys and the other river lords. It’s time for this siege to become a real siege. Daven, don’t forget to send the message to the Blackfish for the parley. Once you’re done, come to dine with me. I have matters to discuss with you in private. You’re dismissed, sers.”

They all left the tent. Tyrion went back to his own and Bronn positioned some of his men along with some of Tyrion’s guards around it. Podrick helped him to remove the armor he wore since he arrived. Tyrion had to wear it while in war. Daven arrived about half an hour later, still wearing his armor. Podrick had started to bring the services for dinner and Daven fell heavily on the chair face to Tyrion.

“A siege is tiresome, as I see,” commented Tyrion.

“You’re very perceptive like always, coz,” Daven replied with a tired voice. “Those damn Freys! I don’t know why I said in the war council we should participate to the taking of Riverrun and to not let the Freys suffer all the losses. After all it’s all their fault if this siege is dragging on. We should send the insufferable ones in the first wave and keep the decent ones in the last one with us, after the Freys and the Tullys are all dead.”

“Are there decent Freys?” asked Tyrion.

“Ser Perwyn looks like a decent man. He’s the brother of Roslin Frey, Lord Edmure’s wife. He wasn’t present at the Red Wedding. I think his family probably thought he was too sympathetic to the Young Wolf to be present. His brother Olyvar was Stark’s squire too. He told me his sister loves her husband and she prays everyday for him to survive. But the others… Ryman, Edwyn, Lame Lothar, Walder Rivers… The last one more than everyone else. Hates that he’s a bastard, and hates everyone who’s not.”

“Let’s hope they will keep quiet after what Bronn did to them,” Tyrion said as he swallowed a piece of pork sausage.

“I doubt it. But I appreciated what your new knight did. Looking at the Freys receiving a lesson was gold. I think I should try to know him better.” Daven drank wine deeply. “Still with the best wine there is I can see.”

“You know me too well, cousin.”

“Now that you’re the lord, you must have everything you ever wanted. I saw your wife. She’s something.”

“Sansa is a lady and a person, not an object to contemplate,” Tyrion said with an exasperated and reproachful voice.

“Calm down, my lord. I didn’t mean it like this. I just meant she seems to be alright. I don’t think Cerenna would become friend with a Stark if she wasn’t kind and decent. I have nothing against her. I fought against her brother, not against her. And if she’s a friend to my two sisters now… Anyway, she is my liege lady. She doesn’t have to fear anything from me. It’s my men she should fear.”
“I count on you to keep them in line,” warned Tyrion.

“I will. Don’t worry, they won’t try anything against her. She’s the Lady of Casterly Rock after all. But many of my men here survived the Whispering Wood or Oxcross. They were almost killed by Robb Stark. Don’t expect them to be ready to kneel before her, or at least to do it heartily.”

“Just keep them in line, Daven. That will be enough.”

“No problem. Where is she by the way?” Daven asked. “I thought you would dine with her. And I would like to have news of my sisters.”

“Cerenna and Myrielle are alright. But Sansa needed some time with Edmure Tully.”

Daven nodded silently. “You know that storming the castle is the only option, Tyrion.”

Tyrion sighed. “We will storm the castle only if necessary. First we will negotiate with the Blackfish. If he doesn’t want to surrender, then we will storm the castle.”

“He could decide to kill you at the parley.” There was worry in Daven’s voice. “He has nothing to lose. He will bring with him in the death as many people as he can. Do you think he won’t try to bring the Lord of Casterly Rock to the grave?”

“This is a parley. We are talking about Ser Brynden Tully, not Walder Frey. And Sansa will come with me. If the laws of war mean nothing for the Blackfish, family will mean something. He won’t dare anything if it can endanger his grandniece.”

“So you will negotiate with the Blackfish along with your wife? I’m not sure it’s the best tactic.”

“Ser Brynden will listen much more if a member of his family is there to convince him. Sansa doesn’t want the castle to be stormed. She will do everything to convince her granduncle.”

“And if you fail? What will your wife do? Will she let you storm Riverrun like this?”

Tyrion put back his cup of wine on the table after taking a sip. “Sansa knows we’ll have no choice but to attack if Ser Brynden refuses to surrender peacefully. But at least Edmure Tully will stay alive. I intend to bring him back to Casterly Rock if we storm the castle. We’ll force Walder Frey to give us his wife and his son and they will live at the Rock for the rest of their days, far from the Riverlands. Perhaps some day I will even give Edmure’s son some lands after he’s knighted. Don’t repeat it to the Freys.”

Daven looked at him closely. “Your wife has a big influence on you. I don’t know if it’s good or bad.”

“I think we already murdered enough Starks and Tullys like that. And you’re not the one who was married to her when she learned your father had slaughtered her family at a wedding.”

Daven nodded with a grim look. “Well, at least you have a lovely wife. Can’t say the same for me. I’m to marry a Frey girl, I hear. Your father might have seen fit to consult with me about this marriage, by the bye. My own father was treating with Paxter Redwyne before Oxcross, did you know? Redwyne has a nicely dowered daughter.”

“Desmera Redwyne.” Tyrion knew. Sansa talked to him about that. His cousins Cerenna and Myrielle wanted them to annul the deal with Walder Frey to marry Devan to one of his daughters, but Tyrion couldn’t. “Sorry that my father destroyed the marriage of your dreams, but he’s never been good at arranging marriages, not even for his own children. Cersei ended up with a drunken
fool, and I ended up with a child of fourteen whose family was at war with us then murdered not
long after I married her.”

“Your father seemed better at ruining marriages. Any hope you could annul my dreaded betrothal?”

“I’m afraid not, Daven. Walder Frey is prickly and proud. I already called off two betrothals, so a
third is out of question.”

“Two?” Daven seemed perplexed.

“Well, Lancel left for Quiet Isle, so Amerei Frey lost her betrothed. And I arranged a betrothal
between Joy and Rollam Westerling. Walder Frey will have to find another wife for one of his
bastards.”

“Joy? Married to a Westerling?”

“Not yet. It’s a betrothal. They will marry when she will be fifteen. But with a betrothal to the heir of
a minor house, I have every good reason to refuse a marriage to some bastard.”

Daven burst into laughs. “That’s something. Gerion’s bastard daughter marrying the heir of the Crag.
How did you do it?”

“I can be persuasive when I want. My father promised a wife for Lord Westerling’s heir. I thought
Joy would be good enough for them. Apparently my father said they would have joy from the
bride.”

Don’t forget to invite me to the wedding.”

“I’ll remember.” Tyrion took a more serious expression. “But now we have your marriage to
organize, as much as you hate it.”

“I’ll wed and bed my stoat, never fear. I know what happened to Robb Stark. From what Edwyn
tells me, though, I’d best pick one who hasn’t flowered yet, or I’m like to find that Black Walder has
been there first. I’ll wager he’s had Gatehouse Ami, and more than thrice. Maybe that’s why Lancel
decided to confess his crime, so he wouldn’t marry her. Still can’t believe he killed the king. Amerei
must be stoatish than I’d heard is she could drive him to that.”

Tyrion doubted Amerei Frey had anything to do with Lancel’s confessions. He never saw her before
he revealed the role he played in Robert’s death. “I hope not. Because once this siege is over, we will
travel to the Twins and stop at Darry on our way. Amerei Frey is there. And that’s where your
marriage will be celebrated.”

Daven looked at him questioningly. Slowly, he understood what Tyrion meant. He snorted. “So, is
that how you reward your good cousin, my lord? You know why they call her Gatehouse Ami? She
raises her portcullis for every knight who happens by.”

“The man who has Amerei Frey can claim Castle Darry and its lands. Lancel is exiled, we need
someone else to take his place at the head of House Lannister of Darry. You’re already promised to a
Frey. If you are to marry a Frey, better to marry a rich one. Your children will have something to
inherit at least.”

“If they are my children,” Daven countered bitterly. “There’s a huge possibility any child Amerei
Frey could have would come from some random knight.” Daven smiled in the end. “But you’re
right. Better to marry a stoat with a castle than a stoat with nothing. I’ll marry her, since I have no
choice.” Daven looked at the outside. It was getting dark. “I’ll go, Tyrion. Thank you for the dinner, my lord.”

Daven left. Tyrion went to his desk and sat heavily, just like his cousin had done when he had arrived. He was tired from the journey from Casterly Rock. He looked at the map before him, with pieces showing the positions of the different armies through the Seven Kingdoms. They had so much to do. First, they had to take Riverrun. Then, they would have to go to Raventree Hall and end the siege on House Blackwood. Darry would be another stop on the way, only the time to celebrate Daven’s wedding with Amerei Frey. Then they would go to Seagard and force Lord Jason Mallister to bend the knee to Tommen. Finally, they would have to collect the hostages Walder Frey still kept at the Twins along with Roslin Tully and her son. Tyrion didn’t intend to pursue the Brotherhood Without Banners. The river lords would have to deal with them by themselves. Their halts at Riverrun, Darry, Raventree, Seagard and the Twins would already delay them too long. Sansa was right. They should march on the North right now. Tyrion shook his head. He couldn’t let the Riverlands still in chaos behind him. He would have to restore the king’s peace quickly though. Once it was all done, he would march on Winterfell with a great army, plant Roose Bolton’s head and his son’s head on spikes, and rescue Arya Stark. If she was still alive at this moment. Tyrion had some doubts she would still be alive when they would reach Winterfell, or not missing a few parts. He would have to watch out his tongue to not voice his thoughts before Sansa.

The fact Stannis Baratheon was marching on Winterfell as well didn’t help them either. Stannis was a proven and experienced battle commander, and to the opposite of the Blackfish, he wasn’t stuck between the walls of a castle with only a small garrison. He had about ten thousand men from what they knew, seasoned men and sellswords with experience of battles and war. Stannis was an additional variable they had to consider. Most likely he would besiege Winterfell before Tyrion’s army would reach it, and with winter coming, Stannis wouldn’t lose his time like the Freys did. He would storm the castle. Tyrion wondered who would win? The Boltons had a better position, but Stannis had more men and was the best commander. In both cases, one thing was sure, there would be heavy losses. Whether Stannis won or the Boltons won, the winner would support heavy losses just like the one who would be defeated. The weakened army would then face Tyrion’s host.

Tyrion wondered who the northern lords would support. For now, House Manderly was the one who helped Tyrion the most in the North, sending him the most information on the Boltons and cooperating with him to weaken their rule. However, Roose Bolton had Arya Stark. If the Boltons won, who would the northern lords support? The man who stabbed their king in the heart? Or the evil dwarf who forced himself on Ned Stark’s daughter? Sansa was officially Lady of Winterfell and had a stronger claim than her sister, but the northern lords could prefer the Boltons. After all, they were Northerners. Tyrion wasn’t, and their children to him and Sansa wouldn’t be seen as Northerners. They would be Lannisters. On the other hand, if Stannis won, he could declare Arya Wardenness of the North and marry her to one of his bannermen, or to a northern lord who would pledge himself to Stannis. The Red God Stannis followed could make some lords hesitate to join him, but if he promised them revenge against the Lannisters... Tyrion had to consider the possibility that no northern lord would join him against whoever would hold Winterfell once they would penetrate the North. The Lannisters were hated. Everyone suspected his father to be the mind behind the Red Wedding, and they were right. They would possibly have to fight the entire North, but they had no choice if they wanted to save Sansa’s sister. And if what Jon Snow said was true, then it was very important to bring a full army in the North. Far in the North.

Tyrion wondered if they should have warned Jon Snow. They could have asked him to join them in their crusade against the Boltons. On the other hand, the Night’s Watch always stood away from the wars of the Seven Kingdoms, and the black brothers already had their own foes to face. Perhaps Jon Snow would side with Stannis if he learnt his other sister was at Winterfell. That’s why Tyrion hadn’t warned him. Also, if the lad broke his vows, then the laws of the North said he should die.
They would have to fight to get back Winterfell. Sansa would have to face the former bannermen of her father and brother.

As Tyrion was lost in his thoughts and tried to think about a faster way to reach Winterfell and to avoid conflict with all the North, Sansa came inside. She smiled at him, but it was obvious her smile was forced. Tyrion missed the natural smiles she displayed back at Casterly Rock. She had been happy there. She sat in a chair before him.

“They things went well with your uncle?” Tyrion asked. Sansa nodded, but it wasn’t very convincing. Tyrion supposed Edmure Tully was in no good mood. Tyrion wished he could do something. They remained there for a few minutes, Sansa staring at the floor, Tyrion wandering his eyes from his wife to the map before him. Finally, Sansa left her seat.

“I need to sleep, Tyrion.”

“Of course, Sansa. You must just know… We will meet Ser Brynden at dawn tomorrow. If you need more time, I can still send him a message to delay the parley…”

“No.” Sansa shook her head strongly. “The more we wait, the less we have a chance to save Arya.”

Just like her mother was ready to do everything for her children, Sansa was ready to do everything for her family. “As you wish.” Tyrion resumed to look at the map, trying to choose the best routes for his army once Riverrun would be theirs. After a moment, he realized Sansa was still standing before him, playing with her hands. “Is there something you want, Sansa? Is there something wrong?”

“Could you… could you just spend the night with me?”

“Yes, of course. If that’s what you want.”

“That’s what I want.”

Tyrion forgot about all the problems they had for the next hour. Only Sansa mattered in these moments for him. In the end, her head was resting on his chest and one of his hands was wandering through her hair. No matter how she felt, she was beautiful. Right now, she had the same smile she had each night they spent together at Casterly Rock. He didn’t want to break this moment for her, but he had to.

“How was your uncle?”

Just like Tyrion feared, the smile disappeared immediately. “He was alright.” Tyrion didn’t know how to ask her, but after some time she answered before he asked any question. “I told him about our plan. He’s not certain he can trust you. I think he doesn’t trust me. Not entirely. Well, I think he does trust me, but he doesn’t trust you.”

“We can’t blame him,” said Tyrion.

“He said his uncle would probably not listen, not even to me.”

Tyrion brought his hand to her back and rubbed it, trying to relieve her from some tension. “We’ll meet the Blackfish in a few hours, Sansa. We’ll see by ourselves at this moment. Just try to sleep for now. We both need a good night.”

He kissed her on her forehead and laid back. Sansa kept her arms around him and her head rested on his body and after some time, Tyrion managed to fall asleep.
The next morning, Tyrion didn’t know if his wife had slept at all since they were awakened by Podrick who warned them dawn was coming. Podrick reddened when he seemed to realize Sansa wasn’t wearing any clothes under the furs. They ate quickly and reviewed everything they had to do. The parley with Brynden Tully would determine if they would need to storm the castle. Sansa was still unsure. Tyrion was as well, but he tried to comfort his wife and to reassure her all the same. Tyrion donned his armor again with Podrick’s help while Sansa dressed with a simple red gown.

They took horses to go to the main gate of Riverrun. Tyrion could see Sansa was worried. Daven accompanied them to the bridge that led to the drawbridge with fifty men. Podrick and Bronn followed them as well. If things went wrong, Bronn and ten of his men had the mission to ensure Sansa would get out. Podrick was the one to carry the peace banner while another man carried the banner with the Lannister sigil. The twilight didn’t allow them to see very much, but with the torches on the walls, Tyrion distinguished at least ten crossbowmen on the battlements between redoubts. Tyrion and Sansa unhorsed while the other men stayed behind. Bronn wished him good luck as he and Sansa walked on the bridge. They stopped before the drawbridge that was still raised. Tyrion could better distinguish the men on the walls. They were pointing their crossbows at him, or at least he hoped so. If any of them targeted Sansa and released a bolt on her, then he would show them he was the son of Tywin Lannister. No one would want Riverrun afterwards.

They waited for some time. He could hear Sansa breathing heavily beside him. He took her hand trying to reassure her, and he thought he felt her breath slowing down. She kept staring before her at the drawbridge. The last time Sansa had seen her granduncle, she was only six or seven-years-old and she could barely remember him. She wasn’t even sure Ser Brynden Tully would recognize her. Tyrion was beginning to grow impatient of the waiting when, finally, the drawbridge slowly lowered.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa (we meet the Blackfish)
Sansa XXII

Chapter Notes

For all those who were waiting for Brynden Tully to appear in this story, this is your chapter. Let's see if Tyrion and Sansa do better than Jaime when it comes to negotiate with the Blackfish.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sansa found it very long before the bridge moved, but now she found the bridge lowered too quickly. What could she expect from Ser Bynden Tully, the uncle of her mother, her granduncle? She couldn’t even remember what he looked like. How would he react to her? Would he hug her? Smile at her? Kiss on the cheek? Or would he see her as a Lannister? Sansa hadn’t been sure at all how to dress, but she had decided during the night that she would wear the colors of House Lannister. She had to assume the fact she was the Lady of Casterly Rock now, that she was Sansa Lannister of House Stark, and to show it to everyone. Too quickly the drawbridge lowered and joined the bridge where she and Tyrion stood.

When the drawbridge was low enough, Sansa could see the men on the other side, inside the courtyard of Riverrun. A tall man with a grim face, grey hair, broad shoulders and suspicious eyes walked towards them. After ten years, Sansa thought she remembered him a little, but not precisely enough. If she had met him on luck, she wouldn’t have recognized him. He stopped a few feet from them. He was staring at her.

“Sansa?” he asked her.

Sansa tried to smile. “Ser Brynden.”

The Blackfish let the beginning of a smile appear at the corners of his mouth. “Last time I saw you, you were only a child.” He turned his attention to Tyrion and the grim expression returned to his face. “Imp.”

“Blackfish,” replied Tyrion.

“I assume you’re here to fulfill the vow the Kingslayer gave to my niece, and the promise you made to her as well. She sent your brother back to you, alive. I think it’s time you keep your part of the bargain. I see Sansa, but I don’t see Arya. Where is she?”

“I do not have Arya Stark, Ser Brynden,” said Tyrion. “As for Sansa, she can go back with you inside Riverrun if she wants, but I won’t force her to come with you if she doesn’t want. I promised Catelyn Stark to send her daughters back to her, not to you. And since sending Sansa back to her mother would mean to kill her, this is not really a promise I wish to fulfill anymore. And I’m sure you agree with me.”

“Pity. Do you wish to take your brother’s place as our captive then?”
Sansa didn’t like the turn this discussion was taking. “No, thank you, ser. I’m sure your cells are better places to live than the sky cells of your niece, but I prefer the comforts of my pavilion.”

“Whilst Catelyn enjoys the comfort of her grave,” Sansa’s granduncle replied gravely. Tyrion didn’t seem proud of that, and she knew he wasn’t. “Why are you here? And why is my niece’s daughter here?”

He looked at Sansa suspiciously and questioningly. Tyrion was right. It would be better if she was the one to talk, so she did. “Ser Brynden, the king gave to Lord Tyrion the task to bring back the peace in the Riverlands. For that he has full authority to do as he sees fit. We’re here to propose you an agreement that would put an end to this war and bring back the peace in the Riverlands.”

“Peace in the Riverlands. Really? A peace with House Frey in command? I think not. I was there at the Twins when your mother and your brother were killed.”

Sansa closed her eyes and opened them again. “You don’t need to remember me how they died. I know it.”

“And yet here you stand, Sansa.” He made a few steps towards her. “Proposing to surrender this castle where I grew up, where your mother grew up. And to surrender it to who? To the Freys and to the Lannisters. And you propose this as you wear the colors, the sigils and the symbols of House Lannister.” Both the voice and the face of Ser Brynden showed contempt. “I do hope and believe you’re saying these words under constraint. Perhaps they promised you they would spare me and Edmure if you convinced me to surrender. Your mother would have done the same in your place. But I won’t accept.” He looked back at Tyrion. “If you believed that bringing my grandniece would convince me to give you my home, then you were wrong. This is my home. I was born in this castle and I’m ready to die in it. Nothing you will tell me will change my mind on it.”

Tyrion sighed. “Ser Brynden, you are surrounded by an army at least ten times yours. The war is over. I’m here to offer you a chance to save the lives of all your men. We both have two choices. We can either fight each other for this castle or we can end it now without violence. I could storm the castle, but I would rather have you lay down its weapons instead of having thousands of men dying for a stupid and useless war.”

“Thousands of your men, Imp.”

“These men will be yours as well, Ser Brynden. Look inside and outside your castle. These are your men inside, and these are your men as well outside. These are your bannermen. They will die when we’ll attack Riverrun. They will be in the first waves alongside the Freys. You won’t be able to kill one Frey without killing one man from the river lords. The Riverlands will bleed in this battle. Men of the Riverlands will die. Is that really what you want?”

“If this is what I need to do to keep my home away from you Lannisters and Freys, then yes I will.”

“Blackfish.” Tyrion obviously started to get unnerved. “If you do not lay down your weapons…”

“Then you will hang Edmure. My nephew is marked for death no matter what I do. So hang him and be done with it. I expect that Edmure is as weary of standing on those gallows as I am of seeing him there.”

“He will not hang Edmure,” almost shouted Sansa. Almost. Why was Ser Brynden so blind? They were trying to help him. “Edmure is in the Lannister camp and well treated now. The Freys have been set aside. You don’t need to fight for Riverrun. The war is over.”
“I doubt it, Sansa,” replied her granduncle. “As long as I’m standing, the war is not over.” He turned again to Tyrion. “You can either attack, or try to starve us out. We still have enough provisions for a year. Do you have a year, Imp?”

No, we don’t have a year. Arya doesn’t have a year. She may not even have more than a few months. Ser Brynden Tully started to walk away to the drawbridge and its castle. No, he can’t leave like that. What is he doing? He’s condemning himself, Arya, all of us. Sansa couldn’t let that happen. “Uncle Brynden, let me discuss with you in private. Or has family no longer any value in your eyes?”

The Blackfish stopped and turned to her, a queer look on his face. “You may come, but only you,” he said after a moment. Sansa could feel Tyrion’s worried eyes on her. Ser Brynden resumed his path, not looking behind.

Sansa looked at Tyrion, trying to reassure him by showing confidence, but she didn’t think she succeeded. In the end, she said nothing and it was Tyrion who spoke. “Be careful.”

Sansa tried to smile and walked inside Riverrun. That wasn’t how it was supposed to happen. They were supposed to both speak to Ser Brynden. Tyrion was better to negotiate than her, no matter what he said about her own aptitudes for diplomacy, and she felt better when he was there to support her. But it was obvious her granduncle wouldn’t listen to her husband. He barely listened to her. So Sansa had had no choice in the end but to ask for a private discussion.

As she was done crossing the drawbridge, she heard it raising again behind her. She turned to see Tyrion disappear as he was hidden behind the raised bridge. Sansa was alone inside Riverrun. She turned again to the courtyard and saw at least a hundred men looking at her from the battlements, the windows, the stairs and the courtyard where she stood. Ser Brynden was right before her.

“Follow me,” he said.

He walked through the courtyard and Sansa followed him. The men wearing the silver trout were all looking at her with various facial expressions. Astonishment, curiosity and respect were visible along with disdain, hatred and sadness. Sansa felt like she felt when she arrived at Casterly Rock through the Lion’s Den months ago, but worse. This was Riverrun. She wasn’t supposed to feel unsafe where her mother had grown. Yet she did. She followed Ser Brynden Tully to what was the keep of Riverrun. It was triangular just like the castle itself. They climbed the spiral stairs in silence and arrived in a solar that was triangular as well. Sansa noticed a stone balcony all around it. She realized that from this solar, you could see everything about twenty miles around. No movement from the enemy could be missed.

“As you can see, you won’t have any chance of seizing this castle.” Ser Brynden said, as if he was reading her thoughts. “You can tell that to the Imp. My men are hardened warriors and ready to die to defend this castle just like me. We can see every upcoming attack. And this is not a dwarf with five thousand men that will change anything.” He knew how many men Tyrion brought. If only he wasn’t fighting against them but with them. Sansa’s granduncle sat behind a huge desk. “You may sit.” Sansa accepted the offer.

They sat there, looking at each other, Sansa folded her hands before her. Ser Brynden was examining her. His expression had softened and turned sad. She thought she recognized more the man she met ten years ago, or at least what few she remembered of the man.

“Cat once told me you would grow more beautiful than her. It seems she was right. I wish she could see you today.” He sighed. “So, why are you here? And tell me the truth now. You don’t need to lie. I won’t repeat what you’ll tell me here. It will remain within this solar.”
He thought Tyrion forced her to be present. Sansa would have to convince him of the opposite. By luck, she was the one who had the scrolls. She produced them from folds in her gown and put them on the desk.

“What is it?” asked Ser Brynden.

“One of these scrolls come from Ser Emmon Frey and his wife. The other one comes from Tommen. This is a royal decree.”

He looked at her strangely, as if he didn’t know what to think of it. “Can you tell me what does it mean? Did he send you to parley with me in his stead? If that’s the case…”

“He didn’t send me,” Sansa cut. “I came here by my own will because you refused to listen to us right away. That’s why I decided to come inside. To discuss with you.”

Ser Brynden’s lips twisted. “What did he promise you in exchange? My life? Edmure’s life? My men spared? That’s really kind of you to try to save us, Sansa, but it’s useless. House Tully is lost, no matter what happens. I can keep you here inside Riverrun if this is your wish, but I will let you go if that is what you want. I wouldn’t condemn Cat’s daughter to death against her will.”

Sansa was getting unnerved by her granduncle’s behavior. “If you would only cast a glance at these scrolls, you would know that House Tully will get back Riverrun and the Riverlands as soon as you and Edmure bend the knee to Tommen.”

Brynden Tully looked at her as if he saw her for the first time. “What did you say?”

“Read the scrolls,” Sansa ordered him.

With great care, Brynden Tully took the first scroll, the one who came from Tommen, still eyeing her. He broke the seal and read it. Incomprehension and bewilderment were plain on his face. He unrolled the other scroll coming from Genna and Ser Emmon and read it as well. When he was done with reading it, he threw it on the desk and almost spite.

“Does he really think I’m going to believe it? Do you believe him when he told you this?”

“He’s sincere. It’s the truth. This is an official royal decree signed by Tommen Baratheon him…”

“Tommen Baratheon? Isn’t it more Tommen Waters? Or Lannister? We all know who his real parents are.” Sadly, Sansa knew it. Tommen was a bastard born of incest, but he was all the opposite of Joffrey, a kind and sweet boy who was incapable of hurting anyone or anything. “These are words from Lannisters and Freys. Do you really think they will give up their claim on Riverrun and give it back to us? Their words mean nothing. Your brother and your mother experienced it firsthand.”

Sansa tried to recover. “Uncle Brynden, Arya is at Winterfell.”

Her granduncle sighed, looking pitifully at her. “Your sister is dead, Sansa. Arya is gone.” He rose from his chair and went to sit right before her on the same side of the desk. “I understand you cling to the hope she might still be alive. Your mother did the same. But she’s dead. No one saw her or had any news from her ever since your father’s death.”

“Arya is alive,” Sansa stated firmly. He didn’t believe her. “I know it. She is at Winterfell right as we speak. She’s been forced to marry Ramsay Bolton, and he’s a monster. He imprisons girls in dungeons, he beats them, skins them, rapes them, and when he’s bored by them he releases them in the forest and hunts them like animals. We have to save her.”
“Alright.” Ser Brynden raised his hands to stop her. “Who did you get this information from?”

Sansa gulped. “From Tyrion. He has spies in the North.”

Ser Brynden sighed. “Sansa, he lied to you.”

“No, he didn’t lie. He’s telling the truth, just like I’m telling you the truth.”

“He lied to your mother, Sansa. Just like his brother. Your mother released the Kingslayer because the Imp promised her to send you and Arya back to her if he got back his brother.” Sansa already knew that. “The Kingslayer swore that he would bring you back to her. And what did they do? Instead the Imp married you and his brother forsook the vow he made to your mother. The Lannisters and the Freys are lying.”

Sansa tried to explain. “You don’t know what happened. They both wanted to send me back to my mother, and Arya too once they would find her. But when Ser Jaime reached King’s Landing, it was too late. I was already married to Tyrion and Mother and Robb had been killed.”

“Yes, killed at the Twins by the Freys, with Lannister’s complicity. This wedding smells of Tywin Lannister. I know he was behind this.”

“Tyrion and Ser Jaime had nothing to do with this. Tywin Lannister organized it alone. They had no hand in it.”

A silence followed during which Sansa hoped foolishly her granduncle would believe her. “Then it confirms what I suspected. The Lannisters are the ones behind the Red Wedding.” He was angry. He didn’t understand well. “I will not surrender Riverrun to the people who murdered my family and my king. Riverrun will stand.”

Sansa was desperate. “You don’t know what really happened. You weren’t in King’s Landing this whole time. Tyrion didn’t want to marry me. His father forced him to. He was forced to wed me as much as I was forced to wed him. He protected me from Joffrey, Cersei and Lord Tywin, even before we were married, when he had no interest to do so. He put his life in danger for me. He has been nothing but kind and gentle with me. He… he didn’t consummate our marriage during our wedding night. He told me he would wait for me to be ready, and he held his promise. He’s not like the rest of his family. And the Lannisters are not all monsters. I met them, I spent time with them during the past year. Most of them are very kind and decent people. They didn’t take part to the Red Wedding and hate the Freys as much as us. Some are only children. Even Ser Emmon’s sons hate to be Freys. I can’t pretend I like Ser Jaime Lannister, but he’s not as bad as people think. Even he helped me in King’s Landing. The Lannisters are not the monsters you think. Only Tywin, Joffrey and Cersei are monsters. The others are not worse than us.”

Ser Brynden Tully was looking at her. His face turned hard with time and he rose from his seat and went back behind his desk, moving slowly. When he looked back at Sansa, he looked angry. “You speak as if you were one of them.”

Before she could hold her words, they came out of her mouth, with a determination and a certainty she didn’t know she had. “Yes. Because I am one of them. I am their lady. I am the Lady of Casterly Rock.”

A long silence lingered after what she said. “I didn’t want to believe it when I first saw you. After the drawbridge had lowered.” His voice was somewhere between anger and sadness. “You were standing there, looking every bit like your mother. Only you were wearing a red gown, with a gold necklace, holding the hand of the Imp for a moment. And when I approached I saw what was on
your necklace. A sigil. A golden lion. I gave you the benefit of the doubt and assumed this was a play, that you were forced to do this and that you tried to save me and Edmure, and your mother’s home. But it seems I was wrong. I think your mother would have feared the same. She never learned you were married to a Lannister. It’s probably better like that. She would have wondered if her daughter had betrayed her. She wouldn’t have believed it, but she would have wondered all the same. And the mere thought of that would have killed her, after everything she endured. But it doesn’t matter. Your mother is dead. Your brother is dead. They were murdered by the people you defend. And now you’re helping them.”

Her granduncle was looking at her accusingly. It was like with the river lords, and in some way a little like with her uncle Edmure. He saw her as a Lannister. She could see that. He looked at her the same way the Lannister soldiers were looking at her. Only when they saw her as a Stark, Brynden Tully, the uncle of her mother, saw her as a Lannister. And he was right. She was a Lannister, but not only a Lannister. She was also a Stark, and she was a Tully as well through her mother’s blood. But that wasn’t what the knight standing before her saw in her. He only saw the lion and red, not the wolf or the blue eyes or the auburn hair. He walked to the door and opened it.

“I think we have nothing else to tell each other,” he said.

Sansa rose from her chair but didn’t walk to the door. Instead she looked straight into his blue eyes, the same blue eyes she had and that her mother had. “Let me be clear about something, ser. My sister is held prisoner by a rapist and a murderer. She is being tortured and raped as we speak. And I will do everything to save her. If I need to destroy these walls and to take Riverrun by force for it, then I will do it. You stand in the way to my sister, the only sister I have. I won’t let you stop me from saving her. I won’t let you and your stupid pride and will of revenge get in my way and have her killed.”

Sansa heard spite in her voice. At the end, she was almost shouting. Ser Brynden Tully walked towards her. He was towering her, taller than her he was. And he was angry, angrier than ever. “I lost a niece and a king at the Twins. I will not let the Freys and the Lannisters take my home. Perhaps you don’t understand that, but I will not let these murders go unpunished. If they take this castle, they will pay for it. They will pay with their blood. If they ever take it.”

“Yes, you lost a niece and a king, ser. I lost a mother and a brother. Before that I lost two brothers. They were only children and they were burned like animals. And before that I lost a father. I was there when he was executed. I saw his head cut from his body, and I saw it roll on the steps of the Great Sept of Baelor. After that I was beaten before the whole people of King’s Landing on the orders of a man who said he loved me. And the only one who dared to challenge him, who dared to protect me in these moments is the man I’m married with today. The man who I love.” She stared at him, holding his gaze. “You think you lost a lot? I lost much more than you. You still have a nephew, and there are still two daughters of your niece who are alive, and the son of your other niece. All I have left now is Arya and Jon, and I will not abandon my sister. Family still means something for me. My family who lives, not the one who’s dead. You can either choose to march with us on Winterfell to save Arya, your grandniece, or you can choose to stay hidden behind these walls like Aunt Lysa did when you needed her. You can turn your back on your family like she did. I think your families’ words need to be changed. It should be Pride, Duty, Honor and As High as Pride. The Lannisters care more about their own than you. And they aren’t the only ones to murder children, unless you already forgot about Martyn and Willem.”

Ser Brynden Tully didn’t flinch. He kept staring at her. “I want you to leave. You’re no longer welcome here. I don’t want any Lannister in my castle.” He turned his back on her and walked back to the huge desk. Sansa remained there, unmoving. When her granduncle reached the other side of the desk, he looked back at her. He looked angry and sad at the same time. “I told you to leave. I
Sansa put out the necklace she always bore and threw it at the knight who caught it in the air. “Clasp it in your hand when I’m gone. I’m still loyal to my family. Are you? You have one day to decide. If at the first light tomorrow you haven’t surrendered Riverrun, we will storm the castle.” There was no time to lose. Arya had no time to lose.

She turned on her heels and walked away. She followed the same way they took to arrive in the keep. The drawbridge lowered for her and she left the castle where her mother grew up. That wasn’t at all how she imagined the first time she would come to Riverrun. But when she had imagined it, she was still a little girl with dreams of gallant knights and handsome princes. The only men she met in King’s Landing who were gallant were a dwarf and a dog with a half-burned face.

Tyrion was waiting for her with all the other people who accompanied her. When he tried to know what had happened, she just moved away from him, climbed on her mount and rode for their pavilion. She didn’t care about anyone else around and reached her tent very quickly. There she sat on the bed. She caressed the furs between her fingers.

These are words from Lannisters and Freys. Their words mean nothing. Your brother and your mother experienced it firsthand. The Kingslayer swore that he would bring you back to her? And what did they do? Instead the Imp married you and his brother forsook the vow he made to your mother. The Lannisters and the Freys are lying. The Lannisters are the ones behind the Red Wedding. You speak as if you were one of them. I didn’t want to believe it when I first saw you. Your mother is dead. Your brother is dead. They were murdered by the people you defend. And now you’re helping them. I will not let the Freys and the Lannisters take my home. You’re no longer welcome here. I don’t want any Lannister in my castle.

The words of her granduncle echoed through her head. Then someone entered. Sansa turned to face the intruder. It was Brienne.

“My lady,” she said, “is there is anything I can do for you?”

“Leave me alone.” Sansa averted her gaze from her. It took some time for the Maid of Tarth to reply.

“As you wish, my lady.” She left. Sansa was alone again.

She didn’t know how long she stayed here. Her discussion with Ser Brynden Tully was playing back again and again in her head. *Your sister is dead, Sansa. Arya is gone.* The two little sentences came again and again. Was Arya dead? Was everything she was doing useless? Did she just say they would take the castle with force if they didn’t surrender without reason? Everything she did, it was for Arya, for the little sister whose quarrels she regretted now. For Arya, who loved to ride horses, to fight with a sword, to shoot with a bow, to soil herself from head to toes while exploring swamps, bogs, forests and trees. For her sister who hated needlework, singing, dancing and playing music. For the sister who put sheep shit under her bed when she was angry with her. For Arya who was always angry with her. Ramsay Bolton imprisons women and tortures them. He starves them, peels their skin off a few of their fingers, beats them, rapes them and inflicts them many other horrible things. After a few months or a few weeks, he releases them and hunts them with his dogs in the woods. If he catches them, his dogs eat them. The marriage already took place two months ago, perhaps more. *After a few months or a few weeks.* Were they already too late? She just said they would storm Riverrun. For nothing.

Sansa burst into tears. What had she done? She cried, and cried, and cried. She felt a hand on her shoulder. She knew to who it belonged. She had already felt it almost everywhere on her, with or without clothes, to know only with the feeling of the touch whose hand it was. He just stood right
next to her, his hand on her shoulder. Sansa kept crying. Finally, she managed to say something.

“He refused.” That was all she could say, and yet it was enough for another sob to escape her throat.

Tyrion moved to sit next to her on the bed. His hand wandered on her back, comforting her a little.

“The meeting didn’t go well. I feared it.”

It was a statement, not a question. She knew he didn’t need to ask her to know what had happened.

“I told him he had until next morning to surrender. That if he didn’t, we would attack.” She told him everything that was important for him to know about their conversation. “He told me Arya was dead. That she was gone. What if he was right? What if Arya was already dead? What if he already…”

She couldn’t say the rest. She couldn’t imagine her sister devoured by… She sobbed again. She let her head fall on the shoulder of her husband. The gentle hands who stroke her hair so many times did it again, but it barely managed to comfort her. “Do you think she’s dead? Do you think we can still save her?”

After a long moment, he answered. “I hope she is alive, Sansa. And I believe she is still alive. She is too valuable for the Boltons. They need her to keep their hold on the North. They will keep her at least enough to have…” He seemed to change his mind and didn’t finish. Sansa thought it for the better. She didn’t want to hear him tell it. He pulled her head away from him and looked directly into her eyes. “Sansa, your sister is still alive. I saw her at Winterfell, and from the little I saw she is strong. Just as much as you are. I’m sure she is still alive. I know it. They won’t kill her.” He cupped her left cheek with his hand. “We will save her. I promise. But I must leave you. I must go and speak to some people. Podrick and Brienne will remain close.”

He kissed her on the right cheek and left. Sansa looked at him leaving the tent. She knew who he had to speak with. He would meet all the commanders to prepare an assault on Riverrun. They would have no choice. They couldn’t wait. As difficult as it was, they needed to take Riverrun, and to take it now. If Arya was still alive… Though Sansa wondered in what state she was if she still lived. She tried to push these thoughts aside. She couldn’t think about it. She didn’t want to think about it.

She stayed in the tent all the day. A handmaiden she brought with her brought her a meal in the middle of the day, Podrick came inside a few times to ask her if she needed anything, only to be dismissed each time with a negative answer. She kept weeping half the time. The other half she tried to do something to occupy her time and to think about something else, but nothing succeeded. She tried to write letters to her friends in Casterly Rock or to Jon, only to crumple all of them in the end. Every time she tried to read she put the book aside before the first page was over. Even embroidery works couldn’t distract her. She had unconsciously started to embroider the sigil of House Tully, but it was all twisted. She threw her work on the floor as soon as she realized it. Tyrion only came back for dinner and they ate in silence. Sansa didn’t dare to ask him questions. She ended sitting on the bed like before.

“Tyrion?” she asked all of a sudden as Tyrion was writing something. He raised his eyes to her immediately.

“Yes, Sansa.”

“Do you think I’m a Stark?”

She could see the puzzled expression on his face. “Of course, you are a Stark, Sansa.”

“I don’t feel like one.” She had finally said what she feared so much to tell loudly. “I don’t feel like a Stark.”
Tyrion approached. “Sansa, what are you saying? You are a Stark, you know that.”

She wished she could agree with him. “I never was. When I was at Winterfell, I only dreamed of the day I would leave my home to marry a prince or a lord from the south, and live happily in a great castle, like in a song. I only cared about what I could have, not about what I had. I never really cared about my family. I only cared about myself. Arya is a prisoner of a Bolton. Jon is thousands of miles away and I never saw him as a brother. I have been closer to Cerenna and Joy than I ever was to Robb, Arya, Bran or Rickon. I was even closer to Margaery in King’s Landing than to them. I’m not a Stark. I was never one.”

Tears were running on her cheeks, silent tears rolling without a sound. Tyrion had come closer and taken her left hand in his own. “Sansa, you care about your sister, and you care about your half-brother. And you care as well for your brothers, and your mother, and your father, even after they’re dead. If you weren’t a Stark, you wouldn’t. Where is your necklace?” he asked suddenly.

Sansa brought her hand where the golden necklace always was, and only found her naked throat and neck. She remembered. “I gave it to Ser Brynden before I left Riverrun. I wanted him to look inside. To see who I was. Who I thought I was.” She gulped, hardly holding another sob. “He told me he wanted no Lannister in his home. He saw me as a Lannister. And the river lords and their men, and my uncle Edmure, and even the Freys I think, they all see as a Lannister. But our men see me as a Stark. They always see me as an enemy. And I think Ser Brynden was right. I am a Lannister. I feel like one. I am the Lady of House Lannister, the Lady of Casterly Rock. I’m not a Stark anymore. The river lords see me for who I really am. My mother’s uncle saw me for who I really am.”

A long silence followed. Sansa could feel it in her. She was Sansa Lannister, Lady of Casterly Rock, Lady of the Westerlands, Lady of Winterfell, wife to Tyrion Lannister the Lord of Casterly Rock, Shield of Lannisport, Lord of the Westerlands and Warden of the West, friend to Lannisters, in love with a Lannister, and soon she would bring Lannisters into the world. She was also the friend of Queen Margaery Tyrell of Highgarden. Margaery had kept her origins. She was still a Tyrell, and she would be all her life, no matter who she married. Sansa was no longer who she was when she left Winterfell. If she had ever been a Stark, this Stark had died when she left Winterfell. From this moment, she had been a little girl promised to other men and she had abandoned her origins. That was what she had wanted at the time, and that’s what she got.

“Sansa,” resumed Tyrion, “I have been a dwarf all my life. I have been some sort of an outcast in my own family. An embarrassment for House Lannister. People looked down at me, whether they knew me or not. I was a disgrace hidden to the rest of the world. People saw me as a dwarf, a misshapen little creature. At first I was angry with that. I lit fire in the caverns below Casterly Rock, imagining the people who spoke to me that way burning in that fire. But I didn’t feel any better for that. And progressively, I came to understand that people would always see me as a dwarf. Because it was who I was. So, I accepted that it would always be like this. I decided to never forget who I was, and to wear it like armor, so it could never be used to hurt me. And with time I wasn’t bothered anymore by the fact they looked at me like a dwarf. I even learnt to use it to my own advantage. People always underestimate a dwarf. It served me well.” He stopped for a moment before he spoke again. “It doesn’t matter how people see you, Sansa. All that matters is how you react to this, and how you use it. And one day or another, people realize we are more than what they thought we were. Most of the people, at least.”

Tyrion’s words helped her to stop crying. Sansa understood what he said. She had been a prisoner in King’s Landing for so long, and she knew the way you behaved when you faced people judging you wrongly was important. Sansa had built an armor of courtesies around her back when she was Joffrey’s toy. But she had abandoned her armor when the time had come to play the game, and after so much time in Casterly Rock where she had been well accepted despite some initial reluctance, she
wasn’t used to other people looking at her like a traitor, or worse. What was worse now however was the fact members of her own family, her mother’s family, were looking at her like she was a traitor. Perhaps Tyrion felt like this with his own family.

Tyrion stayed with her for a long time, just being there for her like he always was. The sun had set on the horizon and evening was giving way to night. Sansa remembered the ultimatum she gave to Ser Brynden. She was about to ask him what they would do at dawn, but Podrick came in at this moment.

“My lord. My lady,” He bowed awkwardly to each of them like he always did. “My lord, Ser Brynden Tully sent a messenger. He’s asking for another parley with you.”

Sansa’s heart bumped inside her tummy. “What does he want?” she asked immediately. “Did he say why he wanted to parley?”

“No, he only said he wanted another parley. Right now.”

Sansa jumped on her feet. “What are we waiting for?” She started to walk to the flap of the tent. Her granduncle had accepted to surrender.

“My lady, he doesn’t want to talk with you.” Podrick’s words stopped her.

She looked at him. “What do you mean?”

“He asked for a private parley with Lord Tyrion. Alone inside Riverrun.” Sansa turned to look at Tyrion. He looked as dumbfounded as she was. “He says that’s how he will parley. Or else we’ll have to take the castle by force.”

Chapter End Notes

I know there are some of you who must be raging "Another cliffhanger!!!". Sorry if you do. I like to do them too much. Next chapter will be the last one about the siege of Riverrun. Don't miss the denouement of this part of the story.

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
He didn’t know what to expect from this parley. The Blackfish could have set a trap for him, hoping to kill the Lord of Casterly Rock before his army launched the assault on Riverrun. Ser Brynden had nothing to lose anymore. If he didn’t surrender, he knew enough in military matters to know Riverrun would fall. Yes, thousands of Tyrion’s men would die, mostly Freys if they were lucky enough and sent them first, but they would take Riverrun all the same. Perhaps the Blackfish hoped to kill him before the battle. Tyrion wasn’t stupid enough to fight in the first lines, or even to fight at all if they stormed the castle, and the Blackfish surely knew it. Or he certainly believed Tyrion was a coward. By killing him during this parley, he would bear a great stroke at the Lannister army and have the satisfaction of killing the Lord of Casterly Rock before Riverrun fell. However, Riverrun would fall. Bronn, Crakehall and Daven would make sure of that.

But Tyrion chose to go to the parley all the same. He had to try. Sansa wanted to save her sister at all cost, and was ready to take Riverrun by force as well if they had no other choice, but his wife already lost enough people of her family and Tyrion didn’t want to add to it by killing her granduncle. He also feared she might resent him one day for destroying her mother’s home. Tyrion had to seize his last chance to take Riverrun without bloodshed, even if he highly doubted Ser Brynden Tully had changed his mind. Their previous meeting before the gates of Riverrun and Sansa’s tale of their private discussion inside the castle didn’t promise much. Her granduncle treated her like a Lannister.

Tyrion didn’t know what to make of it. Sansa told him she felt more like a Lannister than a Stark. Tyrion had never really thought about this as a possibility. He had tried to make Sansa happy as much as he could at Casterly Rock, but he never expected this. He only hoped she would come to not see all Lannisters like monsters. He even had the foolish hope she would love him one day, which happened against all odds, but he never expected she would think of herself as a Lannister. Tyrion always saw her like a Stark. He meant it when he gave her the necklace. No matter she bore the name of House Lannister, she was a Stark through and through in his eyes. What could have happened for her to see herself as a member of the family who butchered her parents and her brother?

Tyrion put these thoughts aside for another time. He had to focus on convincing the Blackfish to surrender. He had accepted his conditions for the parley, or in fact a part of the conditions. Half an hour after Podrick entered their tent, Tyrion was standing before the drawbridge of Riverrun, but he wasn’t alone. Lord Edmure Tully stood with him. He wouldn’t go alone, and Edmure Tully had been convinced it was in his interest for Riverrun to surrender. It was dark and both Tyrion and Edmure were holding a torch. They were in the middle of the night.

“Who goes there?” shouted someone on the battlements.

Tyrion thought he heard voices from the battlements, but he couldn’t understand what they said. The soldiers were probably arguing amongst themselves, or with the Blackfish himself. The Blackfish probably thought this was a trap. He wasn’t entirely wrong. It would be a trap to let Edmure Tully inside only if Ser Brynden refused to surrender Riverrun himself. One way or another, Riverrun would surrender.

“Lower the drawbridge,” a voice finally shouted from above after some time.

The drawbridge began to lower. Tyrion looked at Sansa’s uncle. “You know what’s good for House Tully. What’s good for your wife. What’s good for your son. What’s good for Sansa. What’s good for you. Even what’s good for the Blackfish, whether he knows it or not.”

“I know, Lannister. You don’t need to remind me what I must do,” replied the lord.

Despite the fact he trusted Sansa, Edmure Tully’s trust for his niece didn’t go as far as her husband. Tyrion supposed he couldn’t really blame him. His sister was killed because of Tywin Lannister. However, the Lord of Riverrun was far less hostile to him than his uncle. The drawbridge was completely dropped and they entered Riverrun. Tyrion and Lord Edmure both wore full armor. They had managed to find an armor of Riverlands soldier that fitted Sansa’s uncle. The garrison watched them, not moving in the light of the torches. The Blackfish appeared behind his men as the drawbridge was raised.

“I told you to come alone,” said the war veteran, not even welcoming his nephew.

“Yes, you told me, Ser Brynden,” answered Tyrion. “But Lord Edmure, your lord, decided to come. After all, this is his castle. If there are to be negotiations concerning Riverrun, he should be there.”

“Yet he wasn’t there this morning.”

“Now he is.”

“I came here of my own accord, Uncle,” confirmed Edmure, though he didn’t mention Tyrion had pressured him to come.

Ser Brynden Tully looked about to spit, but instead turned and walked to the keep. Tyrion Lannister and Edmure Tully followed him to the top where the solar of the Lord of Riverrun was. It was the first time Tyrion saw it, but he knew what it looked like from the descriptions in some books he read. Tyrion and Edmure sat on the opposite of Ser Brynden before the desk.

“Before we discuss about Riverrun, there are certain things I want to settle. First, tell me what is the necklace my grandniece gave to me yesterday.” The question was clearly addressed to Tyrion.

“This is a necklace made of gold and silver. On the outside it looks like a medallion made of gold, displaying a lion. However, there is a mechanism that makes it open when you clasp it in your hand. It shows a silver direwolf once open.”

The knight looked at him with a grim expression, then threw something on the desk right next to Tyrion. The necklace he gave to Sansa long ago landed with a resonating sound on the desk, opened and showing the direwolf. “You didn’t lie, I’ll give you this. Bring it back to Sansa. I’m sure she must miss it. And I wouldn’t want her deprived of one of the few things that still links her to her
“Family.” Tyrion took the necklace. “Now I want the truth on another matter. Is Arya Stark still alive?”

“She is,” confirmed Tyrion.

“How do you know it?”

Tyrion had prepared for this. He produced two messages White Harbor sent to him. Ser Brynden read them. “They come from official ambassadors and spies I sent in the North many months ago. Read well the message about how Ramsay treats women. I suppose you’ll understand why it is so urgent to take back Winterfell.”

The knight’s face turned harder as he read the message in question. He put it down roughly. “How did my grandniece ended up there?”

“I don’t know.”

“You’re lying. The last time she was seen was in King’s Landing,” Ser Brynden accused him.

“Arya Stark disappeared the day Eddard Stark was arrested in the capital. Nothing is known of her movements ever since. She reappeared only recently when my men in the North informed me she had been betrothed to Ramsay Bolton. I don’t know how she came back to Winterfell, and her whereabouts in the meantime are unknown.”

“And you expect me to believe you?”

“You have the ravens of my agents right before you.”

“They could be forged. And if I remember well, you had someone tell my niece that you had Arya Stark in King’s Landing, when you promised to exchange both Cat’s daughters for the Kingslayer.”

“I lied,” admitted Tyrion reluctantly.

“Why should I believe you’re not lying now? Roose Bolton is your ally. You gave him the North after he stabbed Robb Stark in the heart.”

“My father gave the North to Roose Bolton. My father is dead, and I have no wish to maintain this alliance with House Bolton. Do you think I want to work with the man who murdered my brother-in-law?”

“Did Tywin Lannister arrange the Red Wedding?”

“My father did.”

“And you knew it?”

“No. I was only Master of Coin at the time, recently married to Sansa and my father barely acknowledged me for his son. Do you really think he would have told me?”

“That fits Sansa’s story.” Tyrion understood now. Brynden Tully was testing him. “However, I would like to know how you made her forget about the way you paid an assassin to kill her brother Bran. Catelyn told me everything about it.”

Tyrion sighed. Again. “I have nothing to see with the attempt of murder on this boy. I said so to your niece when she captured me. And even after I saved her from an attack of the mountain clans, she still believed me to be guilty. Joffrey is the one who tried kill Bran Stark. He’s the one who hired the
So you admit your family was behind this assassination attempt.”

“I admit that my stupid nephew, who had Sansa beaten publicly for the crime of being Robb Stark’s sister, decided to kill Bran Stark because our good king Robert said in his presence that no one had the courage to kill a cripple whose life was useless.”

“According to my niece, the dagger found on the assassin belonged to you.”

“And she got this information from a brothelkeeper. A brothelkeeper who was the one later to tell her Arya Stark was alive and well in King’s Landing. A brothelkeeper who worked for my father during all the war, who betrayed Ned Stark after he promised to help him. A brothelkeeper who once challenged Brandon Stark, your first niece’s betrothed, into duel and was almost killed by him. And your niece was stupid enough to believe him. And by listening to his lies, she started a war.”

“Your father started this war,” pointed out the knight.

“After your niece arrested me. If she had been a little more suspicious of Petyr Baelish, we wouldn’t be at war, and there would be no siege on Riverrun right now. And her daughter wouldn’t be married to a psychopath.”

Tyrion was tired of being accused of his family’s crimes, or of crimes others committed. The attempt of murder against Bran Stark. The starving of King’s Landing and the other ills of the city during his tenure as Hand. The new taxes his own father forced him to introduce while he was Master of Coin. The huge debts of the Crown collected by Robert and Baelish. Joffrey’s murder. He had enough of this.

“So you deny that your family beheaded Ned Stark?” asked the Blackfish.

“I wasn’t there.”

“Do you deny it?”

Tyrion pressed his lips. “No. I would have tried to prevent that from happening. But since your two charming nieces kept me at the Eyrie for quite a long time, it was difficult for me to help Ned Stark.”

Ser Brynden got on his feet. “I defend you to talk about Catelyn this way. She is dead, killed by you, Lannisters.” His voice was controlled, but dark and threatening, full of fury.

“Yes, Ser Brynden,” Tyrion conceded. “You lost your king to Roose Bolton. And my brother lost a hand to one of his men. So we have a common enemy.”

“You compare the loss of a hand to the death of a king.”

“For Jaime, the loss of his hand is no better than death. He is entirely defined by it.”

“Ah!” the knight snorted. “I have no doubt about it. The hand of a kingslayer. The hand who shove a blade in his king’s heart. Though the Kingslayer didn’t die with the loss of his hand. He’s still breathing. The Bolton men should have sliced his throat like he did to his king.”

Fury filled Tyrion, but he kept his control. “Have you ever wondered, Blackfish, why my brother killed the king he swore to serve, to protect, to defend? Why did he stab him in the back?”

“Because this is your nature, you Lannister scum!”
It was time for the knight to learn the truth. Jaime had hidden it for far too long. “Do you remember who was the last Hand of the Mad King?”

“Quarltont Chelsted. Until the Mad King burned him.”

“Yes. But do you know why the Mad King burned him? No need to answer, you have no idea. Lord Quarltont Chelsted was named Hand of the King after the Battle of the Bells when he exiled Lord Jon Connington.”

“I know that. I don’t need a history lesson.”

“You do. Because you don’t know what happened behind the doors of the Red Keep after the Trident. Once it was obvious that the war was lost, the Mad King decided to make sure Robert Baratheon would only have ashes to rule. So he set a plan. He hid caches of wildfire all over the city. Under the markets, under the streets, under the squares, under the whorehouses, under the gates and the battlements, under the Alchemists’ Guild, the Great Sept of Baelor, even under the Red Keep itself. He commanded the pyromancers to burn the capital once the rebels would be close enough. Lord Chelsted discovered it, and he tried to convince Aerys to renounce this scheme. When the king refused, he resigned from his position as Hand and the Mad King had him burned alive. He named the Grand Master of the Alchemists’ Guild, Rossart, as his new Hand. Jaime was there when all of this happened. The Mad King kept him close to him all time. When my father’s army sacked the city, my brother pleaded the king to surrender. Aerys, in his great wisdom, ordered my brother to kill our father and to bring him his head. So Jaime killed Rossart when he tried to execute Aerys’ scheme, and after he killed Aerys like you said.”

A heavy silence had fallen on the room. Edmure and Brynden Tully were looking at him with an incredulous expression. Tyrion kept his eyes on the Blackfish. He had enough of him or Jaime being on trial all their life when they both saved a city and hundreds of thousand people.

“Tell me, Ser Brynden,” resumed Tyrion, “if you had been in my brother’s stead, if the Mad King had ordered you to murder your father and your family, and to watch hundreds of thousand people burn alive, what would you have done? And before you ask why my brother never told to anyone, then you should know that Eddard Stark shouldn’t have considered him a kingslayer as soon as he entered the Great Hall. That’s the problem with you, the so-called men of honor. You only see the world through your code and your vows, and when you see someone who doesn’t follow one of his vows, you consider him an oathbreaker, a man without honor. But you rebelled against your king, twice, only because a member of your family had been killed. What’s the difference between you and my father who declared war upon you after you tried to have me executed? Or Jaime, who killed his king after he ordered him to kill his father? Tell me the difference, Blackfish. And you should be happy that I am alive, ser. If not, Sansa would be miserable right now, and there wouldn’t be an army marching on the North to save her sister. And it so happens that you stand in the way of this army.”

Edmure Tully seemed to gain back his wits at this moment. “Brynden, they offer us Riverrun. We can have our lands again. This is much more than we could hope for. We have to accept their offer.”

For the first time, the Blackfish didn’t seem to know what to do. He looked at his nephew. “You trust this man?” he asked while glancing at Tyrion.

Edmure looked at Tyrion for a moment, then turned his attention back to the knight. “I don’t know, but Sansa trusts him. And if he really helped her, and that Arya Stark is really alive at Winterfell, then it would be foolish to fight. You have no chance against the Lannisters and the Freys together. We have no chance.”
Ser Brynden looked closely at his nephew. “He promised you your son and your wife, I guess.”

“I did,” Tyrion confirmed. “I also promise you your lands, your titles, your castle, and everything we took from you we can give you back. If I could, I would also give you back the people who died at the Twins, but I don’t have the means to bring back people from the dead. The gods will deal with my father about this matter.”

“May the Father judge him justly,” said the knight on a mocking tone.

“Joffrey is dead,” Tyrion resumed, ignoring the dark jape. “My father is dead. My sister is no better than exiled. All the people of my family who played a role in your family’s death or the outbreak of this war are dead or neutralized. And I know you want revenge for what happened at the Twins. You have no revenge left to find in House Lannister. But Roose Bolton is the one who killed Robb Stark, and he’s at Winterfell right now. The only thing you have to do to get your revenge is to bend the knee to Tommen and to accompany us in the North with the Tully forces and those of your bannermen. Then you will have the revenge you’re seeking. And you will save the daughter of your niece at the same time.”

Ser Brynden seemed to consider the matter for a moment. “Is Tommen Baratheon a bastard?” He seemed unsure about that fact.

“You believe Stannis Baratheon?”

“I have a tendency to believe him more than a Lannister,” he admitted. That would be a long time before he trusted Tyrion or any Lannister.

“Ned Stark had discovered, just like Stannis, that all of Cersei’s children were bastards born of incest with our brother Jaime. But who do you think told this to Ned Stark? Who was the only person Ned Stark trusted in the capital? Someone your niece trusted. He married your other niece recently, and she died not long after.”

The Blackfish’s eyes went wide in horror. “You mean that Littlefinger is the one behind this?”

“Sansa told me he betrayed her father, turned the gold cloaks against him when he tried to arrest Joffrey. You think he made Ned Stark believe Joffrey Baratheon was a bastard?” Lord Edmure asked to Tyrion.

“That wouldn’t surprise me,” Tyrion replied. Technically, he wasn’t lying. He was only suggesting something that could have been true. “If Baelish tricked Ned Stark, and that Ned Stark sent the information to Stannis, who he thought was the lawful heir, this is no surprise that Stannis claims it on all the roofs in the Seven Kingdoms and declared war upon Joffrey.”

“Why would Baelish do such a thing?” Ser Brynden asked.

“Who knows? He gained a lot with the war. He has a title, and rules the Vale until Robin Arryn comes of age. The war was quite good for him and his station. Perhaps he arranged for Ned Stark to be killed in the hope he would be able to get back Catelyn Stark. When he was Master of Coin, he spread a rumor in all the Red Keep that he took her maidenhead one night. Everyone heard it.”

“WHAT?” The two Tullys shouted exactly at the same time.

“Lady Stark’s reaction wasn’t far from it when I told her on the Eastern Road.”

“This is a lie!” said Ser Brynden. “That wasn’t Cat he slept with. It was Lysa that he….” He stopped at once. Tyrion looked at the knight. What did he just say?
“Littlefinger took Lysa Arryn’s maidenhead? He slept with her?”

“Uncle?” asked Lord Edmure.

The knight tried to recover. “This is not a tale for now. But about Catelyn, that’s a lie. You can be sure of that.” He sighed. “Alright. You’ll give us back Riverrun, its lands, the title of Lords Paramount of the Trident?”

“All of it,” confirmed Tyrion. “You will also get back your new lady, Roslin Tully, and the heir to Riverrun, her son, who are kept at the Twins right now. You can deal with the Freys like you want, but I would suggest you do not seek revenge on them too harshly or too quickly. The two documents Sansa gave you yesterday will be an assurance for that. Your forces, and the Frey forces and all those of your bannermen, will follow us in the North to prove your fealty to your king by removing the rebellious House Bolton from Winterfell. You will have an opportunity to kill the man who murdered Robb Stark, and all this will be over.”

“And you will get Winterfell instead of Roose Bolton,” completed the Blackfish.

“Winterfell belongs to Sansa, and to her children when we will have some. I intend to give the namesake of House Stark to the one who will become the Lord of Winterfell. House Stark will rule the North again. It will have some Lannister blood, but I suppose this is better than the flayed man floating over the walls of Winterfell.”

Tyrion had this idea in mind for a very long time. He didn’t tell Sansa yet. He would have to convince Tommen, but he didn’t think he would oppose. Kevan may have some reluctance, but Tyrion could convince him as well. As for the Tyrells, they wouldn’t oppose this. Giving the name Stark to the man who would inherit Winterfell would cause them no problem.

Ser Brynden seemed to take his time to decide. His nephew begged him to accept. Finally, the old knight faced Tyrion. “That’s not enough.”

Tyrion frowned. “Not enough?”

“Catelyn, Robb, Talisa, their child. This can’t go unpunished. I will bend the knee to this boy king. I heard he’s not mad like his brother. I don’t care he’s a bastard. I will follow you in the North and kill Roose Bolton myself for what he did, but only if you meet my demands.”

Tyrion sighed. “What do you want?”

Ser Brynden answered with a single word. “Justice.”

They spent the next hour arguing, making plans and looking at a map. When Tyrion left Riverrun, he was alone. Edmure Tully stayed behind. With him inside the castle, it would surrender no matter what happened. Tyrion assembled his war council, composed of Daven, Bronn, Lyle Crakehall and Forley Prester. Sansa was there as well. When dawn came, they went to receive the yielding of Riverrun.

They waited not far from the bridge leading to the main gate of Riverrun. Tyrion and Sansa stood at the head of everyone. They would be the ones to receive Ser Brynden’s surrender. Behind them was the highest officer of the Lannister army, Ser Daven Lannister. Lothar Frey and Walder Rivers represented House Frey, and the present river lords were Karyl Vance and Lyman Goodbrook. They were surrounded behind by a host of soldiers in red armor with a few Frey guards for Walder Frey’s brood.

At first light, the drawbridge lowered for the fifth time within a whole day. A column of Tully men
emerged from the gates. They were about fifty from what Tyrion could judge. He could feel Sansa shaking next to him. He held her hand, managing to smooth her a little like always with this simple gesture. Sansa didn’t feel well about all this. The two Freys standing behind her had killed her mother and her brother’s wife. Tyrion knew Black Walder hadn’t forgotten the slap he received from the Lady of Casterly Rock, but his brother, or whatever he was considering the family tree, managed to keep him quiet. Ser Brynden and Lord Edmure arrived at the head of the column, still wearing their weapons. They would lay them down very soon.

“Imp.” The old knight was as warm in his way to greet as usual.

“Blackfish,” replied Tyrion like when they met.

“Finally you come out of your walls, old trout,” mocked Black Walder. The Blackfish eyed the bastard angrily.

“Lord Tyrion, House Tully is ready to bend the knee before Tommen of the House Baratheon, First of His Name, King of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, and Lord of the Seven Kingdoms,” declared Lord Edmure.

“As long as you keep your word,” Ser Brynden added.

Tyrion smirked. “Blackfish, there are words we love very much, us Lannisters.” Tyrion turned to Sansa. Uncertainty still on her face, she turned her back to the Tullys and faced the river lords, the Lannisters and the Freys behind.

“A Lannister always pays her debts.”

Swords were drawn, men charged, and soon the twenty Frey soldiers who were present laid dead on the floor, taken by surprise by the attack of the Lannister troops right behind them. Lame Lothar and even Black Walder couldn’t react quickly enough. They were seized by Tyrion’s men and put on their knees. They both struggled to get free.

“Let me go, you whore sons.” Black Walder’s words only earned him kick and punches. Lame Lothar was too much caught by surprise to say or do anything, still in state of shock.

A man brought a wooden block and Black Walder’s head was forced on it. Lothar Frey asked what it meant while the other one kept cursing. Sansa stepped forward. Ser Brynden Tully came next to the block and unsheathed his sword.

“Walder Rivers, I, Sansa Lannister of House Stark, Lady of Casterly Rock, Lady of the Westerlands and Lady of Winterfell, in the name of my brother, Robb Stark, Lord of Winterfell and King in the North, and in the name of Tommen of the House Baratheon, First of His Name, King of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, and Lord of the Seven Kingdoms, I hereby sentence you to die for the murder of Catelyn Stark under the protection of the guest rights. Do you have any last word to say?”

Black was staring at her in a mix of shock and fury. “You won’t do this. If our father hears, you are doomed. He will kill all the hostages we have at the Twins.”

Sansa nodded to her granduncle who raised his sword and brought it down, cutting the head of the bastard off his shoulders in a single swing. Lame Lothar was brought ahead next and his head was forced on the block as Black Walder’s body was taken away and his head put in a sack. He kept wailing and pleading for them to spare him. The Blackfish took the same stance he had before he beheaded his bastard kin.
“Lothar Frey,” said Sansa, “I, Sansa Lannister of House Stark, Lady of Casterly Rock, Lady of the Westerlands and Lady of Winterfell, in the name of my brother, Robb Stark, Lord of Winterfell and King in the North, and in the name of Tommen of the House Baratheon, First of His Name, King of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, and Lord of the Seven Kingdoms, I hereby sentence you to die for the murder of Talisa Stark and her child under the protection of the guest rights. Do you have any last word to say?”

“Please, don’t kill me. I’ll do everything you want. Everything. Just don’t kill me.” He was crying like a little girl calling for her mother.

Again, Sansa nodded to the old knight who cut the head in the same fashion than the previous one. Tyrion looked at Sansa. Her face was stone, but her eyes betrayed the agitated state of her mind. The second head was put in the same sack and brought inside Riverrun by a Tully man.

Tyrion turned to Ser Brynden. “We filled our part of the bargain, Blackfish. It’s time you fill your own.”

The knight nodded and went on his knees, head bowed. “I swear fealty to Tommen of the House Baratheon, First of His Name, King of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, and Lord of the Seven Kingdoms, from this day, until my last day.”

Edmure Tully repeated the oath in the name of House Tully and all the Tully men here knelt as he swore fealty to the Iron Throne. The two river lords present knelt as well as their lord paramount made his oath. In the distance, they heard sounds of battle and horses. The standard of House Frey had fallen on the ground when they had killed their men. That was the signal for Bronn and his men, and also for Prester’s men.

When Tyrion went to the two camps the Freys occupied, he found their armories and food stocks guarded by Lannister soldiers, some soldiers bearing the Frey colours lying dead or injured on the ground and all the Frey commanders assembled at the same spot not far from the walls of Riverrun. Bronn carried out his orders perfectly like always, though he limited the number of deaths this time, on Tyrion’s special order. That had been the plan they devised in the night. The Blackfish, the Imp and the Lord of Riverrun had planned to neutralize the Frey army by depriving it of their commanders at dawn, when their soldiers would still be sleeping or just waking up. The Lannister soldiers rushed on them at dawn while Walder Rivers and Lothar Frey were executed. They had positioned them all around the borders of the Frey camps, hidden behind forests or hills. The executions had been the justice the Blackfish demanded for his surrender. However, seeing his resolve, Tyrion had decided they would neutralize the whole Frey army in a quick stroke to prevent any problem. Doubtless some Frey soldiers would escape and report to Walder Frey, but they had no way to stop all of them. Most of the manpower of the Twins was there at Riverrun, and by holding them at the throat like this, they deprived Walder Frey of almost all his forces.

They had a platform risen and forced all the Frey soldiers to look at it two hours later. First they brought all the other commanders in chains. Ser Ryman Frey, still drunk, his son Edwyn, Ser Perwyn Frey, brother of Roslin Tully, and about half a dozen more. Some were only squires, still children. They brought up two spikes on which were planted the heads of the two men beheaded, and both soldiers and family members stared in horror. Tyrion, Sansa, Brynden, Edmure and Daven stood on the platform, the other Freys on their knees, trying to not look at the heads of their kin.

“Look at it, everyone,” shouted the Blackfish. “This is what happens to everyone who breaks the guest rights and slaughter people under their roof. Look at it! Look at the oathbreakers!”

Some Freys looked up while their men couldn’t detach their eyes from the show right before them. Daven took the scroll Tyrion had signed by Genna, her husband and their eldest son before he left
Casterly Rock. He read it.

“\textit{I, Ser Emmon of House Frey, son of Walder Frey the Lord of the Crossing, hereby renounce any claim on the castle of Riverrun and the lands, titles and revenues attached to it, and renounce any claim my children might have over it. I humbly ask the king to give it to anyone he considers worthy of the castle and its titles. May the Father lead him to take the best choice there is. Signed Ser Emmon Frey, Lady Genna Frey, and Ser Cleos Frey their son and heir.}”

There were groans among the crowd of soldiers who muttered words to each other. Then Daven took the other scroll, Tommen’s decree Tyrion asked, or more precisely ordered Kevan to produce as soon as he learned the fate of Arya Stark. Daven read it as well.

“I, Tommen of the House Baratheon, First of my Name, King of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, and Lord of the Seven Kingdoms, hereby confirm House Tully in their rights over Riverrun and all its lands and revenues. I grant it to them for swearing their allegiance to me, and seeing the wrong in their rebellion in the time of my brother’s rule, King Joffrey of the House Baratheon, First of His Name, King of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm. I name Lord Edmure, of House Tully, Lord of Riverrun and Lord Paramount of the Trident, titles to be held by his children and grandchildren until the end of time, as long as they remain loyal to me and my descendants.”

Tyrion stepped forward and spoke loudly. “Men of House Frey. Swear fealty to your liege lord, Edmure Tully, or suffer the consequences of rebellion against the Crown.” The Frey soldiers got on their knees and pledged themselves to Edmure, surrounded they were by Lannister and Tully men armed to the teeth while they had no weapon. Tyrion turned to the Freys in chains. “You are given the same choice, Freys.” They all bent the knee before their liege lord, Ryman Frey the first, probably realizing for the first time his life was in danger through all the wine he swallowed. Their chains were removed, but they were escorted back to the Lannister camp and kept under heavy guard.

Later, not long before the middle of the day, they were all together in the Great Hall of Riverrun, the Lannister commanders, the re-established Lord of Riverrun and his uncle the Blackfish, the river lords, Tyrion and Sansa. To Tyrion’s great surprise, Daven brought Ser Perwyn Frey to represent his house. His speech left some people without words.

“I know what my family has done, and I am ashamed to be part of a family who committed such horrible crimes. Lothar and Walder were my half-brothers, but they got what they deserved. My Lord of Riverrun, my sister is your wife. Your son is my nephew. We both knew nothing of this treachery that our father prepared. I do not ask to be given command of the Frey forces. I only ask to be given the right to speak for my house in the war council. I will return to my confinement as soon as this council is over if that is your wish.”

Tyrion remembered Daven saying that Ser Perwyn was a decent fellow. The Lord of Riverrun gave him the right to be present at the council. These formalities done, the council started. The river lords were angry that they were set aside in all this. Some like Lord Piper would have liked to participate and kill some Freys in the process, while others complained they still had family held at the Twins and that they were in danger.

“This is why we will march on the Twins,” said Tyrion. “Walder Frey is hiding in his castle now. The Twins are strong, it’s true, like Riverrun, and yet they can be taken. The Crossing only has a small garrison left, and the two banks of the Green Fork are without defence. We will besiege them, and if Walder Frey dares to threaten the life of his hostages, then we have our own hostages.”

“My lords,” interrupted Ser Perwyn, “If I may, my father doesn’t care about most of his children. We
are so many that he doesn’t give a shit if one of us die. He doesn’t lack sons or grandsons to replace any who dies. He won’t give you back the hostages if he learns you executed Lothar and Back Walder.”

This is what Tyrion feared. Walder Frey wouldn’t care for his progeny. It was too huge already. However, he may care for himself and Tyrion had his little idea about how to force the Lord of the Crossing to surrender the hostages. Or else they would have problems with the river lords, like Lord Clement Piper outlined it right after.

“My son is still at the Twins. We must prevent Walder Frey from knowing about this at all costs.”

“That will be impossible,” said Tyrion. “We cannot stop every man from deserting and spreading the word of what happened here. But Walder Frey may hesitate before he executes anyone. He is many things, but he’s not brave, and he’s not stupid. He will realize he stands alone soon enough without his army, and that each hostage he executes will only make his situation worse. He was the one to command to not execute Lord Edmure if I remember well. He knows his hostages are too precious.”

“My Lord Lannister,” said Ser Perwyn, “my father is bitter, proud, and prickly. He may act harshly and without consideration when he learns about Riverrun. I fear what he might do.”

People were murmuring all around the Great Hall. Ser Brynden hit with his hand on the table and stood up, towering everyone with his huge size. “House Frey murdered people under the guest rights. They killed and imprisoned family members and men of all the houses who are present. Or at least most of them.” He looked in Tyrion’s direction as he said the last sentence. “I say we destroy the Twins. Let’s burn their two towers to the ground and put their bridge into pieces until there is nothing left of it but rubble. They played the Rains of Castamere for us at Robb Stark’s wedding while they were murdering him. I say we sing the song for them now.”

A huge silence followed, until it was broken by the shout of Perwyn Frey. “You can’t do this! The Twins are my home. I have a brother and a sister, two nephews and a niece who are there.”

“Then let’s hope they will have enough sense to leave it before we attack them. You should have tried to stop your father, Ser Frey,” countered the Blackfish.

“What my father did is horrible. I was angry when I learned Robb Stark had married a foreigner after he promised he would marry a member of my family, but what my father did is unforgivable. Still, he is my father.” Tyrion could only agree with that. “My brother Benfrey participated at the Red Wedding, and he was killed there. He got what he deserved. But I was away at this moment, and my brother Olyvar too. He was Robb Stark’s squire and wanted to remain at his side even after his marriage to the Lady Talisa. And Roslin is at the Twins too, just like him now.” Ser Perwyn turned his face to his liege lord. “Lord Edmure, my sister loves you, and she had a son. Your son. They are all at the Twins. If you attack the castle, if you destroy it, my father will kill everyone there before it’s taken. I beg you. Spare my house, for the sake of those who didn’t take part to the Red Wedding. My family is not only a bunch of traitors and assassins. You know it. You’re married to my sister, and she loves you.”

A long silence followed. Tyrion thought there were probably good Freys somewhere. After all, Genna’s sons weren’t bad people like their insufferable father. No, they couldn’t destroy the Twins.

“Then let’s propose a deal to the other Freys,” suggested Lord Roote. “We let them live if they give us Walder Frey. The man planned the Red Wedding. He should die. His children will deliver him. And we have his heir and his heir’s son. We will control the Twins once the old man is dead.”

There were shouts of approval, but Tyrion decided to step in. “My lords, I was given orders to bring
back the peace in the Riverlands, and Riverrun was given back to House Tully in that goal. To kill Walder Frey would start a war inside House Frey and bring chaos on the Green Fork. All his children will compete for the title of Lord of the Crossing. They may end up killing each other.”

“Good riddance,” commented Lord Roote.

“Furthermore,” continued Tyrion, ignoring the comment, “Walder Frey is old. He was ninety the last time I looked. He doesn’t have much long to live. He will die soon, and Ryman Frey being an incapable ruler, House Frey will doubtfully pose a threat. No need to storm the Twins. All we have to do is to get the hostages back and to keep Edwyn Frey hostage so Ser Ryman won’t try anything.”

“The old man murdered people under his roof,” said Ser Brynden with hatred. “He must die. Now.”

“Are you willing to risk the life of your son and your wife, Lord Edmure?” asked Tyrion to the Lord of Riverrun. “Because if you want, you only have to attack the Twins.”

“Lord Tyrion is right, my lord,” supported Ser Perwyn. “My father will kill your son if you attack the Twins. He may spare Roslin since she is his daughter, but he will kill her son, have no doubt about it. Please, Lord Edmure. Don’t destroy the Twins. Force my father to give you the hostages we still hold and besiege the castle if necessary, but don’t storm it. This will be a bloodbath, another butchery.”

Everyone was looking at Lord Edmure Tully now. He seemed to hesitate, but after a long time, he spoke and made his decision. “The Twins will not be destroyed. Despite everything they did, the Freys are my bannermen and this war needs to end. My wife comes from this house furthermore. I will not execute her father. But we will get back the hostages Lord Walder is keeping. I swear it by the Old Gods and the New.”

“Then we should march on the Twins at once,” the Blackfish declared. “The Blackwoods are still besieged by the Brackens and Seagard rose up against the Freys as well. We should inform them.”

“You will go to Seagard and make sure they join us on our march, Ser Brynden,” said Lord Edmure. “As for me, I must bring back the peace in the Riverlands and take care of the lands with winter coming. I will go to Raventree Hall to end the fighting between the Blackwoods and the Brackens, then I’ll come back here. I name you commander of all the forces of the Riverlands, Ser Brynden.”

“I’ll accompany you to Raventree Hall, my lord. It’s on the way to Seagard anyway. Then our army will follow the west bank of the Green Fork to the Twins.”

“The Lannister host will follow the River Road and the Kingsroad to the Twins on the east bank,” completed Daven. “But we will have to make a stop at Darry on our way.”

“Darry? Why stop at Darry?” asked Lord Piper.

“I am to marry Amerei Frey and to become Lord of Darry, my lord,” said Daven bitterly.

“A Lannister at Darry! That’s unacceptable!” shouted Lord Roote.

Sansa spoke up before Tyrion could. “Castle Darry was granted to Ser Daven Lannister by royal decree at the condition he would marry Lady Amerei Frey. Ser Daven will swear fealty to Riverrun as soon as he will take possession of the castle and its lands.”

“If you want, I can swear my fealty to you right now, Lord Edmure,” Daven offered.

It was done before all the river lords and the Lannister commanders. Afterwards, the discussions
were on details concerning, among many other things, the Brotherhood Without Banners. They were still active, and the river lords weren’t sure if they should consider them as outlaws to be chased and hanged, or rebels against House Frey’s rule who should be given the chance to lay down their weapons. After some argument, it was decided they would give a month to the Brotherhood to end its activities and for their members to surrender to any lord in the Riverlands, after that those who refused to yield would be treated like outlaws.

It was decided the armies would march immediately and that each host would keep half the prisoners of House Frey and half their forces. They would have to watch them closely. They broke camp almost as soon as the war council was over. Two hours later, the two armies were on march, the Tullys and the river lords heading for Raventree and Seagard, the Lannisters going to Darry. Tyrion sent ravens to King’s Landing and Casterly Rock to inform Kevan and Genna of Riverrun’s surrender.

“Don’t you think we should have made hostages?” Sansa asked him about an hour after they left, while they watched the column advance on their horses.

“We already have hostages from House Frey, Sansa.”

“No, I meant hostages from the river lords.” Tyrion looked at her. Was she serious? It seemed so. “I’m not sure they will follow us. Perhaps it should have been better.”

She looked afraid. Tyrion tried to reassure her. “The Blackfish will keep them in line. Your granduncle is a man of honor, like they say. He will keep his word. And the river lords want to get back their sons and their brothers. They will follow us to the Twins. Anyway, at least a member of each house in the Riverlands will be with us in the army. In some way they could be considered like hostages, and they know better than to start a new rebellion against the Crown.”

“But after? What’s telling us they will follow us to Winterfell. They don’t even know Arya is there, and our own men neither. What if they decided to not go in the North?”

Tyrion feared it too. “Your uncle Edmure and Ser Brynden will force them to go in the North. And our men owe their allegiance to us. They will obey.” They hadn’t revealed the true purpose of the march. Except Tyrion, Sansa, Edmure and Brynden Tully, no one in the army knew they would head north after the Twins. Bronn knew as well, but he was no longer there. He had left on Tyrion’s orders with a hundred men for a secret mission in King’s Landing. The river lords, and the lords of the Westerlands too, wouldn’t have followed them in the North when winter was so close, so they would only tell them once the Twins had surrendered and they were far away from their homes.

“You’re worried for your sister?” he asked. She nodded. Of course she was afraid. “We took Riverrun. The Blackwoods, the Brackens and the Mallisters will join us soon. Once Walder Frey has surrendered to your uncle, there will be nothing to stop us on the road to Winterfell.”

“And what if Walder Frey refuses to surrender? Your heard what Ser Perwyn said.”

“Don’t worry, Sansa. Walder Frey will surrender, and quickly. I have a plan.”

“What plan?”

As she said those words, rain began to fall. They pulled their hood over their heads and ordered their horses to move forward along with the column. They should all be wary of the weather. Winter was coming.
I hope you liked my version of the siege of Riverrun. I will only update one chapter next week since I just released five in less than two weeks. However, I will also release an important chapter of my other fic, "A Rose and a Lion", to compensate in some way.

Please review

Next chapter: Mira
She woke up lying on her tummy, her right cheek resting on a pillow, a warm breeze caressing her back from her waist to her shoulders. She saw through the window the sun illuminating their chamber. She sighed, feeling comfortable and peaceful. The Hightower was a beautiful place to live and the streets of Oldtown were a pleasant place to walk. Oldtown was everything King’s Landing wasn’t. Clean, organized, pleasant, beautiful, safe, well fed, full of life.

She turned her head towards her husband, lying in the same position than her. He was still sleeping. She smiled fondly while looking at him. Just like her, the blanket only covered his body under his waist, though Mira wouldn’t mind if there was no blanket at all. Since they met, he had let his hair grow a little and had strands of it falling on his forehead. Mira liked it. She could discard his hair when she was close enough to kiss him or look at him deeply in the eyes. He wasn’t muscled like his brother Garlan, but he had some thin muscles on his arms that were strong enough for her taste. They were strong enough for her to feel safe whenever he took her in his arms, just like he did last night. The memories she had of that night brought another smile on her lips and she closed her eyes for a moment to revive them.

She opened her eyes again and quietly removed the blanket from her legs. She seized a dressing gown laying on a nearby chair and put it on her. Gerold once said the only thing he regretted from her northern origins was her modesty whenever she left their bed. It was half a joke and half a wish, but Mira wouldn’t give up on this. She had no problem sleeping without clothes beside her husband, but it wasn’t appropriate to wander naked in their chambers. She walked as silently as she could to the bathroom and discretely called Saryn, her handmaiden, to prepare a bath. Fifteen minutes later, Mira was resting in the tub. Another fifteen minutes later, she was all dressed and prepared for the day, wearing a grey gown with white on the shoulders. She had already dressed all alone when Saryn came back. Even after two months in Oldtown, she still kept the habit to prepare herself for the day on her own, like she did when she was in Margaery’s service. Saryn only had to arrange her hair like she used to style it in King’s Landing. Mira thanked her when she was done and Saryn left. Mira hadn’t grown very close to her handmaiden. Saryn wasn’t very talkative. She missed Sera.

Mira went back to their bedroom, her husband still sleeping in the same position. She went to her desk and started to write a letter for her best friend, trying to give her news while not making her too envious. Mira pitied Sera. She wished her friend was married like her to a good man. She had grown to appreciate Gerold during the last month. He had his flaws like everyone, but he was kind and gentle all the same, and had many other qualities Mira could only love. She didn’t know if she loved him yet, but she enjoyed her time with him, day and night. She would repay it to Margaery one day. Without her, she would be married to the heir of Highpoint in this very moment. Who knew how her life would be if Ser Kevan and Roose Bolton had succeeded in their plot? She couldn’t imagine...
herself living happily with a Whitehill. Mira was done with her letter very soon and sealed it.

She then took a copy of *Frozen* she found in one of the many libraries of the Hightower and resumed the reading she started yesterday. A discussion between Anna and Elsa brought a smile upon her face. *You can’t marry a man you just met.* Sometimes they didn’t have the choice to do it. Saryn brought their breakfast. When she left, Mira realized her husband was now lying on his back and was looking at her. A small smile he had on his face widened when she looked at him.

“How much time have you been watching me?” she asked with a thin smile as well, returning to her reading.

“I don’t know. Not enough time, I guess.” She kept reading, knowing Gerold loved to watch her.

He had loved it ever since they met before the entrance to the Hightower. She had to admit she didn’t hate the attention. There hadn’t been many men interested by her in King’s Landing and Highgarden, though there had been some. But she preferred the way Gerold was interested in her, admiring her when young men in Highgarden had tried to convince her to spend some intimate time with them, whether it was in one of the many gardens, the maze or in their own personal chambers. Mira always refused. Only her husband would ever know her. As a highborn lady, it was to be that way, and Mira didn’t have to regret it up to now.

Gerold finally got up after a moment and walked to the bathtub in the other piece. Mira kept her attention to her book as he walked away without any clothes on him. He returned some time later with fresh clothes on him. Mira had to set the tale aside at the moment the second sister met the mountain man. They broke their fast together. Her husband was to train in the sparring grounds this morning, so she accompanied him. They parted ways once arrived, Gerold heading to the armory to take weapons and armors. Mira joined the other ladies assisting the training. Elys shook her hand in the air to attract her attention and Mira went to join her.

“Glad to see you, Mira.” Her sister-in-law already had a cup of wine in hand. She had no problem drinking at anytime in the day, but Mira had to admit she rarely saw her drunken, except in feasts and special events like her wedding. “So, how was the work tonight? Did my brother wear you out?”

Mira sighed. “I already told you I wouldn’t talk about it, Elys. This is between me and your brother.”

“Alright. Like you always say. Though in this case I wonder why your friend Sera had so much to say about it.”

Mira turned her head to look at Elys in complete surprise. “What do you mean?”

“She gave me many details about your nights with my brother. Who would have thought he was such a beast in the bedchamber?”

Mira couldn’t believe it. Sera told her everything. She had promised to tell no one. For a moment she thought about telling Elys about Sera’s true origins, but she thought better. She wouldn’t reveal Sera’s secret. She tried to gain back her composure. “What did she tell you?” Mira asked, trying to look indifferent.

“She told many details about your first week with Gerold,” she said with a wicked smile.

There was something wrong in what Elys said. Mira only told Sera about her wedding night and the day and night that followed. They never talked about it again afterwards. Mira thought she understood now. “Well tried, Elys, but I only told Sera about the first two nights, not about the whole week.”
The smile didn’t leave Elys’s face. “Thank you. Now I’ll know what to ask Sera the next time I see her.”

Mira wanted to curse. Elys had played well. Now she knew Mira told some things to Sera. She would have to be careful the next time Elys Hightower and Sera Durwell found themselves in the same place. They watched the knights sparring before them. All Ser Baelor’s children were among the fighters. Garlan was the best of all of them. Gerold wasn’t bad either, but like Ser Garlan once told her, he wasn’t the best either, nor even one of the best. It was a shame he was named after a Lord Commander of the Kingsguard known as the White Bull. But Mira had observed he was getting better in the last weeks. He spent a lot of time practicing. Perhaps he was trying to impress her. Sadly, Gerold didn’t have the same muscles than many other knights and that put him at a disadvantage. Asher would have defeated him within a few seconds, and Rodrik within half a minute. Elys gave her opinion on all the young men who fought in the grounds, still holding her cup of wine. Mira drank water next to her and ate one lemon cake from the plates servants were carrying all around.

Gerold defeated more people than the times he was defeated. He lost against Garlan, but his brother helped him to get on his feet after he was on the ground and they left in good spirit. Mira knew Gerold’s frustration when he was defeated was one of his main flaws. She worked hard to correct it, but it was easier to say than to do. All the same, there was an improvement in comparison to the first time she saw him sparred. She had been quite hard with him after this first time, telling him he acted like a child before everyone. That had stunned him, but Mira knew he needed the scolding. He couldn’t keep reacting this way every time he lost only because he was angry after some people mocking him. Gerold tried to act better after that, and he also fought better.

All of a sudden, Gerold had to face his eldest brother, Altos. Mira knew the relationship between the two was delicate at best. They faced each other, shields and swords risen. Everyone was looking at them. Everyone knew they had few love for each other. At the beginning, Mira had thought Altos was a little like Elys who simply mocked everything and bore no ill to his brother, but it turned out Altos was really evil, sometimes even vicious with his youngest brother. He really looked at him like a lesser brother, simply because Gerold supposedly would have nothing to offer him once Altos would be Lord of Hightower. He would never act with Garlan like he acted with Gerold. He took pleasure in lowering him, and that had gone worse recently after Gerold managed to defeat the firstborn a few times.

The duel began. They were of equal force, a match for each other, their swords clashing, their shields blocking each other’s strikes. It lasted quite a long time like this, none of them being able to take the advantage on the other. She saw Ser Altos’ wife, Lyanna Norcross, cheering for her husband. Mira decided to stay quiet. At one moment, Gerold looked about to lose his balance. He didn’t, but his brother used it to take the advantage and launch series of attacks, barely allowing him to parry the blows. Mira remembered a time when Asher was fighting with Ser Royland and how he had madly repelled the master-at-arms, raining his sword upon him until the knight had fallen on the ground. That was the same thing Mira saw here. Gerold finally stumbled and fell on the ground. Lyanna cheered louder than ever, but it wasn’t over. Ser Altos tossed away Gerold’s shield and swung his sword at her husband on the ground. Gerold stopped the first hits until the sword slipped from his hands. Altos Hightower was pointing the pointy end of his sword towards his own brother, lying on the ground without defense.

“Yield.” Before Gerold could answer, he kicked him in the ribs. Gerold screamed as he received a second, then a third kick. “Not quickly enough. You should learn to surrender quickly. That’s all you’re good for.” Ser Altos kept turning around his brother, delivering a new blow at different places, even his head. That was horrible. Gerold was on the ground and clearly defeated. Nothing in this was necessary. It was pure viciousness. Without realizing it, Mira got on her feet and walked
toward her brother-in-law on the sparring ground. She reached his level and put a hand on his arm to stop him while his back was turned on her, trying to put an end to this without causing further problems.

“That’s enough, Ser Altos. He surren…”

She didn’t have the time to complete her sentence. The back of a hand met her cheek too quickly for her to see it coming. She fell on the ground, face ahead, in the mud. She felt dizzy for a moment, but she thought she heard a few cries, then a raging scream. Sounds of metal could be heard very close along with several footsteps. Before she could regain her senses, hands seized her and helped her to move away.

“Mira, are you alright?” asked a voice. Was it Elys? She looked around her, only to have dizziness taking hold of her head again. Arms and hands brought her reeling to what she thought was a bench. “Mira, look at me. Are you alright?” She thought she recognized Elys’ features, though it wasn’t the only face looking at her. She discerned three or four men holding another one in full armor who tried to escape their hold, screaming madly.

“I’M GOING TO KILL HIM! I’LL KILL HIM! I’LL KILL HIM!”

She never heard her husband yell like this. Another man was lying on the ground, in full armor as well, surrounded by a few other people. She thought she saw blood on the ground. A woman was close to him as well.

“Come, Mira. We mustn’t stay here.”

Elys and a few other girls brought her back to her chambers. A maester and Saryn came to tend to her wounds. A good thing to be in Oldtown was that you didn’t lack for maesters. The Hightower alone had about ten maesters at its service. From what she understood, she only had a few bruises on the right side of her face. When the maester was gone, her handmaiden helped her to get out of her dirty clothes and to take a bath. Mira didn’t expect she would have to take another bath this day. She was garbed into clean clothes once this was over.

When she sat in a chair, Mira started to realize what just happened. Ser Altos had hit her. And Gerold? She remembered seeing him screaming like a mad man, and his brother on the ground, with blood. Did he…? No, that was impossible. She looked at Saryn who was there.

“Where is Gerold?”

“There is a maester tending him, my lady,” her handmaiden answered. “Do you need anything? A cup of wine? Something to eat? Or only water?”

Mira repeated her question. “What happened to Gerold? What happened to my husband? Where is he?”

“I don’t know, my lady.”

“Then find out. Only return when you have the answers.” She almost shouted the order, and the handmaiden was quick to obey it.

Mira found herself alone. She realized her breathing was quick. She tried to calm herself, but she was worried. What happened to Gerold? What did they do to him? If he hurt his brother, then what would become of him? After a few minutes, someone entered. It wasn’t Saryn like Mira expected, but Elys.
“Mira.”

“Elys. Where is Gerold? Is he alright?”

“Don’t worry,” she said, making an appeasing gesture with her hands. “Gerold is alright. They just keep him far away from Altos. Truth be told, my eldest brother is the one who’s not very well. Gerold almost ruined his face, and he keeps saying he’s going to kill Altos.”

“Did they put him into a cell?” asked Mira, horrified.

“No, gods be good! He’s alright, I told you. They just keep him in another room until he cools down.” Mira quietened down a little. Gerold wasn’t in a cell, or in danger. She didn’t want him to be. Her friend came to sit close to her. “I have to admit that was something to see. I never saw my brother like this. He looked like a savage beast. Gerold jumped on Altos right after he slapped you and almost beat him bloody. It will take a lot of time for Altos to be presentable again. That should give us some peace for a while, though that may be worse when he gets back on his feet. Or it may get better, if he learns to not provoke Gerold.”

Mira sighed. “I shouldn’t have done this. I shouldn’t have tried to intervene. None of this would have happened.”

Elys scoffed. “You couldn’t know Altos would be stupid enough to hit you, and that Gerold would respond by disfiguring him. Though I have to admit you’re probably the only woman here who would have tried to stop a knight in the middle of a fight. Except myself perhaps, but I’m not married yet and I have no suitor for now, so I’m not a normal woman.”

They both laughed. “That’s not funny, Elys. One of your brothers is badly injured.”

Elys Hightower shrugged. “That won’t be permanent. He’s not in danger. And if he was, we have the best maesters and healers of the Seven Kingdoms within hand’s reach. Perhaps that will teach him to be less arrogant, though I doubt it. But it was amusing to see him being beaten by the little brother he always mocks.”

A silence followed. Mira was lost in her thoughts. What would happen after that? That was no small accident that just happened. The future heir to Hightower was almost disfigured.

“Show me your wound, Mira,” Elys asked after a moment. Mira showed her the right side of her face and Elys put a hand on the bruise. The pressure brought some pain upon her face. She gasped. “Nothing serious. That will be gone in a few days. And once Gerold will be calm again, he’ll be able to kiss it during the night.”

Mira wasn’t really in the mood for this kind of thoughts or jokes, whatever it was for Elys. The door opened and two people entered. It was Ser Garlan Hightower and his wife, Lady Venia Webber. They were bringing news of Gerold. They had managed to calm him enough so that he would stop saying he would kill his brother. He was alright but asked for her news and was worried about her. Mira told them she was alright and to repeat it to her husband. Venia told her she shouldn’t have intervened, that it was inappropriate for a lady, but Garlan scolded his wife and said Mira had nothing to blame herself for. Altos was the responsible one. They left a few minutes later. Mira also received the visit of Ser Altos’ wife, Lady Lyanna, who expressed her apologies for her husband’s actions. He was the one who hit Mira, which was unforgivable, and she asked for Mira’s forgiveness. Mira granted it as long as they didn’t hold rancor against her own husband and wished Lyanna that Ser Altos would recover quickly.

Mira spent most of the day in Elys’ company. They decided to make some embroidery to spend time.
They even dined together, though Mira wasn’t hungry. Elys remarked Mira couldn’t eat less than she already ate. Mira knew very well she ate less than most of the people at Hightower and in Oldtown. This was another inheritance of her northern education.

Passed the time when the sun disappeared, the door finally opened to let Gerold enter. Elys quickly excused herself and let them alone. They remained still for a moment, looking at each other. He had a few bruises too, and Mira could see by the way he walked that his ribs and legs pained him. Unable to hold anymore, she ran to him and threw her arms around his neck. His own arms came around her back, and Mira wept. For the first time in months, she cried. She buried her face into his shoulder. They remained this way for some time.

“I was afraid for you,” he finally said.

“And me for you.”

“I’m alright. Only some pain in the back. Nothing serious. And you?”

He backed his head to look at her face. His hand brushed her right cheek and Mira felt the same pain than when Elys touched it. “It’s nothing. It won’t remain here for long. I’m alright.” She still had water in her eyes and her husband wiped the tears with his fingers.

“If he ever touches you again, I’ll kill him for real.” There was a determination in his eyes she never saw before.

“Please don’t do this, Gerold. He’s your brother.”

“I don’t care. If he ever tries to hit or slap you again, I’ll kill him. I almost wish I had this morning.”

“You cannot do this. You don’t have to do this.” She would have to watch her husband so he wouldn’t meet Altos too often.

“I do. You’re everything to me. I would kill for you. I would do anything for you.” He pulled her into a new embrace. “I love you, Mira. I love you.”

He held her against him, his arm tightening around her. Mira had tears filling her eyes. She felt something break inside her. She cried, and cried again. She spent the night into her husband’s arms. He held her tightly, as if he was afraid to lose her. He fell asleep before her. When she was sure he was sleeping, Mira murmured with the lowest voice she had.

“I love you, Gerold. I love you, my love.” She fell asleep not long after.

The next morning, they broke their fast in silence, and spent most of the morning in silence as well. Gerold didn’t seem eager to leave their rooms, and she wasn’t about to encourage him to do so. She didn’t really want to leave them either. However, as midday approached, Saryn came to inform them their presence was required in Lord Leyton’s solar. They had no choice but to go. They crossed the path of a few people on their way to the solar at the top of the Hightower. Many bowed among the servants and Mira could see their empathy for her if not for Gerold, but some also tried to not look at them. They even met a few hostile looks, though there were very few.

Leyton Hightower, Lord of the Hightower, Lord of the Port, Voice of Oldtown, Defender of the Citadel and Beacon of the South, sat behind his desk and welcomed her with a smile. He didn’t stand up however like the other people already with him in his solar, Ser Baelor and Ser Garlan.

“Mira, I’m glad to see you are well. Sorry I didn’t pay you a visit. I hope your cheek doesn’t hurt,” the old lord told her.
“No, my lord,” Mira assured him. “The maester told me the bruises would be gone in a few days. It doesn’t hurt much.”

“Good.” There was relief on the old man’s face. Mira saw that her father-in-law was looking at Gerold with something between anger and disappointment.

“Is Ser Altos alright?” she asked.

“He is,” answered immediately Garlan. “I visited him this morning. He fares well. He has a few broken teeth and will have marks for some time, but he will recover. Lyanna is always with him.”

“You shouldn’t have interfered, Lady Mira,” declared Ser Baelor. “It wasn’t your duty to interfere in the duel. As for you Gerold, I thought better of you. I didn’t think you would beat your brother like this.”

“He hit my wife!” shouted Mira’s husband.

“He is your brother.”

“What would you have done if Altos had attacked our mother?”

Ser Baelor didn’t seem able to reply to this. Ser Garlan intervened. “Father, Lady Mira shouldn’t have tried to intervene and Gerold shouldn’t have beaten Altos either, you’re right. But Altos is the one who started all of this. He kept beating Gerold while he was still lying on the ground and he’s the one who hit Lady Mira. He’s responsible of this. Lady Mira may not have acted like she should have, but remember she comes from the North. From what I know, women in the North don’t stay still while their husband is being beaten.”

Mira shot a grateful glance at Ser Garlan. What he said wasn’t untrue, especially far in the North among families like the Umbers or the Mormonts, but Northerners weren’t wildlings either. Women seldom fought on the battlefield, and Mira’s mother came from the south. Her parents hadn’t encouraged Mira and her sister to fight and mostly they were taught to remain discreet and to support their husband and their family in privacy more than publicly. Nevertheless, Mira had grown up in the North and women weren’t expected to stay hidden doing nothing while their husband did all the work. The North was hard, and everyone had to stand up and work to survive.

“I will have a good discussion with Altos once he feels better,” said Lord Leyton. “He is to be Lord of the Hightower one day. We cannot allow such behavior from him, and neither from you, Gerold. I don’t want this to happen again.”

“He attacked my wife!” Gerold argued.

“That won’t happen again. I expect you to not assault your own brother in return. Do I have your word?”

Gerold didn’t want to comply, Mira knew it. She gave him a pleading look and, grudgingly, he accepted. “You have my word, grandfather.”

“Then the matter is settled. Now please sit. There is something else we must talk about.” Gerold took a seat between his brother and his father. “You too, Mira. This concerns you.” Mira sat as well between her husband and his brother.

Lord Leyton took a long inspiration. “We received a raven yesterday in the afternoon. A raven for you, Mira. It came from King’s Landing. From the king.”
“The king?”

“Yes, my lady. Maester Alfryd would have given it to you yesterday, but with everything that happened and the matter of the message, I thought it would be better to wait.”

Lord Leyton slowly handed the scroll to her. Mira read it and couldn’t have been more surprised.

*Lady Mira,*

*You were always very kind with me, and your family didn’t deserve to die. I want to inform you that Roose Bolton will soon be branded a traitor to the Realm. My uncle discovered that Lord Bolton captured Arya Stark and forced her to marry his son. Everyone agrees this is treason. He will soon be removed from Winterfell, and I’ll see that you get back your home.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Tommen of the House Baratheon, First of His Name, King of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoylnar, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms*

Arya Stark? She remembered Sansa speaking about her little sister a few times, but she was supposed to be dead. She had disappeared not long after Lord Eddard Stark was arrested. All of sudden, she appeared again, at Winterfell, married to Ramsay Snow. She diverted her attention from the scroll and looked back at Lord Hightower. He was looking intently at her.

“I didn’t know you were so close to the king, my lady,” he said.

“I wasn’t very close to the king, my lord, but I was a handmaiden and friend of Queen Margaery. I spoke a few times with his Grace, and the queen said she would help me get back Ironrath one day,” Mira explained.

“Yes, I have no doubt about it. It seems this time is coming. House Whitehill is allied to House Bolton. If the Boltons fall, the Whitehills fall with them. However, I didn’t expect the Boltons would be stripped of their titles so soon.”

“Then we should prepare,” declared Gerold. It seemed he had read the scroll over her shoulder. “If the Boltons are to be deposed, we should be prepared to go in the North.”

“Don’t be so quick about it, Gerold. Mira, how many men the Whitehills have?”

Mira considered a moment before answering. “They could muster approximately the same number of men than my father at the beginning of the war, so five hundred men. However, they lost some during the war and some more when they attacked Ironrath. They could raise some more men from the lands attached to Ironrath. They could also hire sellswords, but I doubt they have the money for it. I think that right now they can raise an army of five hundred men like at the beginning of the war.”

“And they have two fortresses,” added Ser Baelor. “Highpoint and Ironrath. We would need a bigger army than the one they have.”

“Not necessarily, ser,” intervened Mira. “I know Lord Tyrion Lannister recently led an army in the Riverlands. Officially, it is to pacify the region and end the siege of Riverrun, but I don’t think so. I know Lord Tyrion, and he loves his wife. I can’t imagine him taking by force the castle of her mother’s family. Catelyn Stark was a Tully. I think he’s leading a great army in the North. He’s preparing an invasion and he uses the chaos in the Riverlands as an excuse. He is about to attack the North. If we were to join the Lannister host, we wouldn’t need to send too many men in the North.”
“These are only suppositions, Lady Mira,” pointed out Ser Baelor. “Lord Tyrion could really be in the Riverlands to restore peace and nothing else.”

“It’s possible, Father,” conceded Garlan, “but it would be strange for him to go there himself. Why would a dwarf go in the Riverlands? He could have given the task to one of his commanders. But if he is about to invade the North and to take possession of Winterfell, then that would explain why he’s leading the army himself. And with the message we just received from the king… It seems an invasion of the North by the Lannisters is inevitable. The question we ought to ask ourselves is, will we stand aside while the Lannisters conquer the North? They may refuse to give us Ironrath if we don’t participate to the invasion. But if we join them, they would have no choice but to give back Ironrath to its lawful heir.”

Ser Garlan looked at her. Mira agreed with him. If Lord Tyrion was about to invade the North, then they had to join him and to take back Ironrath from the Whitehills. The odds would be much more in their favor with the might of the Westerlands at their side, and Mira had no doubt Sansa would make sure Ironrath was bestowed to her, and Margaery would make sure Tommen acknowledged her and Gerold as Lady and Lord of Ironrath.

“We should go in the North,” declared Gerold. “Ironrath belongs to Mira, and she is one of us. She is a Hightower now. We cannot stay here and take the risk to have Ironrath taken away from us.”

Lord Leyton was tapping the desk with his fingers. He looked lost in his thoughts. “The Citadel tells us winter is coming. The weather is already getting colder. I think we could defeat the Whitehills, and their Bolton allies with the help of the Lannisters, but it is a long march to Ironrath. Where is it exactly?”


Lord Leyton shook his head. “It is even farther than Winterfell. If we were to send an army so far in the North, many would die of cold, or starvation without good supply lines. Not to mention the possible desertions. Our men are not used to this climate. The Stark words have never been more true. Winter is coming.”

Mira saw she was losing them. They wouldn’t join the invasion on the North, but they had to. That may be her only chance. Her husband stepped in. “We promised Mira to give her back Ironrath. We cannot stay here doing nothing.”

“Would you have us sacrifice hundreds, perhaps thousands of men uselessly? Not to Whitehill and Bolton men, but to the frost, the snow and the cold?” asked his father.

“The Northerners don’t die in the North, even when in war,” said Mira. “But they are equipped with appropriate clothes and garbs for winter. Furs, gloves, heavy cloaks, fur-lined boots. That’s how we manage to survive. If your men have this, they will make it through the march to Ironrath.”

“We’re not keeping stocks of these items,” Ser Garlan revealed, “but there are many ships here in Oldtown, and a few will probably have that kind of goods. We could probably find them and have enough for a small contingent. This may be our best chance to take Ironrath back from the Whitehills, no matter the fact winter is coming. We won’t have the castle if we stay here, that is certain.”

Lord Leyton had brought his hand to his chin, obviously thinking about everything he just heard. As Lord of the Hightower, the decision would come to him in the end. Mira waited anxiously. She had tried to convince her husband, but also all his family of the interest they had to take Ironrath one day.
Mira was the only Forrester still alive, so Ironrath belonged to her, and Gerold could become Lord of Ironrath at her side and create a cadet branch of House Hightower in the North. The Hightowers had all interest to take her home from the Whitehills, but there were risks all the same. Mira was well aware of that. Finally, Lord Leyton let his hand fall on the desk and looked at his grandson.

“Gerold, I will give you a thousand men. It’s time you command an army.”

Chapter End Notes

Sansa is not the only northern girl heading for the North.

Please review

Next chapter: Kevan
Kevan IV

Chapter Notes

I suppose it was time we came back to King's Landing. The last time we were there, it was when Mira left the city for Oldtown. The storyline in King's Landing will start now, with the consequences of Myrcella's death beginning to appear and Dorne starting to play a real role in the politics of the Realm.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

KEVAN IV

Riverrun surrendered. Lord Edmure Tully has been given the castle and reinstated as Lord Paramount of the Trident before the obvious inability of House Frey to keep the Riverlands in the king’s peace. Men were dispatched to Raventree Hall and Seagard to end the fightings still going on there, as well as to the Twins to receive the fealty of House Frey to the Crown and to their liege lord. Peace will be re-established soon in the Riverlands.

Tyrion Lannister, Lord of Casterly Rock, Shield of Lannisport, Lord of the Westerlands and Warden of the West.

Pycelle’s quivering voice read the message they received from Tyrion yesterday. It was sent from Riverrun with one of their ravens, but it had the seal of Casterly Rock on it and Tyrion’s signature. Kevan had sighed in relief when he had read the message for the first time, but now he showed no emotion as the Grand Maester read the new before the small council.

The small council had taken a very odd appearance in the last weeks. Tommen still sat at the head of the long table with Kevan at his right. However, for two weeks now, the queen sat left to the king, face to face with Kevan, and it became very obvious for more and more people that the Hand and the queen were fighting for the king’s ear. Kevan could live with that, though he wished he didn’t have to. Tommen hadn’t wanted to back down on this matter and ordered that Margaery Tyrell would be present at every meeting of the small council. Kevan didn’t have many reasons to give against it. Cersei’s decisions back when she was Queen Regent came back to hunt them. She created a very recent example that legitimated Margaery Tyrell’s place on the small council. If a Lannister queen once sat on the council, why not a Tyrell queen? There was nothing Kevan could oppose to that.

On the queen’s left were her father, Mace Tyrell, the Lord of Highgarden, and Paxter Redwyne, the Lord of the Arbor and the Master of Ships. The Tyrell queen, the Lord of House Tyrell, and a Tyrell bannerman. Kevan was worried that there were so many Tyrells on the small council and in the capital. At least, Mace Tyrell was only there as an advisor and held no real power. Things were different for the Master of Ships and the queen. Kevan had his ow allies however. Ser Harys Swyft, his father-in-law and the Master of Coin, sat at his right. Kevan would have preferred to have Tyrion as Master of Coin, but his nephew was in the Riverlands, and marching on the Twins now. Pycelle was also a staunch supporter of House Lannister, though Kevan doubted his usefulness lately. The Grand Maester cumulated errors and failures for the last months. There was also Varys, the Spider, the Master of Whisperers, a man so mysterious that no one could guess who he was loyal to. He sat on the side of the table where Kevan and his allies were, but he couldn’t be counted as an ally.
The member of the small council who made it quite unpredictable and dangerous was the Lady Nymeria Sand. She had arrived last week with a large retinue to take the seat her father occupied before his death. According to Varys, she was twenty-five and the second daughter of the Red Viper. He had her with a noblewoman from Volantis. Kevan couldn’t have believed it from her appearance. She had a skin so pale that she could have come from the north of the Wall. However, if she had lived north of the Wall, she would have frozen immediately in her attire. She wore a very lightweight dress displaying most of her body with three overtures on the sides and between her legs. Her shoulders were entirely free of any cover just like almost half of her breasts, except for the long single braid that assembled all her black hair and fell to the level of her breasts. Margaery Tyrell’s lightest gowns would have looked decent for the Sparrows in comparison. She sat there, at Lord Paxter’s left, a leg crossed on the other one, listening to what was being said without really looking interested. She was the daughter of Oberyn Martell, there was no doubt about it.

The Sand Snake, like Varys told him Oberyn’s daughters were called in Dorne, could turn a meeting of the council into hell with a single insult and could offer comments that could be very wise or so impertinent that it would make everyone around the table blush. She was also eyeing Tommen and every other man on the council, except Kevan and Varys after she probably understood she would get nothing from them. That made the relations between the two women on the small council silently thunderous, especially when Nymeria Sand was trying not very subtly to seduce Tommen. Kevan wished they had Doran Martell, or even his son Trystane, in the lady’s place. She was an ally to no one, could cause more trouble than they could imagine and was totally impossible to predict just like her father.

If Prince Doran or Prince Trystane had come to King’s Landing, Kevan would probably have bestowed the office of Master of Laws on him, freeing himself of the duties of the office he had to assume while acting as Hand at the same time, but he would never give the office to this young woman and preferred to keep Mace Tyrell far from any official position. If only Doran Martell had sent his son. Myrcella would have come back at the same time. The king was eager to see his sister again and asked very often questions to Lady Nymeria about her. That didn’t help to mend the feud between the Sand Snake and the queen. As for Kevan, he would be happy for the princess to be back in King’s Landing, considering the threat they received. Nymeria Sand had assured him Princess Myrcella was alright and safe at the Water Gardens and that no one would touch her, but Kevan didn’t trust the word of a Sand Snake.

“It was time,” commented the Sand Snake after Pycelle was done reading. “How much time did you need to take that castle? A year? Two? My sisters and I could have taken it within a single day.”

“No one doubts the abilities and the courage of the people of Dorne, my lady,” said Kevan. “However, if we could end this siege without storming the castle and have thousands of men killed, this is all for the better.” He turned to the king. “Your Grace, it seems the war is almost over, and for good. Riverrun was the last important fortress to hold against you. There are still two keeps resisting in the Riverlands, but with House Tully back in power, it is only a matter of weeks before the last resisting houses bend the knee. Storm’s End surrendered a month ago, Dragonstone fell last week, and now Riverrun is back into the fold. Peace has returned to Westeros, at last.”

“Yes, these are very good news,” acknowledged the king. “I want to thank you all for the fantastic efforts you deployed to bring back peace. Lord Tyrell, Lord Redwyne, Ser Kevan, and all of you, I thank you. I wish Lord Tyrion could be there so I could thank him as well, but I will send him my thanks by raven later in the day. We can all be proud of what we accomplished these last months.”

“I agree with you, your Grace,” approved the queen.

“Your Grace,” began Lord Tyrell. “Perhaps it should be time to consider the matter of Storm’s End.
The castle yielded in great part thanks to the efforts House Tyrell deployed. Maybe you could consider granting it to the queen’s family.”

As always, Mace Tyrell asked for very much in inappropriate circumstances. Pycelle coughed. “Storm’s End has always belonged to House Baratheon. To hand it to another house… That can’t be.”

“Well, House Tyrell supported most of the burden and the losses for taking Storm’s End. It is normal we get it for the efforts we put in the siege.”

“All the efforts you put in the siege?” Lady Nymeria scoffed. “You needed an eternity to have the castle yield. You didn’t take it. The men holding it surrendered because they were starving. They were only two hundred men to hold it and they repelled four assaults you made on the walls. I know it. I visited your army’s encampment on my way. Your men were drinking and laughing and feasting all the time. They didn’t seem to have taken so many losses. You just starved the garrison because you were incapable of defeating it. Thousands of your Reach asses couldn’t take down two hundred Stormlanders.” The Lord of Highgarden was red from anger and searching for his words, and though the queen was better at hiding her feelings, it was obvious she wasn’t pleased by the comments. “Anyway, the old man is right. Storm’s End belongs to House Baratheon. And even though in Dorne the laws of succession are different from here, a castle that belongs to a certain house cannot be given to another house unless the first house rebelled. Would you say that our king rebelled against himself? I don’t think so. House Tyrell has no right over Storm’s End. In fact, if anyone had any right on the castle, it would be Princess Myrcella, King Tommen’s heir. Storm’s End belongs to her. Unless our queen has some little feet moving in her belly that I’m not aware of.”

The queen decided to reply to this insinuation. “I agree with Lady Nymeria. Storm’s End belongs to House Baratheon. However, like my lady just outlined it, Princess Myrcella is the heir to the Iron Throne. If my memory is right, the heir to the Iron Throne doesn’t hold Storm’s End, but Dragonstone. Hence the princess is the Lady of Dragonstone. I don’t think sweet Myrcella could rule Storm’s End and Dragonstone at the same time. That would be too much for her.”

“Usually, the queen is right,” began Pycelle. “The heir to the Iron Throne is given the seat of Dragonstone until the king dies and he takes his place. However, this is only a custom, not a law. The king could give whatever he wants to Princess Myrcella, or name any lord he wishes to hold Dragonstone and Storm’s End. He could also consider himself Lord of Storm’s End and Dragonstone, or only one the two. The decision belongs to the king in all cases.”

Tommen seemed indecisive and Kevan stepped in before the queen could. “Your Grace, since Princess Myrcella is your heir actually, I think it would be good to give her some recognition. Grant her the title of Lady of Dragonstone. This would have the benefit to show to the rest of the Realm that Dragonstone was clearly retaken. When you will have a son, he may take the title in your sister’s stead since he will be your heir and the princess will become the Lady of Sunspear when Trystane Martell will become its lord. As for Storm’s End, to prevent any succession problems, I would advise you to take the title of Lord of Storm’s End and Lord Paramount of the Stormlands until you have a second son or a daughter who comes of age. In the meantime, you could choose someone you trust to act as castellan at Storm’s End since you won’t be able to be there most of the time.”

After a moment, Tommen acquiesced. “I will do this. I will release a decree tomorrow acknowledging Myrcella as my heir until I and Margaery have a son, and I will recognize her as Lady of Dragonstone as well. And her betrothed, Prince Trystane, as Lord of Dragonstone.”

“You can’t do that, you Grace. Prince Trystane is not married yet with your sister. You should wait for the marriage to name him Lord of Dragonstone. If you don’t have a child by this time.”
“Yes, you’re right, Ser Kevan. I’m sorry.” Tywin would have said that a king should never apologize. Not that a king couldn’t make mistakes. Well, he shouldn’t in the best of the worlds, but it was impossible to make no mistake. Even Tywin made mistakes. However, a king could never show he could be wrong, or else the others would see it as a weakness they could use.

“In Dorne, Princess Myrcella would be the one sitting on the Iron Throne, not her brother,” Lady Nymeria suddenly said.

“Perhaps, my lady, but we are not in Dorne.” Kevan was firm. He wouldn’t let the Dornishwoman start a discussion about the rules of inheritance. Kevan turned to the Lord of the Arbor. “Lord Redwyne, what’s the situation of your fleet after the Battle of Dragonstone?”

To the opposite of Storm’s End, Dragonstone had given a fight and was taken by force. The garrison, seeing they had no chance to receive help from Stannis or anyone else, and probably learning recently about the fall of Storm’s End, had decided to make a bold attempt to break the siege. They had apparently sent ravens to all the other islands of the Narrow Sea and asked them for assistance into destroying the Redwyne fleet. The fleet had remained there for a long time and grown carefree. So when small boats attacked them in the night, they had been taken unaware. The boats came from Driftmark, Claw Isle, Cape Wrath, Sharp Point and Sweetport Sound to assault the unprepared fleet in the middle of the night. They had sunk some ships, burned others, and were joined by the garrison of Dragonstone who put boats at sea as well. They caused heavy damage. However, the Redwynes recovered after the initial surprise and beat off the attackers. In the end, most of the small boats sank in the Narrow Sea or barely managed to escape the battle. The garrison of Dragonstone surrendered on the morning when the men saw their last attempt had failed, and the other islands surrendered in the days that followed.

“It could be better, but it could be worse as well, my lord Hand,” answered Paxter Redwyne. “We lost only ten ships in the attack, but about sixty were badly damaged. We will need time to repair them.”

“Do it quickly then. We need the whole fleet of the Arbor to invade the Iron Islands,” ordered Kevan.

“Two weeks should be enough, my lord.”

“Very well. The Lannisters will leave a garrison at Dragonstone in case Stannis would try to take it back, and the royal fleet will defend the city if Stannis’s fleet or his pirates attack.”

“For now, it is very unlikely, my lord Hand.” Varys entered the discussion. “My little birds in the North are few, but they reported that Jon Snow left Eastwatch-by-the-Sea with Stannis’s fleet and all the ships the Night’s Watch owns there. However, they were seen going north, not south.”

“Why would they sail this way? There is nothing north of the Wall. Except snow. And wildlings too,” Lord Paxter wondered.

“Perhaps he thinks to return to its source, in the snow. After all, this is his family name,” joked Nymeria Sand.

“Ser Kevan,” said Tommen, “I think we don’t have to worry about Jon Snow. He is Sansa’s brother. I don’t think he would try anything against us.”

The queen spoke. “We must be careful, your Grace. Lady Lannister is worthy of your trust, no one denies it, but we don’t know much about her half-brother. She seldom spoke about him to me. Maybe he’s trying to fool us by having us believe he’s sailing north. What if he joined Stannis’s
cause? Lord Paxter, do you think Jon Snow could feign to head north and turn around to launch an attack on us?"

“That would be possible,” recognized the Lord of the Arbor.

“But not very likely,” said Kevan. “I doubt Jon Snow would believe Varys has little birds so far in the North. He wouldn’t think it necessary to fool us this way. Anyway, up to now, he only allowed Stannis’s troops to remain at the Wall. The Night’s Watch was far outnumbered by Stannis’s army, so they had no choice. They sheltered his troops before Jon Snow became Lord Commander.”

“All the same, I believe it is very dangerous to let the son of a traitor lead the Night’s Watch,” Pycelle pointed out. “Perhaps we should ask the Night’s Watch to remove Jon Snow from his command. There are a few cases through history of the Night’s Watch removing their Lord Commander, or of the Starks defeating a Lord Commander, when he proclaimed himself king I think.”

“Perhaps, Grand Maester,” recognized Kevan. “Only Jon Snow didn’t proclaim himself king. To interfere in the internal affairs of the Night’s Watch could have a few consequences. That may push Jon Snow to support Stannis for real.”

“But he’s already supporting him, Ser Kevan,” sputtered Lord Tyrell. “Eddard Stark tried to take the Iron Throne for himself when King Robert was still alive. His son may try the same. We cannot allow him to help Stannis, the last man to contest our king’s birthright.”

He was forgetting about Balon Greyjoy. “As long as Jon Snow remains at the Wall, we will not brand him a traitor. We have enough enemies like this. No need to send one more into Stannis’s hands.”

“Anyway, Stannis left the Wall,” revealed Varys. “He is certainly marching on Winterfell, trying to conquer the North.”

That was new. “Has any northern lord joined him?”

“Not from what I know, my lord. But they may if he manages to defeat the Boltons and take Winterfell. Stannis has about ten thousand men who could recover their strength at the Wall. House Bolton doesn’t have that much.”

Kevan thought about this new development as Tommen raised his voice again. “Lord Tyrion is already in the Riverlands. Perhaps we could send him in the North to face my uncle. Or maybe we could try to reason Stannis. Certainly he knows he cannot win.”

Kevan didn’t doubt Stannis knew his chances to win were low, but the Lannisters had been about to be defeated by Robb Stark not long ago, and they kept fighting, because they knew they had no choice but to win. Stannis knew what was waiting for him too when he would be defeated. He would never surrender.

“Your Grace, this is all in your honor to hope Stannis Baratheon would lay down his weapons, but he won’t. As for Lord Tyrion and his army, they still have to pacify the Riverlands. Even if we sent them north immediately, they would barely reach Moat Cailin before Stannis attacks Winterfell. Time is getting colder every day. We cannot send the Lannister army in the North. It would be better to let Roose Bolton deal with him. He was named Warden of the North by your brother. It is his duty to protect the North. Hopefully, Stannis’s army will die outside Winterfell if the cold arrives quickly enough and Lord Bolton will defeat him. He has more support than Stannis in the North.”
Kevan looked intently at the king while he said so. Tommen was clever enough to understand they were not to speak of this matter anymore. For now, people couldn’t know Tyrion was already heading to the North with his wife and an army of at least twenty-five thousand men. This included the men he brought with him from the Westerlands, those who were already besieging Riverrun, the armies of the river lords and House Tully who joined him after Brynden Tully surrendered, and possibly the Frey forces they captured.

He hadn’t approved his nephew’s decision. It was a very dangerous move he made. Winter was almost there, and besieging Winterfell at this time of the year was much more dangerous than besieging Riverrun. However, Tyrion had bluntly told him in his ravens that he would march on Winterfell with or without Tommen’s approval. Kevan had finally persuaded Tommen to sanction Tyrion’s actions. If he was to take down Roose Bolton no matter what happened, better to do it with the king’s support.

Kevan still found it difficult to believe that Arya Stark was at Winterfell. Varys and Littlefinger had failed to find her, and Varys had really looked utterly surprised when Kevan had asked him about Arya Stark’s presence in the North. He didn’t know about it, or feigned to know nothing about it, but he promised he would investigate about Ramsay Bolton. Kevan didn’t think Tyrion lied. He had no difficulty to imagine Tyrion starting a war to save his wife’s sister. Tywin would have done the same for Joanna, and Kevan would probably be ready to do the same for Dorna. Still, Tyrion took huge risks. If the invasion didn’t go as planned… No one could know about Tyrion’s destination until it would be too late for the Northerners to react. The combined forces of the Westerlands and the Riverlands would penetrate in the North at the moment Tommen would declare Roose Bolton a traitor to the Realm for holding Arya Stark prisoner. It was a good thing Pycelle for once intercepted Tyrion’s messages without allowing Maester Vallis to read them first. The queen was unaware of the situation. Only Kevan, the king, Pycelle and Varys knew about Arya Stark. Stannis Baratheon and Roose Bolton would fight before Winterfell and weaken each other, making things easier for the army Tyrion was actually leading.

Tommen understood what Kevan’s gaze meant and approved him. They went through reports of more recent ironborn attacks afterwards, and they all agreed again that the Redwyne fleet would leave as soon as it was repaired and join the Lannister fleet Tyrion reinforced during the last months. Then another threat to Tommen’s rule would be eliminated. Tommen seemed to hesitate when Kevan said there would be no mercy for Balon Greyjoy this time. He rebelled against the Iron Throne for the second time. He couldn’t be forgiven twice. Nymeria Sand heartily approved that weak men could believe in second chances, but only fools believed in third chances.

They went on the financial matters. Harys Swyft wasn’t as capable as Tyrion or Baelish as Master of Coin and the debts of the Crown were still overwhelming. The reconstruction of the royal fleet would soon be over, but even that wouldn’t be enough. They may have to hire new gold cloaks soon. There were growing problems with the Sparrows. They became more unruly each day, more than ever recently. The number of people they forced to walk naked in the streets to “atone for their sins” was increasing and there were a few clashes with gold cloaks. It was a miracle it hadn’t gone to fists yet. The High Sparrow was still distributing food to the poorest people and didn’t seem to care about what was going on. It would be useless to arrest him. Kevan didn’t think he had much hold on the other Sparrows, and his arrest or execution would only infuriate these fanatics furthermore and may rise the people against Tommen. The High Sparrow and the queen were competing for the people’s support. Kevan had even asked Tommen’s wife to make more work with the poor. Money was no object he told her, and she accepted to help him on this matter. All the same, they had to clean the Crown’s finances from the follies of Robert’s and Joffrey’s rules. Some cartels and guilds from across the Narrow Sea refused to lend them money anymore. At least, for now, they didn’t have to borrow more money and some gold was accumulating in their coffers, though not enough yet. They would have to repay some debts very soon, and to not borrow more money in counterpart.
The small council was dissolved and Tommen left first with the queen. The others began to drop out but Kevan intercepted Nymeria Sand before she could go.

“My lady, I was hoping we could talk.”

“Of course, ser. You can call me Nym if you want,” she answered with a smile. Kevan had to be careful with this one. He wondered if Oberyn Martell’s daughter were all unpredictable and dangerous like him. They followed the corridors of the Red Keep.

“My lady, I was wondering how was my grandniece the last time you saw her. It's been a long time since I saw Princess Myrcella.”

“The last time we saw each other was the day before I left. We were swimming in the pools of the Water Gardens with my other sisters and other noblemen’s daughters. Dorne did her wonders. She has become a great beauty. My cousin is madly in love with her.”

“I’m glad to hear it. Her mother would be happy to hear it as well. Let me thank you and your family in her name.”

The Sand Snake scoffed. “Don’t try to fool me, ser. Cersei Lannister hates that her daughter is away from her. I know it. Myrcella told me herself. And I know the Dowager Queen hates us all, Martells and Sands, and that she’s probably very happy that my father died.”

“I cannot speak for my niece, my lady, but I for myself had no wish to see Prince Oberyn die.”

“So be it then,” she said dryly.

“Princess Myrcella will soon be granted the seat of Dragonstone, my lady. And she is more than old enough now. I think it would be a good time for her to marry Prince Trystane. Now.”

She stopped and turned to face him. “Are you sure?”

“Of course, my lady. She could marry Prince Trystane, then they would be able to go to Dragonstone and rule the Narrow Sea together. And it would get the princess closer to the king. I’m afraid his Grace misses his sister greatly. You have sisters. I’m sure you know what I’m talking about better than me. I only have one.”

Her eyes were indecipherable, but she smiled. “Yes, of course. However, Myrcella has grown quite attached to Dorne. She likes the place. I would find it cruel to force her to live on a rock in the middle of the sea right when she started to love her new home so much. And the people in Dorne wouldn’t like that their future Princess was sent far away with their future lord when they were just wed.”

“The princess will be Lady of Dragonstone within a few days. It will be her duty to live in Dragonstone,” Kevan argued.

“Lord Stannis was Lord of Dragonstone for a very long time, and yet he spent most of his time in the capital as Master of Ships. Just like Rheagar Targaryen before him. At least before he got killed and that his son, his daughter and my aunt were butchered.”

Her eyes had turned hard. Very hard. This was dangerous ground. “Lady Nymeria, some of your people in Dorne have no love for the Lannisters and the Baratheons. We both know it. If there was to happen something to the princess because they want revenge, then the alliance between the Crown and House Martell would be in great danger. We left the princess in your care. I think she would be far safer on Dragonstone, and I am sure that if you asked Prince Doran himself, he would agree.”
They stood there, motionless, looking at each other, for a long time. Finally, the Red Viper’s daughter smiled again. “You are right, Ser Kevan. And it would be a great honor for Dorne to see its heir Prince of Dragonstone. I’m sure the king wouldn’t oppose to acknowledge his brother-in-law.”

“No, he wouldn’t. If he is his brother-in-law. And for this, he must marry the princess.” They needed Myrcella to marry Prince Trystane quickly. That would strengthen their ties with Dorne.

“It will take some time before they can get married. If that is the king’s desire, I will write to my uncle and tell him this is the wish of the king to see his sister wed at once. However, with the time for the raven to reach its destination, and with the time required to organize a wedding worthy of a prince and a princess, Princess Myrcella may not be married before two months.”

She was trying to gain time. The Martells, and if not them all then this one, didn’t want to see Myrcella Baratheon married to Trystane Martell too soon. “Then in this case Prince Doran should be informed as quickly as possible.”

“As you wish, my lord Hand.” She curtsied before him, making her breasts even more displayed than before. Kevan hoped his grandniece wouldn’t be dressed in the same way when she would come back. “I will tell my cousin to visit the capital with his new wife after the marriage, before they go to Dragonstone. I’m sure you would all be happy to see Myrcella again. Perhaps you should invite Lady Cersei as well. She will be very happy to see her daughter again, and I’m sure the princess will feel the same.”

“That will be for the king to decide,” replied Kevan. He had no wish to see Cersei again in the capital. Not after everything that happened to Lancel and the many times she tried to have Tyrion killed. Not to mention Kevan didn’t want Jaime and Cersei close to each other ever again.

“I will go and write the raven to my uncle immediately.”

She curtsied again, a wicked smile on her lips. Kevan thought she probably tried to seduce him, or to make him uncomfortable with the way her dress revealed more of her body when she curtsied. However, if she hoped to seduce him, she would only be deceived. She would only manage to make him uncomfortable with her light dresses. Nymeria Sand walked away. Kevan would know if she wrote the message soon enough. Pycelle and Vallis had both no love for the Dornish. If Lady Nymeria didn’t send the raven, Kevan would know. And if she wrote anything different from what she was supposed to write, Kevan would know as well.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
“There is only one solution to a quick victory. We must attack at once. From both sides.”

“I will not send thousands of men to death, Ser Brynden. We will need them in the North.”

They were three in the tent. Ser Brynden had come to discuss, or rather to yell, in the pavilion Tyrion shared with Sansa. “It’s been two days now that Walder Frey has hidden inside his walls like the craven he is.”

“Strange that you call him this way since you did the same not long ago,” Tyrion quipped.

He regretted it almost immediately. The Blackfish drew his sword and brought the point on Tyrion’s throat. “Dare to repeat that, Imp.”

“Stop that! Both of you!” Sansa stood up eyeing her granduncle darkly. Reluctantly, he lowered his sword but kept it unsheathed. “You look like two squabbling children. Have you forgotten why we’re here? To get the hostages back and to save Arya.”

Sansa was shooting angry glares at the Blackfish, but also at Tyrion. “Forgive me, my lady,” he apologized.

“Please accept my apologies, Sansa,” the Blackfish said.

Ser Brynden sheathed his sword, but Tyrion knew he wasn’t sorry. He could see it every time the Blackfish looked at him. He didn’t trust him, even after he gave back Riverrun to his family. Tyrion doubted that the knight liked to see him married to Sansa. Sometimes he had the impression the Blackfish was there to remind him what Sansa’s mother would think of their marriage.

“So, what do we do?” The old knight asked. “If we’re not to storm the castle? Walder Frey won’t kindly open the gates for us.”

“He won’t open them kindly for sure, but he may open them all the same if he faces the annihilation of his house,” explained Tyrion.

“The old man doesn’t care about his brood. Our hostages are useless. Ser Perwyn was right. We should just kill them and be done with it.”

“Some of them have nothing to see with the Red Wedding. Ser Perwyn was very helpful, and there are several women and children inside these two towers. You want to kill them as well?”
That seemed to give something to think about to the Blackfish. “So we stay here and starve them? That is your plan? We will need months to have them surrender this way. I thought you wanted to save Arya Stark.”

“That is my plan. But we must also get back the many hostages the Freys are keeping inside their damn castle. If we storm it, you can be sure the last order Walder Frey will give before he dies will be to kill all the hostages, including Lady Tully and the heir to Riverrun. Especially them in fact. Do I have to remember you there are several of your bannermen who have sons, brothers, nephews, even fathers imprisoned there? What do you think they’ll do when they will die? Do you think they will follow us in the North?”

The Blackfish didn’t show any defeat or surrender. “Then what do you propose?”

“Give me three days, including this one. If at the end of the third, Walder Frey has not yet surrendered, we will storm the castle. And we will storm it your way.”

“Very well, Imp. But I warn you. At the end of the third day, when the sun sets, I attack the Twins, with or without your help. And I will kill Walder Frey, and all his sons, grandsons, great-grandsons, legitimate sons and bastards, who took part to the murder of my niece.”

“You have my word.”

“The word of a Lannister,” the knight scoffed. He bowed to Sansa and left, probably going to ram through the strong currents of the Green Fork and go back to his camp on the west bank.

“I think he’s starting to like me,” Tyrion said to his wife once they were alone again.

Sansa didn’t laugh. “Are you sure this will work? Your idea?”

Tyrion shrugged. “The only way to know for sure is to try it.” He took a gulp of wine.

“Tyrion, I’m not sure about this. It is… It looks like… I mean…”

“It is horrible? Barbarian? Cruel? I know what it is, Sansa, but it may be our only chance to have Walder Frey surrender without a fight, and could save the life of thousands of men. Men who have wives, children, parents, brothers and sisters. Two lives are a low price to pay for it.”

Tyrion drank again. He needed wine when he talked about these things. “So, that’s all we can do? Choose who and how many we kill?”

Tyrion sighed. “I understand what you feel, Sansa. But tell me, when you wanted to push Joffrey from the drawbridge, don’t you think it would have been worth it, if you saved thousands of people who died because of him afterwards?”

“That was different! Joffrey was a monster. He murdered my father, he… He did horrible things.”

“And when I fought Stannis on the Blackwater,” continued Tyrion. “You remember how I had thousands of men killed with wildfire? How many burned alive? Their blood is on my hands and their death is on my mind, but I saved a city of half a million people from destruction with that.”

Tyrion was trying to convince himself of that while he told so to Sansa.

“But you did it to save the city, Tyrion. They were attacking us. You were just defending King’s Landing when you did this.”

“Yes, but I killed these men all the same. Good men for the most, who were only obeying their liege
lord. They only followed Stannis, that was their only crime. And perhaps Stannis would have made a better king than Joffrey. Perhaps he had more right to the chair than my nephew.”

They remained in silence for some time before Sansa broke it. “Tyrion, was Joffrey a bastard? And Tommen? And Myrcella? Is it true, what Stannis said?”

Tyrion averted his eyes for a moment before he answered. “Do I need to tell you? Most of the Realm suspect it by now.”

“Tyrion, I want to know. From you.”

She was fixing him with her blue eyes. Tyrion wished he could tell her. Could he? “If I revealed it was true, then what would happen to Tommen and Myrcella? I wouldn’t be bothered to say it about Joffrey, but my nephew and my niece are good children. I don’t want them to be known as bastards for the rest of their lives. They don’t deserve this.”

He tried to make Sansa understand with his eyes. She seemed to understand. “I know they are, Tyrion.” That startled him. “I know Ser Jaime is their father. Mira surprised him and Cersei next to Joffrey’s body in the Great Sept of Baelor, and she told me.”

Tyrion was horrified. “Lady Mira Forrester saw them?”

“Yes. And she heard them saying they were their children. She only told it to me. She won’t reveal it to anyone else.”

Tyrion hoped she wouldn’t. He was angry at his sister, and at his brother too, though he knew the anger for his brother wouldn’t last long. “Damn them! Fucking next to Joffrey’s dead body, what were they thinking? And in the Great Sept! Sometimes I wonder what Jaime has between his ears.”

“I won’t tell anybody. I don’t want something to happen to Myrcella and Tommen me neither. Only, I wanted you to know that I know.”

Tyrion nodded and emptied his cup. “I’ll see if Ser Forley came back.”

He left the tent, leaving Sansa alone inside. He didn’t think she would reveal it. Sansa liked Tommen and Myrcella. However, Tyrion didn’t know what to make of Lady Mira. If she found herself in a difficult situation, she might reveal it to get out of it. He would have to make sure the daughter of Gregor Forrester wouldn’t run into trouble. Anyway, for now there was nothing he could do about it. Mira Forrester was thousands of miles away in Oldtown.

Tyrion looked at the two towers standing tall over the Green Fork. His own army besieged it from the east bank since yesterday. The Tully forces besieged it from the west bank for two days. Still, the castle had provisions for a few months at least. Months they couldn’t wait. Winter kept approaching, nights grew cold and Sansa’s sister was still at Winterfell. Walder Frey had to give them the hostages, and to give them now. Hopefully, if the old stoat was a coward as much as Tyrion believed, he would surrender before Ser Brynden could attack the Twins. In the meantime, men kept building rams, trebuchets, catapults, siege towers, assembled scorpions and ballistas, and even built boats to attack the bridge. They had the Frey men participating to the operations. That kept them busy, and made them useful as well. Tyrion made sure they wore the colors of House Frey while working to make Walder Frey see that his own men had turned against him.

The march on the Twins had been without story. Well, almost without story. The Brotherhood Without Banners had showed no sign of life. However, there had been a few clashes between Frey prisoners and Lannister soldiers, but surely far less than in the Tully army. All the same, the
Lannister men spat on the Freys because they were turncloaks and traitors, and the Freys saw the Lannisters as traitors as well for turning on them. Daven went to great effort to keep them in line, and Ser Perwyn Frey, who accompanied them, did very much for that as well. Tyrion had to admit he had some respect for the man. Not at all proud or insulting like his kin. Even Sansa seemed to like him a little, though she couldn’t forget he was a Frey all the same.

The sole event of importance on their way to the Twins had been Daven’s wedding. Tyrion had sent his cousin ahead with two hundred men so they could prepare the wedding before the entire host arrived at Darry. Daven had wed and bedded Amerei Frey in a ceremony that could be described as lavish for a castle like Darry, but he had done it without great enthusiasm. Tyrion supposed he enjoyed much more that night, the first one he spent with Sansa in an appropriate bedchamber for a month. They left the next day, not wishing to waste more time than necessary. Daven left as a married man and Lord of Darry, though the main thing he told Tyrion after they left was that if his wife got herself with child, he would have doubts that it was his own. He also said Gatehouse Ami had been very close to the Strongboar during the morning that followed the wedding, and that Lyle was far from looking uninterested.

On the Tully side, as far as Tyrion could tell, the Blackwoods, the Brackens and the Mallisters had all accepted to join them in besieging the Twins. However, the Brackens were not happy that the siege of Raventree was ended without gaining any land on their old rivals. Tyrion knew it could create problems later. The Lannisters had quarrels with the Freys and the river lords. The Freys had quarrels with everyone and among themselves. The river lords had quarrels with the Freys, the Lannisters, and among themselves. That was no good. They had to unite this army. They needed a common goal.

The two men Tyrion sent to the Twins were coming back from its gates. Tyrion went to see them with ten men surrounding him. He missed Bronn. Ser Forley dismounted his horse and bowed before him. The bard did the same.

“So, how did he react?” asked Tyrion.

“He said nothing, my lord,” answered Ser Prester. “We told him what would happen if he didn’t surrender and I had the song played like you ordered.” He shot a glance at the bard with a harp in his hands. “He only let us go, without a word.”

“How did he look like while you played the song?” Tyrion asked the bard.

“Afraid, my lord. He was shaking. I though he would die like that before us.”

A pity he didn’t. Tyrion tossed a golden dragon to the bard. “For your trouble.” The bard bowed and left, keeping the piece against his heart. There was a whore, or whores, who would have a lot of job tonight.

Ser Forley Prester was looking at him, hesitating. “My lord, are you sure this is wise? Only two days?”

“Three days,” Tyrion corrected. “We have no time to lose, Ser Forley. Let’s just hope the Late Lord Walder Frey won’t be too late to save his own house. Go see to your men.”

“Yes, my lord.”

The knight left to perform the order. Tyrion went around the camp with his guards, making sure his men were all occupied, whether at building siege engines, though he hoped they wouldn’t need them, whether at practicing their skills at sword, whether watching over the Freys. When he came to
his tent, he found Sansa kneeling on the floor, her hands joined, praying. That gave hope to Tyrion to see his wife praying like she used to. She had stopped for a moment after her mother and her brother died, and again when she learnt about her sister’s captivity. She opened her eyes and looked at him when he entered.

“Sorry, Sansa. I didn’t want to disturb you,” he apologized.

“No, that’s nothing.” She stood up. “I wish there was a godswood, or even only a weirwood tree somewhere close. Do you think there is one inside the Twins?”

Tyrion searched his memory for anything concerning a godswood inside the Twins. “They may have a godswood, but I doubt there would be a weirwood tree. The Freys built their towers here for the toll they could get, not because there was a tree with a face around here.”

Sansa went to sit in a chair. “Tyrion, I know why you’re doing this. I understand. And I hate the Freys. But still, if we do the same than them, how are we better?”

That was a good question, and Tyrion had no answer to this. “We do this to save your sister, Sansa. And to prevent thousands of men from dying in the assault on the Twins. I suppose it’s better than to kill people at a wedding because they broke a promise of marriage.”

Sansa nodded, though she didn’t seem convinced. Tyrion wasn’t either. Explain to me why it is more noble to kill ten thousand men in battle than a dozen at dinner? His father’s voice was clear into his head, and Tyrion’s voice answered in his head as well. So that’s why you did it? To save lives? The same reply came. To end the war. To protect the family. Why is it more noble to have thousands of people killed by launching an attack on the Twins than two by executing them before their family? It was to save lives, to end the war, and to protect the family. Sansa’s family. Tywin Lannister would be proud of his son right now. The thought didn’t make Tyrion any happy.

Daven emerged in the tent at this moment. “My lord, forgive me. But there is something going on the battlements. The Freys have brought someone and are threatening to kill her.”

“Her?” Tyrion and Sansa said the word together.

Daven was a little blank and obviously worried if not afraid. “It’s Roslin Tully.”

The Lord and the Lady of Casterly Rock ran out to the end of the camp where siege weapons were raised and looked at the battlements where a Frey was holding a young girl with a knife on her throat. The girl was thin, short, with a lovely face in the form of a heart and black hair. It seemed Walder Frey gave to Edmure Tully one of his few beautiful girls. She was much prettier than Amerei Frey.

“Imp!” the man with the dagger shouted. “Release our brothers, and nothing will happen to her. Do it now or we slit her throat.” Terror was obvious on the girl’s face. Even from afar, you could see she was pleading for help. “Do you think we’ll hesitate? You know what happened at the Red Wedding. We won’t hesitate to repeat it.”

Tyrion turned to one of his guards. “Bring him,” he commanded. He left with three other men. Tyrion looked again at the battlements. The girl did nothing for this. Tyrion said something dangerous, but it was the right thing to say. “Go on. We’re waiting.”

Nothing happened. The knife stayed on the girl’s throat, but didn’t move. The Frey didn’t kill her. “You really think I won’t do it?” he repeated. “Release our family now or I kill her.”

“You already told us,” Tyrion yelled in return. “I gave you our answer. It won’t change.”
He turned to Sansa who looked at him in stupor. He knew they could decide to kill the girl, but there was nothing they could do against it. They couldn’t yield before this. Tyrion thought, and hoped, that the Freys would do like for Edmure Tully and not carry out the threat. It seemed to be the case since several minutes passed without anything happening to Roslin Tully.

Tyrion’s men came back with Ser Ryman Frey in chains. They let him drop on his knees before the battlements of the Twins. Tyrion stepped forward while remaining away from archer’s reach. “This is Ser Ryman Frey, future Lord of the Crossing and heir to your lord, Walder Frey. I warned your lord. Let me show you that a Lannister always pays his debts.”

He made a sign with his hand. One of his guards seized Ser Ryman by the hair and sliced his throat with his dagger. There were cries on both sides, from the battlements and behind Tyrion in his own army. His guards cut the dead man’s head, then brought the headless body of Ser Ryman to the Green Fork and threw it in the river.

“If I remember well,” shouted Tyrion to the battlements, “this is how Lady Catelyn Stark died when she was your guest. I hope Ser Ryman enjoyed our hospitality as much as she enjoyed yours. Tell Lord Frey what you saw. Tell him I hope he will keep his new heir for more than a day.”

Tyrion walked away with his guards, people standing aside as they passed. Some of these men were found by Bronn. Sansa followed him after some time and walked faster to reach him. Tyrion wondered if he really was different from his father.

“You’re not your father, Tyrion.”

“Thank you, my lady,” he said bitterly.

“What?” Sansa asked.

“I hope you’re right. That I’m not like my father like you just said.”

“I said nothing, Tyrion.” Tyrion looked up. She was looking at him strangely.

Tyrion shook his head. “I must be tired. Now I hear voices.” When he thought about that, that hadn’t looked like Sansa’s voice. It looked like… No. He chased the idea from his head.

“You’re not your father.” This time, that was really Sansa who said it. Tyrion nodded in acknowledgment and they walked in silence back to their tent.

The next day, at the end of the afternoon, at the time Tyrion had warned Lord Frey in his message, Edwyn Frey, the new heir to the Crossing after the death of his father yesterday, was brought to the same place than his father was the day before. There were many more people on the battlements than yesterday. That was good. The more people who would see it the better. Tyrion had executed Ryman Frey sooner than expected yesterday because they had threatened Lady Tully. No threats had been made today, so they proceeded like they told Walder Frey.

To the general surprise, the Lord of the Crossing himself came on the battlements, supported by two of his sons or grandsons. No one knew who they were. He stared in Tyrion’s direction who had his great-grandson in chains not far away from him.

“So, Lord Frey,” Tyrion shouted. “Have you decided? Do you want to lose two heirs in two days?”

Tyrion thought he saw the old man talking with one of his brood. Edwyn Frey had the virtue to not cry and wail like his father did before he was executed. He would have made a better Lord of the Crossing, though he was proud and arrogant like his father.
“Lord Tyrion,” shouted a man on the battlements, the one Walder Frey spoke to a moment ago. “Walder Frey, Lord of the Crossing and Lord Paramount of the Trident would like to discuss with you about the terms of surrender inside his castle.”

Tyrion smirked. The old lord made a mistake to mention the title he no longer had, no more in name than in fact. “There are no terms to discuss. I gave you the terms two days ago. Does the Lord of the Crossing accept them?”

Before the absence of answer or reaction from the battlements, Tyrion gave the signal again. This time, his guard stabbed Edwyn in the belly repeatedly with a dagger. The cries of the man could be heard from the battlements. Tyrion was sure of that. When the new heir to the Twins was dead, his head was cut as well and his body thrown into the river just like his father was.

“That was for Talisa Stark,” Tyrion shouted. “So, Lord Frey. You lost two heirs. Do you want to lose your castle, your whole family, and your life as well?”

Again, the Late Lord of the Crossing said something to his man. “If you attack, we kill the hostages.”

“Good,” answered Tyrion. “I’m sure the river lords will spare you for that. I gave you the terms. You have until tomorrow at sunset to accept them. Or else, we let the Blackfish avenge his king and his niece. In the meantime, I have a gift for you. As a sign of good faith.” A trebuchet was activated and threw a bag over the battlements of the eastern tower. Tyrion thought he heard cries coming from the courtyard. “Happy family reunion, Lord Frey. You have one day. I hope for you this won’t be your last.” Though that wouldn’t be surprising if it was.

The night came and passed, dawn came and passed, morning came and passed. Finally, while Tyrion was taking the meal of midday with Sansa, Podrick came to tell them that Walder Frey had accepted to meet Tyrion outside the castle. Immediately, Tyrion dispatched men to inform his commanders and the army camping on the western bank. When Lord Walder Frey came to meet him in his litter and what was probably a tenth of his family, Tyrion had Sansa, Ser Brynden Tully, Lord Clement Piper, Lord Edmun Roote, Ser Perwyn Frey, Daven, Ser Forley Prester and his guards with him. A seat was brought so Lord Walder could sit in.


“Lord Frey. You are late, as usual. Too late for your two heirs. According to your son, Ser Perwyn, your heir is now the Lady Walda Frey, your great-great-granddaughter. A child of eleven or twelve. Thanks to you being late,” Tyrion said with a smile he made smug.

“Lord Tyrion,” said the Lord of the Crossing, trying to maintain some pride and dignity, though he had nothing of the latter and kept the first with much difficulty. “I decided to accept your terms with some changes. We will hand all the hostages we have to House Lannister. We will bend the knee for King Tommen and for you. But we will never swear fealty to House Tully again. We ask you to make House Frey bannermen sworn to House Lannister of Casterly Rock, with the commitment to pay you half the revenues we get from the tolls on the Crossing. We will fight alongside you when called upon, fight your enemies, make peace with your allies, and be loyal to you until the end of all time.”

That was a bold offer, even for Walder Frey. Tyrion laughed and made his laugh evil. “Lord Frey, do you really think I want House Frey as bannermen of my house? Do you really think I want my family to be associated with a family of turncoats, traitors, cravens, bastards, cowards, oathbreakers, kingslayers and breakers of the most sacred laws in the world? Look at my wife, Lord Frey. You probably never met her, but I’m sure you know who she is.”
Sansa stepped forward. “My name is Sansa Lannister, Lord Frey. Sansa Lannister of House Stark. Catelyn Stark was my mother. Robb Stark was my brother. Talisa Stark was my sister-in-law. Her child was my nephew or my niece.”

Sansa was staring angrily to the man nailed to his chair, and her voice was harder than Tyrion ever heard. Lord Frey was looking at her with mouth wide open and terror obvious in his eyes. Sansa looked enough like her mother to give him the impression Catelyn Stark had come back to haunt him.

“Lord Frey,” resumed Tyrion, “you have a choice. Accept the terms I gave to you two days ago, or solve your disagreement with the Blackfish.” Tyrion turned to the man who partially unsheathed his sword. The man was looking in utter hatred at the Lord of the Crossing. He killed his niece and his king. Tyrion smiled when he turned again to face the Lord of the Crossing. “Music,” he shouted. He continued on a softer tone as *The Rains of Castamere* began. There was a bard among the delegation. “I heard you love this song very much, my lord. That you even played it at a wedding. While you were butchering your king. His wife. His child. His mother. His men. Under your roof. Under the guest rights.”

Tyrion took his most ruthless and threatening face. He remembered how Sansa was despaired and destroyed after her family died. He would have given anything to see the old man die right now, but he had to think about the people he could save inside the Twins.

At the middle of the song, when Lord Frey heard the bard replace the word *Castamere* by the *Crossing*, Lord Walder, shaking uncontrollably, stammered. “No, please. Stop it. Stop it. I yield. I'll do everything you want. I will. Just stop it. I beg you.”

Tyrion let the music play for some time before he stopped it. He took a menacing voice again. “You will free all the hostages you’re keeping. All of them. Lady Tully and her son first. You and all your family will bend the knee to Tommen, and to your liege lord. Since Lord Edmure is not present, you will all bend the knee together before his uncle, Ser Brynden Tully, and swear fealty to House Tully forever.”

“We’ll do everything you want,” the old man said, almost crying.

“Then do it now,” said Tyrion dryly. “Before I tell my bard to resume the song where he stopped it.”

The Freys became efficient like they had never been. Fifteen minutes later, all the hostages were brought to the Lannister camp. Ser Perwyn hugged his sister Roslin when she came forth with a baby in her arms. She was crying as her brother pulled her into an embrace. Lord Piper hugged his son Marq se well. Tyrion could see how much the hostages and their families were relieved. Ryman and Edwyn Frey wouldn’t be missed by many. He felt he did the right thing.

“Now,” resumed Tyrion when all the hostages were safe, “let me remind you the terms I offered you. House Frey will give two hostages to House Tully to be held in Riverrun with all the comfort their rank requires. The hostages we already have will remain in our custody at King’s Landing or Casterly Rock for the next five years. Half the revenues you get from your tolls will be given to House Tully from this day and forever. A garrison of three hundred men, constituted of both Lannister and Tully soldiers, will be kept inside the Twins for the next ten years and be maintained with the revenues of House Frey. You will also pay reparations to House Tully for the ravages in the Riverlands since you’re partially responsible for them. The amount of these reparations will be fixed later. Your forces will remain with us at the command of Ser Perwyn Frey. And you will bend the knee. All of you. Now.”

Reluctantly, but without waiting, Lord Walder Frey got on his knees and swore fealty to House
Tully, acknowledging them as their liege lord. All his sons and daughters who were present knelt as well. When they were done, the Blackfish made a demand Tyrion wasn’t expecting.

“We want your son Olyvar as well with his brother. I don’t trust you with him, and he’s among the few among you who I can trust.”

Lord Frey made a move of his hand as if he didn’t care. The young man who was Olyvar Frey, who seemed above twenty, came forward and bowed before the Blackfish. “Ser Brynden, I’m glad to see you again.”

“Glad to see you too,” the knight answered. Olyvar went to stand beside his brother. Walder Frey handed them two sons to serve as wards at Riverrun.

“Lord Frey, welcome back into the king’s peace,” said Tyrion. The late Lord of the Crossing nodded, though it was obvious he was angry. “Now we have a few other matters to discuss about.”

The old man was taken aback. “I gave you everything you asked. We respected all the terms.”

“The terms concerning your surrender to Riverrun, my lord,” Tyrion specified. “However, there are a few matters concerning specifically House Lannister and House Frey that need our attention. First, my lord father arranged several marriages between our two houses. Sadly, wars being wars, some of these marriages can no longer be made. Your granddaughter, Lady Amerei, was supposed to marry my cousin, Ser Lancel Lannister. But since my cousin was accused of kingslaying and exiled to the Faith, I’m afraid this marriage is no longer possible. But I have the great pleasure to tell you, Lord Frey, that your granddaughter still married a Lannister.” Daven stepped forward. “I present your new grandson. Daven Lannister, Lord of Darry.”

Lord Walder Frey was speechless for a moment. “But… But you promised me he would marry one of my daughters.”

“My father promised,” Tyrion rectified. “And he married one of your daughters. Or granddaughters I think. That doesn’t make much difference anyway, she’s still a Frey. The deal was respected.”

“Lord Frey.” Sansa moved forward as well, speaking harshly to the Lord of the Crossing. “I have to announce you that the betrothal between Joy Hill and one of your natural sons was called off. Lady Joy Hill is now betrothed to Rollam Westerling, and when Lord Gawen will die, she will become the Lady of the Crag.”

More stupor and flounce came to the old man’s face. “This is… This is outrageous!”

“My father understood we preferred the heir of one of the oldest families in the Westerlands to a bastard from the Late Lord Walder Frey. You would have done the same in our stead,” said Sansa dryly. She continued on an accusing tone. “Furthermore, you owe something to House Westerling since their eldest son and heir, Ser Raynald, died at the Red Wedding. I think that to sacrifice a marriage with a bastard is quite a low price for killing an heir. But you’re lucky, Lord Frey. A Lannister always pays her debts, and I am a Lannister as much as I am a Stark. I propose you another marriage. Lady Genna Frey has a grandson who’s of age with your heir, Lady Walda. I propose they are wed as soon as the future Lady of the Crossing has flowered. I’m sure you will accept. This is a much better marriage than the one you would have with Joy and a bastard of yours. You wanted to strengthen the ties between House Lannister and House Frey. Here’s your chance. No one else will want to marry your heir to his son.”

The Lord of the Crossing hesitated, but finally he spat on the floor. “Alright. At least the Twins will remain in the hands of a Frey. Are we done now?”
“I think we are,” said Tyrion. “You only have to open your gates and to let the Tully forces on the west bank travel to the east bank.”

The parley was over. Two hours later, all the forces on the west bank, those of House Tully, of the river lords, and their Frey prisoners were on the opposite bank with the Lannister forces. Tyrion retired in his tent for a time. Sansa joined him. To his great surprise, she poured a cup of wine for both of them.

“I think we both deserve it,” she said with a sad smile. The both took a sip.

“That was brilliant of you, my lady. To think about marrying Tywin Frey to the new heir of the Crossing. I hope Genna will appreciate.”

“Her sons will not have Riverrun, but at least they’ll get the Twins. Tywin seems like someone good.” Tywin Frey, nicknamed Ty, was Genna’s grandson. They had just arranged his marriage with Walda Frey.

“He can’t be worse than the old man who refuses to die. I hope he’ll die soon, and painfully.”

“I agree.” Sansa took another gulp. “I’m sorry I doubted. You were right.”

Tyrion sighed. “I could have been wrong. We pushed Walder Frey a lot. Though I don’t regret it. With everything we did, House Frey has been weakened considerably and the Crossing won’t pose any problem for at least a decade. But Walder Frey is prickly, and spiteful. He won’t forget it.”

“I wish we executed him,” said Sansa. On that she agreed with her granduncle.

“He will die soon enough. He can’t live forever. With some hope, one of his sons or grandsons will poison his wine or slice his throat before dropping him in the river.”

Podrick entered at this moment. “My lord, my lady. It’s time.”

“Thank you, Podrick.” Tyrion looked back at his wife. “The time has come. Let’s see if people will follow us.”

They left their half-emptied cups on the table and went to the great pavilion where all the lords, knights and commanders of the Westerlands and the Riverlands were gathered. Even the Freys were present, though Ser Perwyn and Olyvar were obviously the ones leading them. Guards watched them closely and the river lords hated to see them here. Only Ser Perwyn seemed to receive some small consideration. When Tyrion and Sansa took place, all the other lords had not arrived. Olyvar came to them.

He bowed before each of them, but it was to Sansa that he spoke. “My lord. My lady. Lady Sansa, I knew your brother, Robb. I was his squire back during the war. He was a good man. I knew your mother and the Lady Talisa as well. They were all good people. I respected them a lot. I’m sorry for what happened. I wasn’t there when the wedding took place. If I had known… I didn’t want to leave Robb, even after he broke his promise to marry one of my kin. He was an honorable man, and I was proud to fight by his side. Just… I know you hate all my family. You have good reasons to hate us all. I’m just… sorry.”

Sansa was looking intently at the young man. Tyrion was too. He didn’t see anything feigned. He really looked ashamed. Sansa replied. “Thank you, Ser Olyvar. But forgive me, before I trust a Frey once again, I will need some time. And I will need you to prove yourself.”

“I will, my lady. I promise you. But I am no knight.” He bowed and went back to his brother. There
was a resolve in his eyes Tyrion rarely saw.

When everyone was here, Brynden slammed on the table to bring silence. They had decided to let the Blackfish do the talking. They would have more chance of success this way.

“My lords, my lady, sers, we all brought you here to discuss about something very important. We are not going back home. Quite the opposite in fact.” He took the first scroll of the two lying on the table. “This is a message from a spy Lord Tyrion and Lady Sansa have in the North. Here is what it says. *Arya Stark is at Winterfell. She was brought there by an unknown man. Roose Bolton betrothed her to his son Ramsay. He wants to consolidate his hold on the North. The wedding is to take place in two moons.*” There was gasps of surprise. The Blackfish let some time pass, the he took the second scroll. “That message was written almost five months ago, so the marriage has already been celebrated. And this is a report from White Harbor. It was sent by Lord Wyman Manderly himself. *Ramsay Bolton imprisons women and tortures them. He starves them, peels their skin off a few of their fingers, beats them, rapes them and inflicts them many other horrible things. After a few months or a few weeks, he releases them and hunts them with his dogs in the woods. If he catches them, his dogs eat them. Few are the girls who survive to tell the story.*”

There were gasps again, but of horror this time. The old knight pounded the table again. Silence came back. “I am not going back home. Roose Bolton murdered Robb Stark. He stabbed his king in the heart, and now he has his sister. I will not stay idle in the south while my grandniece is being beaten, raped and flayed by his bastard monster.” The silence that followed hung heavily in the air. “We march on the North.”

There was a moment while no one moved or made any sound, then an uproar exploded. “We can’t go in the North now,” shouted Ser Forley Prester. “Our men are tired. Winter is approaching. We should go back to our homes, and let our men prepare for it.”

“My sister doesn’t have the winter to wait,” said Sansa loudly. “Roose Bolton will only keep her alive the time she needs to give Ramsay Bolton a son or two. After that, he will let his son have his ways with her. As long as the Boltons will rule the North, everyone in the North will suffer. Men, women and children get themselves flayed for resisting against their rule as we speak, and innocent women are being raped. Is that what you want?”

“My lady,” said Lord Karyl Vance after a moment. “We understand the horrible situation of the North. But if we march on the North and get trapped in the snows, then we will be doomed. Thousands of our men will die.”

Tyrion knew he was right, but he had to say something. “Not if we walk quickly. If we march fast enough, we will reach Winterfell before winter is upon us. But we will have to march immediately.”

The lords began to speak among themselves again. Surprisingly, it was a Frey who spoke loudly. “Arya Stark was supposed to marry my brother once.”

That stopped the chatting. “Who are you?” Sansa asked.

“This our brother Waltyr, Lady Sansa,” answered Ser Perwyn. “He tells the truth. When your mother negotiated with our father the alliance with House Frey, a betrothals was arranged not only for your brother, but also for Lady Arya and Elmar Frey. Our father called it off when he learned your brother married Lady Talisa.”

“My brother is Roose Bolton’s squire. He’s been his squire since the war started,” resumed Waltyr Frey. Tyrion would say he had to be about fifteen. “I know him well from what Elmar told me. If you can have any use of me, then I will follow you in the North.”
The lords started to whisper again after the lad’s declaration. Even more strangely, it was another Frey who spoke next.

“I was Robb Stark’s squire for almost a year. He was a good man. I will avenge him. My sword is yours, my lords.” Olyvar Frey unsheathed his sword and got on his knee. His brother Waltyr did the same, but without a sword since he had none.

Ser Perwyn Frey spoke. “Robb Stark was a man of honor. We cannot bring him back to life, or apologize enough for what we did. But we can avenge him, and kill the man who murdered him.” He unsheathed his sword as well and got on his knee. “House Frey will march on the North.” All the other Freys followed his example.

The Strongboar roared. “I didn’t have the chance to fight here. I hear the Boltons like to flay their enemies. Perhaps I will flay them myself. And we have a good reason to fight. To save a highborn lady, the sister of our lady.” The sword was drawn. “To the North!” He knelt as well.

And then, one after one, all the knights and lords drew their sword, brandishing them in the air and shouting.

“TO THE NORTH! TO THE NORTH! TO THE NORTH! TO THE NORTH! TO THE NORTH!”

Here they had it. The unity, the common goal they needed to bring these many armies together.
Tyrion looked at Sansa, a smile on his lips. She seemed to finally realize what was going on. She smiled widely in return. Tyrion turned to the Blackfish. After a long moment where his expression remained grim, he smiled mischievously. They were in war against the Boltons.

Chapter End Notes

I wrote this chapter in the objective to show a darker side of Tyrion, the one he inherited from Tywin. It'a also meant to show everything is not entirely perfect between Tyrion and Sansa. Tyrion never confessed to her the true origin of his nephews and niece, and when she asks him to tell him the truth, he doesn't deny, but he cannot confess either. Also, Sansa didn't go through as many hardships as in the show (all the time with Ramsay and Littlefinger's influence), so she cannot really look at people being executed without some reluctance, no matter how they deserve it. Also, for those who remember, there is something that Genna Lannister told to Sansa about Tyrion when she arrived at Casterly Rock. This chapter shows that Genna's fear isn't without foundation.

I tried to write the last scene with all the lords of the Riverlands and the Westerlands similar to Jon's acclamation at the end of Season 6. The group effect caused all the lords to swear their sword to the northern invasion and to save Arya after a few proclaimed their resolve. When you just learnt the truth about Arya and Ramsay, and once a few have spoken for the invasion, it's difficult for the people assembled there to not follow the others.

Please review

Next chapter: Daenerys
Daenerys II

Chapter Notes

Let's see what's going on in Meereen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

DAENERYS II

The people were shouting and raising their hands at them in praise. Daenerys Stormborn had never been so popular as a queen since she freed Meereen from the slavers. The Great Masters now accepted her as their queen, and the former slaves loved her again since she reopened the fighting pits. Everything she got, the peace in the streets, the support of the people, the acknowledgment of the masters, she got it because to the man who sat beside her in the litter.

Her engagement with Hizdahr zo Loraq and the reopening of the fighting pits he suggested had brought back peace and prosperity to Meereen after the attacks perpetrated by the Sons of the Harpy. Ser Barristan Selmy, one of the very few people she trusted, had died in one of these attacks. He had crossed the Narrow Sea and two continents to serve her, and now he was dead. She lost Ser Jorah, and now Ser Barristan, the two only Westeros she trusted. She had none at her side now. She claimed to be Queen of Westeros, but she had never spent a single day in Westeros and had no one from Westeros to advise her. She could still take the navy of Meereen and sail to for King’s Landing with her Unsullied and her Second Sons, but would that be enough? She had no allies there, and no way to know who would fight for her. She had three untamed dragons, one wandering freely, two others chained under the Great Pyramid. She wouldn’t, and she couldn’t abandon the people she freed from slavery.

She could have decided to slaughter all the masters like Daario had suggested, but she decided against it. That wouldn’t stop the Sons of the Harpy. She couldn’t fight the Sons of the Harpy inside when there was a threat that the other cities would attack Meereen. She could have chosen to marry Daario Naharis instead, but she didn’t. She had to think about her people. A queen belonged to her people, not to herself. If she was the only one who wasn’t free in this city, then so be it. That was an acceptable price for the freedom of the hundreds of thousands other people living in Meereen.

The litter stopped before the Great Pit of Daznak where the games would take place. People were still cheering, certainly for her. She had reopened the pits and freed them. Hizdhar was only a consort she was marrying to calm down the former Great Masters.

“Please forgive me, your Grace,” her future husband told her as they got out of the litter. “I have several people in my acquaintances to meet before the Great Games begin. If you would allow me.”

“You have your leave,” Daenerys told him, and he left.

She noticed Daario looking gloomily at the former Great Master as he walked away. She knew he didn’t trust him. Perhaps it was mainly jealousy. Daario said he believed Hizdahr zo Loraq was the leader of the Sons of the Harpy. Daenerys didn’t believe he was, though she had to admit it was strange all attacks stopped at once after she announced her betrothal. That could be simply because
the former masters were happy to see one of them as the future King of Meereen. Daenerys didn’t believe Hizdahr zo Loraq was working against her. His advice seemed to work out well for now. She only had to look around her to see it. All the same, Daario’s words managed to make her doubt about her future husband. She would keep an eye on him.

They walked inside the Great Pit, she, Daario, Missandei and some of her best Unsullied. Grey Worm wasn’t there, still badly injured. He had the chance to survive. Ser Barristan didn’t have the same luck. When they entered, a great crowd of about fifty thousand men and women, former slaves and former masters, welcomed them with cheering and clapping. They walked to the platform erected for them and took place. Slaves and masters were all sitting together. Daenerys had forbidden that there would be assigned places. In fact, the Unsullied made sure all the people were mixed, not allowing a group to occupy for himself one section or another. The Great Games were supposed to unite the people of Meereen together. If they were to be united, it would be as equals, not as masters and slaves.

People kept coming inside. Daenerys knew the arena, despite being the largest of the all the fighting pits of Meereen, couldn’t contain all its population. However, those who couldn’t attend the Games today could attend them during the next six days that would follow. The Great Games would last for an entire week. That wasn’t a week Daenerys would enjoy.

The four standard bearers came riding into the center of the pit and people cheered very loudly. Daenerys had to admit the number of people standing in the arena was impressive, even if that was to watch men killing each other. Each standard bearer had a flag for one of the cities of Slavor’s Bay, except for one who had the flag for the city of Volantis. These were the four cities who brought men to fight in the games. Daenerys knew there were Masters from Yunkai, Astapor and Volantis among the crowd. She had met some, though she delegated most of the work to meet them to Hizdahr zo Loraq. She looked at the seat at her right. He wasn’t there. What was he doing? He was the one to insist so much on organizing these games, and when they took place, he decided to be absent.

Daenerys looked at all the people applauding, yelling, crying, cheering before the prospect of the games. That was so barbarous. She had tried her best to rule her people for their own well-being. She abolished the games because slaves fought to the death in it, but it seemed even the slaves appreciated the fighting pits. Many pit fighters had even begged her to reinstate the games. How could someone love to fight in the pits? How could we enjoy killing other people for the pleasure of others? How could we enjoy watching people kill each other? She had ordered people to be killed, but she had done it for the sake of justice, and to free the slaves. That wasn’t the same thing.

Her future husband suddenly appeared from nowhere and sat. “Where have you been?” she asked him sharply.

“Just making sure everything is in order.” He had a small smile on his lips. He was eager for the games to begin. Daenerys knew he loved them, and that he owned some of the pits, including this one. She wouldn’t be surprised if he went to see the famous acquaintances he spoke about to place a bet or another. That wouldn’t make her like him more, though she still needed him. He was her main advisor now in the matters of Meereen. She wished she had someone better than him to advise her. Missandei was sitting on her left, impassive like always. Daenerys wished she had another advisor sitting on Hizdahr’s right, but the place was empty. There was no fourth seat.

The gates of the pit opened and the four riders left, allowing a man wearing the tokar, with long brown hair and a beard to come in. He walked to the center of the pit and bowed to Daenerys and Hizdhar. Then he raised his arm and pointed to his left. He moved it more on the left, and as he made the turn of the arena, people sat and went silent.
“Free Citizens of Meereen!” the herald proclaimed loudly in Valyrian. The sound of his voice went very well through the arena. Everyone could hear him. “By the blessings of the Graces, and her majesty the Queen, welcome to the Great Games!”

He raised his arms high as if he tried to touch the sky, and the people raised with them, exploding again. Two men ran to stand before the herald and looked at the platform. One was tall and muscled with a very long and heavy sword. The other was shorter, with a smaller sword and a small shield. The crowd cooled down.

“My Queen, our first contest. Who will triumph?” shouted the herald. “The strong, or the quick?”

The short man stepped forward. “I fight and die for your glory, oh glorious queen.” He bowed the head and his opponent did the same. The herald left.

Daenerys knew what would happen now. They would fight. Two entered the pit, and only one would leave it alive. The arena was completely silent. It was as if, just like her, they knew someone would die soon and didn’t dare to do anything, trying to delay the inevitable. In the end, Hizdahr zo Loraq brought her back to life.

“They’re waiting for you. Clap your hands.”

Daenerys looked down at the two men standing before her. Soon, she would sentence one of them to die. Was there no way to save them both? To save one from death, and the other one from becoming a murderer? She was the queen. Didn’t she have that power? No, she didn’t. A queen belonged to her people, and her people, as sad as it was, wanted to see blood. Slowly, reluctantly, she raised her hands and clapped them, sentencing a man to die like she did when she condemned Mossador. Only this time, there was no silence that followed the sentence, and no hiss. People cheered instead. How could that be? She executed a man for murder and was hated for that, but now she sentenced an innocent to death and was loved for this.

The two men started to fight. The smaller one was quick, avoided most of the stronger man’s attacks or blocked it with his shield. He managed to get behind his opponent and made a cut in his back, though the bigger man stood tall as if nothing happened. He seemed to wear some sort of armor while the smaller man had none and a less efficient sword.

“That one, the smaller man. No question, that’s where you should put your money,” said Daario as he leaned between Daenerys and Hizadhar. He would always try to stand between them, even if that wasn’t necessary.

“I’m not putting my money anywhere,” she replied darkly.

“Kings and queens never bet on the games. Perhaps you should go find someone who does,” suggested the future King of Meereen. Perhaps he didn’t visit friends for bet finally. Why did he visit them then?

“People used to bet against me when I fought in the pits,” Daario continued. “He would have bet against me. Common novice mistake.”

“I’ve spent much of my life in this arena. And in my experience, large men do triumph over smaller men far more often than not.”

“Has your experience ever involved any actual fighting?” she asked her future husband. “You yourself? Have you ever tried to kill another man who was trying to kill you?”

The leader of one of the great families of Meereen didn’t find something to answer to that and looked
away. Daario was smiling between them and Daenerys only wanted to join him.

“Whenever I got into the pit against a beast like that one, the crowd saw me, all skin and bone back then, then they saw a pile of angry muscles ready to murder me. They couldn’t get their money out fast enough.” Daario produced a dagger as he spoke of his time in the fighting pits and brought it before Hizdahr zo Loraq’s face. “But the pile of angry muscles never had any muscles here.” Daario brought the dagger under his chin, the point almost against it. “Or here.” The dagger was almost again Hizdahr’s cheek now. “And the big men were always too slow to stop my dagger from going where their muscles weren’t. Yes, whenever I saw a beast like that one standing across from me making his beast faces, I knew I could rest easy.”

The crowd shouted loudly in pleasure. Daenerys realized the pile of muscles had cut the head of his opponent. The headless body fell slowly on the ground while the survivor roared. Whatever distraction and amusement Daario’s tales brought, they were gone. A man was dead, and people liked that.

“You may find it horrible, your Grace, but this is no worse than thousands of men dying in battle. Soldiers killed in battle are never remembered. These ones will have their name graven on the Gates of Fate. They will be remembered. Nothing has ever been accomplished without killing or cruelty. These are necessary conditions for greatness,” the man sitting at her right explained.

“That is greatness?” Daenerys asked disdainfully while they took away the body of the dead man and brandished his head, earning more applause from the crowd.

“That is a vital part of the great city of Meereen, which existed long before you or I and will remain standing long after we have returned to the dirt.”

The herald came back to announce the next contest, but Daenerys paid him no mind. She had no interest in the games. “One day your great city will return to the dirt as well.”

“At your command?” Hizdahr asked.

“If need be.”

“And how many people will die to make this happen?”

“If it comes to that, they will have died for a good reason.”

“Those men think they’re dying for a good reason,” he said, glancing at the pit. Daenerys didn’t follow his gaze.

“Someone else’s reason.”

“So your reasons are true and theirs are false? They don’t know their own minds, but you do?”

Daenerys didn’t reply. She hated that man. She wished she had Ser Barristan or even Ser Jorah to give him a good reply right now. She held his gaze for a long time and he kept smiling at her, as if he won, until her attention was brought back to the pit.

“I fight and die for your glory, oh glorious queen.” She knew that voice, even if it spoke in Valyrian instead of the common tongue it usually used. There were six men in the pit, and it was the last one at the right who had talked. He was her bear. Ser Jorah Mormont.

How could that be possible? She exiled him. She told him to leave and to never come back. What was he doing here? She kept looking at him in complete stupor. How could he be there?
“Your Grace,” started her betrothed.

“Shut your mouth,” Daario cut before he could say more.

Daenerys barely heard them. She stared at the man who had followed her ever since Pentos, a man who had loved her. He looked at her too, his eyes asking the same thing he asked her the last time they saw each other. He asked for her forgiveness. *He betrayed me. My child died because of him. I exiled him, telling him I would have him executed if he ever came back. Yet he came back.* She had spoken. He made his choice. She clapped her hands and the fight began. Ser Jorah nodded, as if he was saying that he understood. It didn’t matter if he understood. He came back. She swore to kill him if he did. Why should the people trust a queen who can’t keep her promises?

Ser Jorah first fought a man with a longaxe. He was a bearded priest from the city of Norvos. He hit Ser Jorah to the belly, then to the face with the wooden extremity of his axe, but couldn’t finish him as he was lying on the floor. The knight managed to duck the attack and to get back on his feet. However, his opponent managed to disarm Ser Jorah afterwards. As he tried to give the coup de grace, Ser Jorah disarmed him as well, and as they fought with fists and hands, Ser Jorah used his dagger to plant it in the man’s heart. He looked at her as life left his opponent, then turned to face his second opponent, throwing his dagger on the ground and taking back his sword.

Ser Jorah’s new opponent had a sword as well, but much thinner and shorter. However, he moved quicker than any other man Daenerys had ever seen. She recognized the Braavosi water dancing. There were some men practicing it in Pentos when she lived there. The Braavosi reached Ser Jorah’s cheek, then his leg, and finally his arm with his short sword. The bear was obviously no match for his opponent. He was hit several times by fists and feet as well and soon found himself lying on the ground, without his sword, the thin sword pointed at his throat.

As the Braavosi was about to kill him and the crowd chanted for his death, Ser Jorah looked to her again. Was he pleading for her to save him? Or asking forgiveness one last time? Could she end this? She wanted to, but she couldn’t. As the final blow was about to be given, a spear pierced the Braavosi’s heart. The Meereenese champion had defeated his two opponents and stabbed a third in the back. Daenerys knew Ser Barristan would have disapproved, but right now she could only feel relief. The champion let Ser Jorah go back to his feet and take back his sword. People kept cheering for the local champion. This was obviously no joust, and this wasn’t Westeros. These were the Great Games of the city of Meereen.

The Meereenese champion and the Westerosi knight were the two last competitors. The four others were dead, including a Dothraki. The two men fought. They were a match for each other. Ser Jorah got to the ground at one time and the champion tried to thrust his spear through the knight’s heart, but Ser Jorah stopped partially the spear by gripping it with his hands and his armor made the rest of the work. He got back on his feet as the crowd booed him. They faced each other again. With a roulade, Ser Jorah thrust his sword in his opponent’s heart. The crowd shouted in displeasure. Their champion was dead.

Ser Jorah looked at her. He had won. She supposed she could let him go again, but she wouldn’t take him back at her service if that was what he asked silently as his eyes were on her. Daenerys did her best to keep her face impassive. He was no longer in danger and she was master of her emotions once again. Then all of a sudden, his expression changed. He seized the spear and threw it in her direction.

Daenerys stooped just in time, Daario seizing her to give her some protection. Jorah had tried to kill her. The spear thumped into someone else behind. She looked and saw him fall on the ground. He wore the tokar, but he had a mask. She knew this mask. A Son of the Harpy. People were panicking...
around. She looked back at her bear. He just saved her life. She turned around again and saw them.

They were everywhere, wearing all kind of clothes, with their golden masks. It took some time for everyone to realize what was happening. People screamed and ran away in total panic.

“Protect your queen!” shouted Daario.

Her Unsullied took position to protect her as chaos won the arena. The Sons of the Harpy were killing everyone, mostly former masters. Daario killed one who had seized a spear. Her Unsullied were trying to reach her, but many were killed. They were outnumbered everywhere. Daario killed some more men.

“Yes Your Grace! Your Grace!” yelled Hizdhar. “Come with me. I know a way out. I know a way…”

Her betrothed could never finish his sentence. Three Sons of the Harpy stabbed him in the heart. He wasn’t their leader. Daario was wrong. He had really tried to help her, and just like Ser Barristan he paid it with his life. Daario dealt with the three intruders, along with Jorah’s help.

Ser Jorah walked towards her and offered his hand. He had saved her. How wrong was she? She took it and they all walked away. She cast a last look behind her, seeing Hizdahr zo Loraq dying in his blood, betrayed by his fellow former masters. There was nothing they could do for him.

Daario and Jorah helped her to get down the platform with a few Unsullied. In the arena, some more Unsullied had arrived, but they kept being killed. They tried to escape by the gates, but it was closed as they approached and a Son of the Harpy blocked their path. Ser Jorah dealt with him, but they were still locked inside the pit.

“The other side. Follow me,” Daario said and they followed him.

More Unsullied joined them and made a wall all around her as they crossed the arena to the other end. It was chaos. People were running all around, screaming, killing or being killed. Before they could reach the other gate, dozens of Sons of the Harpy poured from it. Dozens poured in the pit from every gate. More came from the platform and the benches. Soon they were surrounded.

Looking at the platform, Daenerys noticed a dark form with black and bulky hair lying lifeless. Missandei. She was dead. They forgot to take her with them. How many were dead? Only a dozen Unsullied, Daario and Ser Jorah were left to defend her. They faced at least a hundred Sons of the Harpy. For now, they kept them away with their shields and spears, but for how long? The Sons waited with their daggers, hesitating to attack but not backing away.

Some of the Sons of the Harpy attacked, and they died, by Jorah’s, Daario’s or her Unsullied’s hands, but some Unsullied died as well. They had no way to escape. She wouldn’t survive this. They would die for her, but they wouldn’t save her. Viserys. Drogo. Rhaego. Irri. Jhiqi. Doreah. Ser Barristan. Hizdahr zo Loraq. Missandei. Soon Ser Jorah and Daario would join them, and she would follow. Grey Worm would probably be the last to join them. That was the end. Daenerys closed her eyes. Perhaps death wouldn’t be so bad. She had lived with the threat of death all her life. Being freed from this threat may be good. She was resigned to her fate.

Suddenly they heard a roar. She knew that sound. She knew where it came from. The roars resumed and everyone, knights, sellswords, queen, Unsullied and Sons of the Harpy looked at the skies. And he appeared. Her child. Drogon. He spat fire, his great wings outstretched, flying around the arena. Many of the Sons of the Harpy ran away as her first child landed in the pit, roaring.

A Son of the Harpy madly ran on her, but Drogon took him in his mouth, shook his head and tore
the man’s body in two. He unleashed his fire on the Sons of the Harpy. Sadly, he shot his fire without discerning friend from foe and burned an Unsullied as well. Spears were thrown in his direction and he sent fire everywhere, even burning innocent people without mask. Spears kept flying at him. He was injured.

“Drogon!” she called him out. She couldn’t lose him too.

She walked to him, not caring about her men still fighting the Sons of the Harpy around her. He was in pain. She took one of the spears and pulled it out of his neck. He screeched at her, his mouth wide open, but closed it after a moment and looked at her. She raised her hand, approaching it gently of his muzzle, still looking straight in his eyes. She was afraid of touching him. The last time she tried, he had flown away. Before she could reach him, another spear pierced him. He turned and roared at the attackers. He was hurt. He couldn’t take any more spears or he could die. She had to get him out of here.

Slowly, she walked to his side and approached him. Then she climbed on his back. Perhaps it was suicidal, but she had to do it. She had to save him. She took place awkwardly among his scales. She hesitated a little, but finally she said the word. “Valahd.” It meant fly in Valyrian.

Her child charged forward, where her men and her enemies were still fighting. They stood aside and got out the way of her dragon. Drogon spread his wings and took fly. Daenerys gripped his scales tightly. He flew away, high in the sky, out of the arena. As they left the Great Pit, Daenerys felt a happiness she didn’t know to exist overwhelm her. She was the Mother of Dragons. That was her rightful place. They flew high, and as Daenerys looked down, she saw Meereen get smaller and smaller until it was only a point at the horizon. They flew north. Always north.

Chapter End Notes

Not very original I admit. Mostly, this chapter is the scene at Daznak's Pit without Tyrion. I'm really sorry that I killed Missandei. I really like her character, but since Tyrion wasn't there to save her, that was something to expect.

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
Chapter Notes

I'm sorry I didn't update sooner everyone, but let's say I had a very busy agenda lately. My Master in Economics and my new job takes a lot of my time. There will only be this chapter and another one Saturday for this week. Sorry I can't entirely keep up with the pace I used to.

The first chapter where Tyrion and Sansa are in the North (the Neck is part of the North technically).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

TYRION XXI

Tyrion Lannister awoke at the sound of the rain hitting the roof of their tent. His face went immediately to Sansa. She was lying on her belly, her face turned to him. She was a little paler than usual. Ever since they arrived before Moat Cailin, Sansa hadn’t felt very well. She wasn’t the only one to be ill these times. The cold rain and the swamps that surrounded their long camp made many men sick. It was obvious they were going north, and winter was coming. The rain didn’t stop for three days now, and this rain couldn’t have been worse. It was a mix of melting snow and cold water. Nothing worse to demoralize the troops.

Tyrion removed the furs that covered him. He almost regretted it immediately. It was very cold. He put on some clothes hastily. He went to the brazier not far from their bed and fueled it a little to make the air warmer in the tent. That was a difficult exercise with his short height. He looked at his wife in the bed, her shoulders uncovered. He moved some furs on their bed and added them to the ones that already covered her. Sansa would be better this way. Then Tyrion went to the guards before their tent and asked one to fetch Podrick. His squire arrived a few minutes later and helped Tyrion don his armor like every day. Sadly, with his clumsy ways and the sound the armor made, they woke up Sansa.

“Tyrion,” she said in a faint voice, both from tiredness and from the cold she had.

“Excuse me, my lady. I didn’t want to awake you,” he apologized.

Sansa rolled a little in the furs. Podrick seemed very eager to look away. Tyrion found the boy’s shyness funny, though he would probably relieve him from his functions as a squire if he started to look at Sansa in an interested way. Anyway Sansa didn’t leave the furs. Podrick, on his side, left quickly as soon as Tyrion was clad in his whole armor. He turned to face Sansa.

“You’re very handsome,” she said, smiling.

“All courtesy like always.” He climbed with difficulty on the bed in his armor and kissed her tenderly on the forehead. “Try to rest for today. Heal yourself.”

“I almost forgot how cold it was in the North. I’m no longer used to it. I spent too much time in the
“Just make sure you get better. I’ll go speak with your granduncle.” He kissed her again, on the lips this time. Her eyes were shining when he walked away. He wondered if Sansa shouldn’t wear a nightgown while sleeping like before. She would be warmer this way, and that would have the benefit of reducing the risk of someone walking into their tent without warning and seeing her naked. Sadly, one of the disagreements with a coldness was that you always felt it was too cold or too hot. Not that Tyrion knew it from experience. He wasn’t sick very often. He couldn’t even remember precisely the last time he had an illness. All he knew about this came from his readings and the siblings he saw with a disease.

The rain was falling heavily on him when he left the tent. How much time would that last? He put on his helmet, but the protection it provided against the rain was quite dubious. It was a helmet after all, not a hood. Armors were made to protect against swords and arrows, not against snow and rain. Men who were on guard duty stayed under tents or any other shelter they could find. That wouldn’t be good if they were attacked, but there was no way they could force their men to stay under the rain. Anyway, they could die if they did force them. Tyrion walked to the Blackfish’s tent.

The old knight was already awakened like Tyrion expected, talking with some of his commanders including Lord Karyl Vance. They were leaving as Tyrion entered. The Blackfish barely acknowledged the intruder. Despite the last weeks where they almost commanded the army together, Ser Brynden Tully was still cold towards Tyrion like the rain outside. Tyrion dropped his wet helmet on a nearby table.

“We lost three men last day,” Tyrion announced.

“And we lost two,” replied the Blackfish. “The Freys lost one, because he was foolish enough to venture into the swamps.”

All their morning meetings began this way, by announcing how many of their own men they lost to disease, cold or animals from the Neck the previous day.

The knight sighed and dropped some parchment on his desk. “Two weeks that we’ve been stuck here, south of Moat Cailin. These Dustins and these Cerwyns! We live in the mud and the swamps thanks to them.”

“They live in them as well,” Tyrion pointed out. “Moat Cailin has seen better days. It’s not really a place to live in. They surely have as many problems as we have.”

“Yes, but they hold the fortress all the same,” the knight replied. “How does it come they were here? Roose Bolton shouldn’t have had the time to send men. The announcement of his disgrace only came out when we had almost reached this place.”

“Perhaps Walder Frey warned Roose Bolton he was besieged,” proposed Tyrion. “He could foolishly hope his son-in-law would send him help and Roose Bolton deduced he may be next. The man is no idiot.”

“No, he’s not,” Brynden conceded. “Olyvar was in the Twins. As far as he knows, his father sent no ravens in the North while we besieged him.”

“Does Walder Frey tell everything to his son? Or anything?” asked Tyrion uselessly.

“That’s a possibility,” the knight acknowledged reluctantly. “You should have considered this when you devised your plan to invade the North,” he accused, contempt in his voice.
“We cannot foresee everything in war. As a war veteran, I think you know this better than me.” The Blackfish didn’t look happy to receive lessons on warfare. “That matter is irrelevant now. We must focus on taking Moat Cailin.”

“We cannot take it from the south,” the old knight almost roared. “Our attack when we arrived ended with three hundred dead men in our ranks, mostly Tullys. My own men. We cannot get around Moat Cailin, our army would sink in the swamps. And that’s the problem. If we cannot send men north of Moat Cailin, then we won’t be able to take it.”

“I sent a raven to White Harbor. Lord Manderly will soon take the fortress by the north. They won’t hold for long when he’ll arrive.”

“He could never come. The Boltons can threaten him.”

“The Boltons are far from White Harbor,” explained Tyrion. “Right now they must deal with Stannis marching on Winterfell. We have Lord Wyman’s son and heir, Ser Wylis. His father is the one who informed me the most about the situation in the North while I was at Casterly Rock. He will come to our aid. And if he doesn’t, we can still expect the crannogmen to have noticed our presence. Our army is hard to miss. We have almost thirty thousand men. Howland Reed may come to speak with us when he sees the banners of House Tully. I think he won’t complain about helping us to overwhelm the man who killed his king.”

The Blackfish nodded. They both knew they could only wait for now. The Manderlys would come, and then they would be able to take Moat Cailin and to resume their march on Winterfell. In the meantime, they had to be patient.

“How is Sansa?” asked the man standing before Tyrion.

“Still sick. She even gave back her dinner yesterday, but today she seems better. She only needs to rest.”

“I think I’ll pay her a visit later,” her granduncle said. He and Tyrion stood there, looking at each other. Finally, the knight spoke. “I don’t trust you, Lannister.”

That was nothing new. Tyrion was no longer surprised of that. “I gave you back your castle, your lands and your titles to you and to your family. I gave you most of the revenge you wanted against House Frey and I’m endangering my own men to free Catelyn Stark’s daughter, and to kill the man who murdered Robb Stark. Is that not enough to convince you that I’m an ally?”

“Yes, we are allies,” acknowledged Ser Brynden. “But only because we both want Roose Bolton with his head on a spike, his son next to him. That doesn’t make us friends. You took care of Sansa, for that you have my gratitude in Cat’s name. But I know you’re not only marching on the North to save Arya Stark. I know that Sansa is the Lady of Winterfell, hence through her you can claim the North for yourself and House Lannister. Let me be clear.” He stepped forward until he towered Tyrion with his height, only two feet away from him. “If you ever mistreat Sansa, or harm her in any way, I will free her from her marriage, and in a permanent way. It’s only because she loves you and because you seem to treat her well that you’re alive.”

“You’re still better than your niece,” said Tyrion. “After I saved her from tribesmen, she still wanted to have me executed.”

Tyrion walked out on these words. “Perhaps you didn’t try to kill Bran Stark, but I keep wondering why he fell in the first place.” The Blackfish’s words accompanied him as he left the tent back into the rain. Again, the helmet proved to be little protection against the rain, but it was still better than
nothing.

Tyrion went to the outposts and the sentinels watching Moat Cailin. His men would have a better morale if they saw their lord share some of their disagreements. The fact Sansa was sick like many of them also made his men closer to Tyrion since they felt their lord and lady were suffering of the same sickness than some of their comrades.

Tyrion looked at the fortress in ruins. He had spent time there when he had gone in and out of the North before the war, but he couldn’t remember any way to breach it. This ruin was enough to protect the North against any southern invader. Now the banners of House Dustin and House Cerwyn were hanging from its battlements alongside the red flayed man of House Bolton. Tyrion cursed in silence like every day. How could Roose Bolton have known they were marching against him? Tyrion wanted to chop Walder Frey’s head for that. At least they kept receiving supplies from the Twins. The garrison there made sure of it. They also received supplies from the Westerlands, though more slowly recently as they progressed farther from the Golden Tooth and the rain slowed down the wagons. There were a few desertions at the south of the camp, though Daven made a good job in limiting them. Their camps spread on leagues on the thin strip of land following the Kingsroad in the Neck, and the Lannister troops were kept at the far south since they were the men who were the less prone to desert. They were farther from their homes than the soldiers of the Riverlands.

Tyrion finally went back to his tent. Sansa seemed to feel a little better again. She was now sitting in the bed, wearing a woolen gown, though still covered with furs and shivering from time to time. She smiled when he entered. Tyrion forgot about the Blackfish, the North, Moat Cailin, the army, the Neck, the Dustins, the Cerwyns, the Boltons and the Freys. He spent time with his wife, removing his armor and taking more usual garb, remaining with her in what warmth their tent could give them. They also did something else to warm themselves, and luckily no one walked through the flap of their tent while they did it.

“What a Lady of Winterfell I make,” Sansa mocked later, still wearing woolen clothes under her furs. “Getting cold as soon as she enters the North.”

“You’re not the only one who does, Sansa,” Tyrion said.

“Yes, only the others are not Northerners.” She wasn’t wrong. “How can I claim the North if I cannot support its weather?”

“You are the eldest daughter of Eddard Stark, Sansa. You are the Lady of Winterfell,” Tyrion argued.

“A Lady of Winterfell who doesn’t live at Winterfell. A Lady of Winterfell who hasn’t seen Winterfell, or even the North, for years. A Lady of Winterfell who bears the name of the family who slaughtered the last Lord and Lady of Winterfell and the King in the North. A Lady of Winterfell whose path is blocked by Northerners who swore fealty to her family hundreds of years ago.”

Tyrion didn’t like to see her like this. Ever since Riverrun, Sansa was expressing doubts about being a Stark or even a Northerner. Tyrion thought now her doubts had begun before that and were only reinforced by the way the men were looking at her. The commanders of the Lannister army and more and more of their soldiers looked more and more at her like a Lannister, which was a good thing since they had more respect for her, but sadly it had the effect of making her feel even less like a Stark. Tyrion felt he was responsible for this in some way. He made Sansa his wife, and in all senses of the term, making her bear the name of the Lannisters. Her necklace could be hiding a direwolf under the lion, but the direwolf was still hidden. It was the lion that the river lords, the Freys and the Tullys saw.
“Sansa, in my eyes, you will always be a Stark, as much as you are my wife,” Tyrion told her, hoping this would reduce her doubts in some small way. “You are a Stark, and you will always be a Stark.”

“I wish the Dustins and the Cerwyns saw it the same way than you,” she said. She smiled thinly at him, but she was still bitter about the way the only Northerners they met up to now fought against her.

“They may not see you as a Lannister, Sansa,” Tyrion supposed. “They may simply fear the Boltons. I wouldn’t blame them considering what we know of Roose Bolton’s son. We know he flayed the father, the mother and the uncle of the actual Lord Cerwyn. My father knew how fear was effective in keeping people obedient. I’m afraid his friend Roose knows it as well. The Cerwyns are afraid. And they probably fight more against the red banners than against you. I have probably far more to see with their resistance than you.”

Sansa nodded, though she still seemed unconvinced. Tyrion hoped the Northerners didn’t see her as a Lannister and that he was the one they hated, or else they would have no chance of rallying them to their cause, before or after the defeat of House Bolton, if they defeated them. They needed Sansa to be seen as a Northerner, or else the Northerners would fight for the Boltons with Arya Stark and would never acknowledge Sansa as their lady. Tyrion remembered how the little girl had looked almost like a real wolf at Winterfell. He looked at Sansa with her Tully red hair and blue eyes, her southern courtesies and manners, and her silken gowns. Her sister had obviously more wolf blood than her. Even Tyrion had to concede it.

Podrick came in. “My lord, my lady. There are riders who just came from the south. They asked to speak with you and Ser Brynden.”

“Riders?” Tyrion found it strange. “Who are they? How many?”

“A dozen, my lord. They were knights. They asked to speak with you and Ser Brynden. They had a banner with a white tower on it.”

A white tower? There was only one house with a tower as a sigil. “I’m coming, I’ll come back soon, Sansa,” he added for his wife. He put a cloak to protect him from the rain before he went out. The hood did a much better job than the helmet, though it was quickly wet. Still, it was better than a helmet. Ser Brynden was already inside the command tent.

“Can you tell me why Hightowers come to see us?” he asked immediately as Tyrion came inside.

“I was about to ask you the same question, ser,” Tyrion retorted.

“I have no link with the Reach, you know that. You, on the other end, the Tyrells are your allies. And House Hightower is sworn to House Tyrell. If they came, that was for you.”

They waited in silence for a time, then a group of knights entered. They were all wet and had obviously ridden for a long time. Their armors displayed the sigil of House Hightower along with various other sigils.

“My lords,” the leader bowed. He had a sigil black and yellow with three beehives on him. “Ser Hugh of House Beesbury, at your service.”

“Ser Hugh,” the Blackfish greeted him. “May we know what brings you here?”

“They are my escort,” said a voice behind, a woman’s voice. A hooded shape came from behind the knights. She removed her hood. The face under it, with black hair and green eyes, was the last
Tyrion was expecting.

“Lady Mira?” he asked.

“Lord Tyrion,” she greeted him with a smile and a courtesy. “It’s a pleasure to see you again.”

“The pleasure is shared, my lady. Though I didn’t expect to see you here.” He noticed her cloaks and travelling clothes were all wet just like those of her escort. She looked very tired and had dark circles around her eyes. Her hair was all matted. They seemed to have ridden for days. “Perhaps you and your men would like to rest.”

“My men, yes, but I need to speak with you first.”

“Podrick.” His squire was on the right side of the tent. “Show these men a place where they can rest and dry themselves.”

Podrick carried out the order and the men left, leaving Tyrion, Lady Mira and Ser Brynden alone in the tent. Tyrion remembered something then.

“Perhaps I should have thought about this before. You are a Hightower now, my lady. Aren’t you?”

“Yes, my lord,” she confirmed. He remembered Sansa telling him back at Casterly Rock that her friend had been married to a grandson of Lord Hightower.

“Excuse me, my lady,” intervened the Blackfish. “But I don’t have the pleasure to know you.”

Tyrion made the presentations. “Lady Mira, this is Ser Brynden Tully. Ser Brynden, this is Lady Mira Hightower. Previously Mira Forrester. She served as a handmaiden for Sansa in King’s Landing.”

“Forrester?” asked the knight, a queer look on his face.

“Perhaps you’ve met my father, ser. He was fighting with Robb Stark during the war. And my eldest brother too,” said the lady.

“You are the daughter of Gregor Forrester?”

“Yes, ser.”

The knight’s face softened. “Your father was a good man. And your brother a great warrior. I remember him. Rodrik was his name, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, ser,” she confirmed.

“I’m sorry for what happened to them. But why are you here?”

“My husband is bringing an army of a thousand men to the North. They are a few days of march from here, though they progress more slowly in this rain.”

“Your husband?”

“Ser Gerold Hightower. He’s not the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard,” she added before the Blackfish’s skeptical look. “But he was named after him. He’s a grandson of Lord Leyton. His father is the heir to the Hightower.”

The Blackfish seemed to understand. “Let me guess. They want Ironrath,” said Tyrion.
The lady nodded, with a smile on the corners of her lips. “I convinced them it was time with the Boltons disavowed.”

“Clever girl,” Tyrion said, not without admiration.

“Do all lords of the south have Northerners in their family to convince them to march on the North?” the knight asked. “We thank you, my lady. Your men may be useful, but not for now. We’re stuck here in the Neck.”

“Because of the rain?” asked Lady Mira.

“No,” answered Tyrion instead of the Blackfish. “Moat Cailin. Northerners put a garrison there. Mostly Cerwyns and Dustins. We cannot cross it.”

The young lady looked completely surprised, and terrified. “You can’t be serious.” Tyrion nodded to mean they were more than serious. Lady Mira seemed to panic. “The men of the Reach are not used to that weather. We left before they entered the Neck and even then they had a hard time supporting the cold rain.”

“Well, now it’s too late,” the Blackfish remarked. “I hope you brought food with you. Our supply lines could be better right now.”

“We have enough food to stand on our own for a year. I told Lord Leyton when we left that it would be safer to bring more.”

The lady reassured them with these words. Again, Tyrion had to admit she was clever. He wondered if Margaery Tyrell sent her to the Hightowers because she found her too much clever.

“Well, for now, your husband’s troops will have to wait here just like us,” Tyrion said. “You should as well settle yourself as comfortably as you can. Come, I’ll walk you out.”

They left the tent and Tyrion led her under the heavy rain. Couldn’t it stop for a moment? “There is someone who will be overjoyed to see you again,” Tyrion told her on the way.

“How is the Lady Sansa?” she asked.

“A little sick, I’m afraid. Because of the swamps and the rain. But she’s getting better. She stays in our tent. She’ll be happy to see you again.” A moment passed, and an idea came to Tyrion’s mind. “Lady Mira, could I ask you a service?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Sansa doesn’t feel well, but not only because of the cold she caught. She… She has the impression to have lost her northern roots after spending so much time in the south. You’re probably the only one who may have an idea how she feels. Do you think you could help her?”

“I’ll try,” she promised.

Tyrion thought about discussing what she saw in the Great Sept of Baelor, but it didn’t seem to be the time. Someone could hear them there outside, and anyway he didn’t think it would do much good to talk about it right after he asked a favor to the lady. Maybe it would be better if he asked Sansa to talk with Lady Mira about it, to make sure she wouldn’t tell anyone. They arrived at the tent. Sansa was reading. When they entered and removed their hoods, she smiled at Tyrion before realizing who was with him. Her eyes showed complete surprise, then utter happiness.
“Mira!”

“Lady Sansa,” the former Forrester curtsied.

Sansa went out of her furs and approached. “I’m glad to see you. What are you doing here?”

“My husband is bringing an army with him. He means to retake Ironrath, and to help you retake the North.”

“That’s wonderful news. How is he?”

Some red appeared on the girl’s cheeks. “He’s a good man.” Something hit Tyrion at this moment.

“Lady Mira, how did you arrive so quickly? You couldn’t have made the travel from Oldtown in less than three weeks,” Tyrion asked.

“No, my lord,” she answered. “We needed almost two months to reach you.”

“How could you leave so soon? The news about Roose Bolton’s demise were revealed only two weeks ago, three at most.”

“King Tommen sent me a raven to warn me in advance.”

The Hightowers knew Roose Bolton would be branded a traitor before everyone else. What if…?

“Lady Mira, who knew about this message Tommen sent to you?”

“Only Lord Leyton, his eldest son, me, my husband and my brother-in-law.” Lady Mira seemed to find his questions strange.

“What about the maester who received the raven? Did he have any link with the North?”

“Not that I know. Though I must admit I didn’t know this maester very much. But as far as I know, I was the only Northerner in the Hightower. Why?”

There was no clue of it then. That could still explain Roose Bolton’s prompt reaction, but nothing was certain.

“Nothing. I think I’ll leave you between Northerners. You surely have a lot to tell each other.” Tyrion went away, going back into the rain. He would inspect the trenches again and see if there was any new about Bronn. He hadn’t returned from his mission in King’s Landing. As he left, he heard the two women talk.

“Have you seen Margaery?” asked his wife.

“Yes, I saw her when we stopped at King’s Landing. She’s alright. Her marriage with the king is going well. Though they have problems with religious fanatics. They call themselves the Sparrows.”

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Roose
Roose II

Chapter Notes

Quite a short chapter, but with much important information. It allows us to learn more about the situation in the North while the Lannisters, Tullys, Freys and Hightowers are trying to breach through Moat Cailin. I don't like Roose Bolton at all, but there is no better character right now to see the political situation of the North in an enlightened way.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

ROOSE II

The men were preparing, almost all cavalry. They were well fed and rested. Stannis's troops were not. Their scouts had reported the army was approaching only on feet, without any horse. The men looked frozen. Ramsay’s plan had worked out well. Stannis had faced many desertions and now only had as much as men as they had, without horses. That wouldn’t be battle. That would be butchery.

His son came out from the tower where his wife lived, or was kept. With Ramsay, there was no difference between the two states. His sword was unsheathed and his father noticed blood on it.

“I do hope you didn’t start the battle by killing one of our own men,” Roose commented sternly.

“This is my wife’s blood. I made her kiss it.”

“On the edge? I saw men doing the same thing before the battle cowering before the enemy when he charged. Your men are waiting for you, and you’re losing time. Finish what you started.”

Ramsay nodded and walked to his horse. He had some of his men bring his dogs. Roose climbed the steps to the battlements. From there, he had a perfect view. They couldn’t distinguish the enemy from afar yet, but he knew they were approaching, starved, exhausted, cold and spiritless. Still, they were led by Stannis Baratheon, and the man had an iron will. Ramsay didn’t fear Stannis, and that was a terrible mistake. You should never underestimate your enemy, and his son did it all the time. He would lead the charge against Stannis’s army, but Roose had given specific instructions to his commanders. They would follow these instructions, not Ramsay’s. The Warden of the North wouldn’t risk the outcome of the battle with his son’s thirst for blood and screams. Roose would soon see how Ramsay fared in battle. At least, he would see if Ramsay fought well, something he would be surprised but pleased to see. If Ramsay got himself killed… Well, let’s hope the maesters were right and Lady Walda was carrying a boy, or that Ramsay somehow managed to impregnate Arya Stark before the battle. He feared his son didn’t think enough about putting a child in the girl and too much about playing his games with the Stark girl.

The men got out from the castle through the main gate and positioned themselves in a slope that would make them invisible to Stannis’s army. After thirty minutes of something that looked like an endless waiting for everyone else but Roose, the banners with the burning heart appeared on the horizon. They moved slowly. Roose Bolton let them approach, more and more, until he judged they were close enough. The army seemed to have stopped in some way. That was the time. He ordered
the sign. A flag with the flayed man was waved. His commanders ordered the men to move forward, first slowly, then they called for the charge. Roose saw his son, among the commanders in the first lines, not moving, staying away from the fights with his dogs while the men charged. He had ordered the charge as Roose had the signal made, believing he was the one commanding. Roose didn’t entirely reproach to his son his decision to stay behind, but when you didn’t have the intention to fight in battle, you shouldn’t place yourself right in front of your men at the beginning of the battle, then let them charge without you. They could feel uneasy and afraid seeing their lord not going to battle with them. By chance, they didn’t face a true army.

The cavalry extended, forming in a formation wide enough to encircle the army and attack it from the head and the flanks simultaneously. From his point of view, Roose could see about half the army running away, many men trying to hide in the forests. A part of the army managed to keep some formation. This was really Stannis Baratheon they were fighting. Any other commander would have lost all his men to stampede. Roose had to admit he felt some respect for Stannis, just like he still felt some for Robb Stark even after he killed him. The cavalry thrusted into Stannis’s army from all sides. He could hear the sounds of swords clattering and men crying. Ramsay finally charged with his dogs. They didn’t go to the strong point of the army. They chased the deserters in the woods. Ramsay saw battle like a hunt. Unsurprisingly, Roose was deceived by his son once again.

The battle went on. The center of the enemy army could hold only for a few minutes, and they were all slaughtered. Soon the men only had to chase Stannis’s troops fleeing all around. Roose knew some would escape, but that wouldn’t matter as long as they captured Stannis Baratheon. He was the one they needed. If Stannis escaped, he could still regroup the remains of his army and keep fighting. The man could adapt and would never abandon. Capturing Stannis was everything that mattered.

His commanders followed the orders he gave them. They kept chasing every man until they found Stannis. A few men returned with nothing, but finally a group of ten men came back with a man bearing the burning heart on his armor, attached from wrists and feet. He had grey hair, was badly injured at the right leg, was very slender and had a hard face. They dropped him before their lord.

“Who’s this?” Roose asked them.

“Stannis Baratheon,” answered one of the men.

Roose Bolton took a close look to the man. He had blue eyes and black hair, was broad shouldered and sinewy. It was obvious he was tall even on his knees. His armor proved he was someone important. It could be Stannis Baratheon.

“You know who I am?” Roose asked him.

The man looked back at him. He had lost, and was a broken man, but maintained a certain hardness and force that allowed him to be somewhat strong as he looked up at the Warden of the North standing tall right before him.

“Roose Bolton.” His voice was hoarse, but not nervous. “The man who plunged a dagger in Robb Stark’s heart. We have something in common. We both killed someone who pretended to be king. Do you know that it is thanks to me that you killed Robb Stark and now stand where you are? I used blood magic. Spoke three names to the Lord of Light. Balon Greyjoy, Joffrey Baratheon, Robb Stark. I asked for their deaths. Only the first still lives as far as I know. I suppose he will die soon. You will probably die soon as well. All the Northerners want your head for killing the man they chose to be their king.”

One of Roose’s men kicked the fallen king in the back. That wasn’t really necessary. Words couldn’t hurt the Lord of the Dreadfort, and he thought Stannis knew it. The man lying in the snow before
him knew he was lost.

“You are not very well placed to use such words, Lord Stannis,” Roose commented.

“Am I well placed to use any word?” the pretender replied.

“No,” answered Roose sternly. “Bring the execution block,” he told his men before returning his attention to the usurper. “You’re lucky my son didn’t find you in the first place. I will spare you the peeling of your skin. If he ever does it, it will be on your dead body, though he probably won’t. He likes to do it on people alive much more.”

The block was put into place and Roose Bolton held his sword tall next to Stannis Baratheon’s head. Most of the men in the courtyard were looking at it.

“Stannis of the House Baratheon. You rebelled against your rightful king and nephew,” he began.

“As you did. Twice,” Stannis interrupted. He received another kick in the ribs. He barely whined. Roose resumed.

“In the name of Tommen of the House Baratheon, the First of His Name, King of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm, I Roose of the House Bolton, Lord of the Dreadfort, Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North, sentence you to die. Do you have any last words?”

“Go on, do your duty.”

He was resigned to die. Roose Bolton swung the sword and the last contender to the Iron Throne died. That was the Old Way. The man who passes the sentence should swing the sword. Better to honor tradition. Some northern houses held these traditions very dearly, and they needed these houses more than ever now. Stannis Baratheon’s head was planted on a spike and put on the battlements to be seen by everyone. His body was buried along with many others in a common grave outside the castle’s walls.

Five hours later, Roose Bolton was sitting in his solar, reading reports about the battle. For now, they counted one hundred men lost on their side. A small price to pay for killing Stannis Baratheon. One less threat. However, Shireen Baratheon, Stannis’s daughter, hadn’t been found. She was probably still at Castleblack with her mother, Lady Selyse. She was no great threat for now, without men, and only a girl of ten from what they knew. It would probably be better to let the Iron throne take care of her. She was no threat for the North. Roose’s son finally arrived, smiling wildly. His father paid him no attention.

“Sit,” he commanded. His son executed the order.

“I have killed a hundred men,” Ramsay said uncertainly.

“How many men have you fought?” his father asked. He stopped reading and looked at his son. “How many did you actually fight? Or were they all men crawling on the ground? Do you include those your dogs devoured?” His son didn’t answer. “Then why are you talking about it? Do you feel proud to be less efficient than your mad dogs? You missed Stannis’s execution. His head is on the battlements.”

“We should have flayed him. To honour our traditions.”

“I honored the traditions of the North by killing him in the old way. That’s how we can keep northern houses on our side. We need them. While I was gaining support from the other houses and
killing the usurper, you were hunting men who would have ended up dead anyway. I ordered you to come here hours ago.”

“My wife was lonely. I paid her a visit,” the boy offered as an excuse, still with a wide smile.

“I’m sure she wouldn’t have complained about waiting. You wasted your time. And time is something we cannot waste right now. Did you put a child in the girl at least?”

Ramsay shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“Then I would do my best to put a child in her soon if I were you. Perhaps your technique is not the right one. From personal experience, the women who end up with child willingly produce better results than those who have children unwillingly.” He thought about Domeric, how better and worthier than Ramsay he always was. He rose from his chair and looked straight in his son’s eyes. “It is a great victory we had today. Your command of the cavalry was impressive. Do you feel like a victor?”

“Yes.”

His son was really stupid. “Do you think that burning wagons in the night and moving down tired, outnumbered Baratheons is he same as facing a prepared and provisioned Lannister army?”

“No,” his son finally said while shaking his head. Perhaps he wasn’t completely a fool.

“What do you think are our chances against a prepared and provisioned Lannister army, supported by the Blackfish, the river lords, the Freys, the Hightowers and the Crown? And with Sansa Stark with them? How long do you think the North will stand on our side with Sansa Stark coming back home at the head of a powerful army?”

“We have Walda Frey. Let’s send Lord Frey a finger of hers. He will withdraw his men.”

“Lady Walda is my wife, and the Lady of the Dreadfort. And your stepmother. You sent Theon Greyjoy’s favorite toy, like you call it, to his father. Did he order his men to leave the North after that?” His son shook his head. “If Balon Greyjoy didn’t withdraw for his son and heir, do you think Walder Frey will withdraw for one of his fifty granddaughters?”

“We have Arya Stark,” Ramsay tried to argue again.

“Arya Stark is after Sansa in the line of succession, and she doesn’t have tens of thousand men with her. You didn’t even get a child from her yet, and people barely see her. Who do you think the North will support? You?”

His son had no answer. The Lord of the Dreadfort resumed.

“Our house has been attainted by the Crown. Every lord and lady in the North knows it by now. We won’t be able to hide it to our men for long. We are no longer officially the Wardens of the North, and people know how you treat the daughter of Eddard Stark. I rebelled against the Crown to arrange your marriage with Arya Stark. A reckoning is already on his way in the Neck.”

“The Lannisters are blocked in the Neck.”

“For how long? You think the Cerwyns and the Dustins want so much to fight against Sansa Stark and for us? We are lucky Lord Whitehill has a son at the Citadel who happened to be friend with one of the maesters at the Hightower. Or else we wouldn’t have known about our disgrace before it was announced and the Lannisters would be walking on us as we speak, northern houses joining them on
their way. And we have another enemy to deal with now.” He tossed an unrolled scroll to his son. “Read. I suppose you can.”

His son read for a very long time before he said something. Roose knew he had difficulties to read. “Wildlings? They are no threat,” his son mocked.

“They are. Now that Jon Snow let them pass through the Wall. They are on the lands of the Gift for now, but that won’t last. They will head south as winter comes. Head against the houses that are the most likely to support us against the Lannisters. The Glovers, the Whitehills, the Karstarks. They could even attack the Dreadfort. If the Lannisters take Moat Cailin, we’ll have two enemies on two sides. We cannot hope to defeat them both.”

“Then let’s attack the wildlings and end their threat right now,” proposed Ramsay.

“We would have to cross the lands of the Umbers. Do you think Jon Umber will let us pass without question? He remains loyal to the Starks up to this day.”

“Then let’s kill him.”

“If we do that, if we assassinate the head of one of the most powerful houses in the North, what few support we have will diminish considerably. And we will have to fight the forces of House Umber. Our own forces will be greatly weakened after a fight against the wildlings and the Umbers. Do you think we’ll be able to stand against the Lannisters after that?”

No answer. His son was speechless. Roose always had to lecture him. He resumed one of his many lectures. “Put a son in Arya Stark. If you don’t succeed, then let’s hope Lady Walda is carrying a son.”

He could see worry on Ramsay’s face as he left his solar. That could push him to really impregnate his wife instead of playing with her body. It was a chance the marriage between Tyrion Lannister and Sansa Stark was still unconsummated. If she had a son, then they would have no chance of keeping the North in the long term.

Lord Bolton had ravens sent to all the houses in the North to inform them the usurper Stannis Baratheon was dead and executed according to the old way. He also reminded them that southern invaders were still trying to breach through Moat Cailin, but for now were kept away by the courage and the determination of the Northerners holding it. All the same, they had to defend the North from thieves who were trying to kidnap Arya Stark, the daughter of Eddard Stark. He also warned the lords about the recent arrivals of the wildlings on the lands of the Gift, allowed to pass through the Wall and to live on the lands they ravaged for centuries by the Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch, Jon Snow. With some hope, that would make everyone in the North more suspicious about the Starks who weren’t with House Bolton.

Next, Roose summoned Torrhen Whitehill. The heir to Highpoint entered with a stern and serious look that he would make threatening before anyone else.

“Lord Bolton,” he said as a greeting.

“Sit, Lord Whitehill.” The man sat. “I owe you thanks, I guess. Without you and your brother, we would have a Lannister army marching on us as we speak.”

“My house has served House Bolton faithfully and diligently for centuries, my lord. We’re not about to stop now, even less with the advantages you gave us.”

“And yet, despite these advantages that I gave, your father made mistake after mistake. He destroyed
Ironrath, killed all the Forresters there. He is now unable to provide me the necessary ironwood. And when he was given a chance to marry his son to the last Forrester alive, he refused. Thanks to his refusal, the Hightowers joined the Lannisters in their crusade against us.”

“My father serves you faithfully, my lord,” the heir to Highpoint said in defense. “But I have to admit he can be prickly and proud.”

“Very proud and very prickly, you mean. And very often. His pride led him to mistakes that may cost you the control over the Forrester lands and your family’s wealth. It may even compromise the survival of your family. What do you think Mira Forrester will do when she comes home and see what your family did to hers? Do you believe she will spare you?”

“Sansa Stark may not be more lenient,” Torrhen observed.

“Then we share a common goal. If the army of the south defeats us, both our families are doomed. I hope you understand that.” The man nodded. “I expect your father to send me all his men when we’ll need them. And hopefully, we will defeat the Lannisters. When this will happen, you will marry Mira Forrester. We’ll make sure her husband dies on the battlefield. But this will happen only if we win.”

“I understand, Lord Bolton. We win together, or we die together. House Whitehill will stand side by side with House Bolton, in prosperity and in defeat.”

“That’s a good thing,” Roose remarked sternly. “Go back to Highpoint. Reason your father. Make sure all your men are here when the Lannisters come. You are free to use all means necessary to convince him.”

Torrhen Whithehill rose from his seat and walked away, but before he left he made another observation. “We have to admit one thing however, my lord. My father was utterly stupid when he refused the Forrester girl. However, without his refusal, the girl would never have gone to Oldtown, and my brother would never have warned me. In some way, my brother used our father’s mistakes to our advantage.”

The Warden of the North approved. “Lord Whitehill’s children are more intelligent than him.”

“Yes, we are. My sister Gwyn especially. Too bad she chose her love for some Forrester second son over her own blood. I was the one who discovered their affair many years ago. She died at Ironrath.” The man’s expression turned sour. “She should have been wise enough to forget about him.”

“Too bad,” Roose commented without emotion. “I hope you won’t make the same mistake than her.”

“I won’t. My lord.” Torrhen Whitehill bowed and left.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: someone we haven't seen for a very long time
Jon III

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry for those who hoped that Arya would be back, but not yet. She will come back, don't worry.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

JON III

Jon looked to the north. The wind was whipping at his face, colder than ever. The Citadel may say that winter wasn’t there yet, but Jon knew it was. North of the Wall, it was settled, and it was settled to stay. In his dreams at night, he would see him again. The Night King. Raising his hands. The tens of thousand people who would rise from death behind him. The biggest army in the world.

Jon looked all around at the Wall he was standing at the top of. Could the Wall hold them off? Could the Wall hold the dead? Sam told him there was some magic in the Wall, and Melisandre said the same. Was this magic powerful enough to contain the White Walkers and the dead on the other side? Jon couldn’t know. He would ask Sam if he was still here, but Sam had left several days ago for Eastwatch-by-the-Sea with Gilly and her son. Now that Maester Aemon was dead too, Jon had no one to look into the many books and scrolls of Castleblack’s library. Sam was right. He was better than Jon at reading, and right now they needed someone who could read. They needed someone to find answers.

“Lord Commander,” said a voice on his right. Jon looked at Ser Davos approaching. He arrived yesterday, asking for help. Stannis was stuck in the snows near Winterfell. Jon had an idea where this tempest came from. From Hardhome. He had allowed the Onion Knight to stay at Castleblack, but refused to help Stannis. The Night’s Watch took no part in the wars of the Seven Kingdoms, and the wildlings just survived from Hardhome. He swore a vow. They all swore a vow.

“Ser Davos,” Jon greeted him.

He expected the knight to ask for help again, but he didn’t. “I’ve been talking with some of your men. The ones who came back from Hardhome. Is that true? You fought the dead?”

“We did,” Jon simply answered.

“And… the Night King? His great army?”

“Tens of thousands.”

Ser Davos sighed. “No army in the world can defy it.”

“And their army will keep growing. If they get through the Wall, they will slaughter everyone in the North, then bring them back to fight in their ranks. Then they will invade the Riverlands, the Westerlands, the Crownlands, until they reach Dorne. At each battle, their army will grow stronger, and ours weaker.”
“Can they? Can they breach the Wall?” Fear was plain on Ser Davos’s face. Jon shared it.

“I hope they can’t.” That was all he could say. Jon walked away. Stannis’s Hand followed him. They went to the cage and it began to go down.

“We need Stannis more than ever,” Davos said. “He is a proven battle commander, and he’s the only one among these noble people who knows the White Walkers are coming. But he won’t be able to fight them if he doesn’t take Winterfell, and he won’t take Winterfell without more men.”

“The Night’s Watch doesn’t take part in the politics of the Realm,” repeated Jon. He had been clear about it before, and it wouldn’t change.

“When I left,” resumed Davos, “the horses were dying, our men starving, the sellswords were deserting more and more, and Bolton’s men had attacked us, burning most of our supplies and our siege engines.”

“That changes nothing. The Night’s Watch doesn’t participate to wars among lords and kings.”

“You swore to be the shield that guards the realms of men.”

“Aye, and that’s why we must stay here and defend the Wall against the dead. When the dead come, we need men on the Wall to fight them. We cannot allow ourselves to fight in the south, or else we’re doomed. It won’t matter who sits on the Iron Throne or rules Winterfell if the White Walkers get through the Wall.”

“Who answered your call when Mance Rayder marched on the Wall?” Ser Davos’s voice was angry now. “Who saved you from the wildlings when all was lost? Who lent you his ships when you needed them to save the wildlings beyond the Wall? Who’s the only lord in Westeros to realize and to understand the threat the White Walkers represent?” They had arrived on the ground. Jon opened the grid of the cage. Ser Davos kept following him. “Who came to your aid? Stannis. Now he needs you.”

“We don’t have enough men to make any difference,” said Jon on an exasperated tone. That was the same debate than yesterday.

“The wildlings will make a difference.”

“The wildlings will never fight for Stannis. I told him before,” Jon replied angrily as he turned to face the Onion Knight.

“You saved their bloody lives. If they’re gonna live in the Seven Kingdoms, safe behind our wall, they ought to fight for the damn place.”

“It’s not their fight,” Jon countered firmly. He wouldn’t force the wildlings to spill more of their blood, not after Hardhome and what they faced there. They needed the wildlings when the Wall would be attacked, not to fight for Stannis. The Wall and the Night’s Watch were created to protect the realms of men, including the wildlings. The Wall was theirs as much as it belonged to those who lived south of it.

Before Jon or Davos could say more, someone shouted to open the gates. Jon looked behind him as they opened and saw the last person he expected. The Lady Melisandre. Even from afar, Jon was struck by the expression on her face. It seemed… lifeless. What was she doing here? He looked at Davos, who didn’t seem to understand either. Jon went down the stairs quickly and approached as she dismounted and walked away.
“Stannis?” She didn’t dare to look at him as he asked. Something struck Jon. Normally heath seemed to come out of her body whenever you approached her, but now he could feel nothing. It was cold around her just like everywhere else in Castleblack. She tried to keep walking forward, not looking at him a single time. Davos came to stand before her as she tried to walk away.

“Shireen? The princess?” the knight asked.

She lifted her head after long moments. Her face seemed to glow in usual circumstances. Now it was cold and without expression. She said nothing. She simply walked away, not glancing behind a single time. If she was there, and that Stannis didn’t come back with her, that could only mean one thing. Jon could barely recognize the woman who had tried to seduce him, and almost succeeded.

Jon ordered stewards to prepare a comfortable room for her just like he did for Ser Davos. An hour later, the knight came back to talk with him as Jon was working in his solar. He seemed utterly destroyed, just like the Red Woman, though that didn’t strike like for the lady.

“So?” asked Jon.

“I tried to speak with her,” explained Ser Davos as he sat. His voice was heavy. Jon poured a cup of ale for each of them. “She didn’t speak much, but from what I gathered, the snows melted. They had free passage to Winterfell, but almost all the sellswords deserted and ran away with all the horses. She said nothing more.”

The worst was almost confirmed. “Without the sellswords, how many men could Stannis have?”

“Five thousands, at best.”

“Five thousand men, without supplies, without horses, without siege engines, frozen and tired. What are the chances that Stannis took Winterfell all the same?”

“I’m not the best military mind there is, but I would say none. With the Red Woman here, there is no hope left for Stannis.”

Jon closed his eyes. Stannis was dead. “What about Stannis’s wife? And his daughter?”

“She couldn’t tell me anything about them, but since they didn’t come back with her, I fear…”

Pain and sadness were plain on the knight’s face. His king was dead, and his family too. Jon remembered seeing Ser Davos spending some time with the princess. The Hand of a now dead king was close to tears.

“I’m sorry, Ser Davos. If you wish, I can arrange for a ship at Eastwatch to take you back to your home, wherever it is,” Jon offered.

“It is kind, Lord Commander, and I appreciate the thought, but my home is on an island in the Narrow Sea, near Dragonstone. Dragonstone is besieged as we speak. My keep will soon be taken.”

“I can arrange a passage for you all the same. If the ship bears the colors of the Night’s Watch, it might have a chance to pass through the enemy fleet. You could see your family again.”

“I was Hand to an usurper, officially, for the boy who sits on the Iron Throne now. And this usurper is dead. When they’ll find me, they’ll kill me. My son died on the Blackwater. I have nothing left at home. If my wife is wise enough, she will surrender our keep to survive, when they’ll order her.”

“I can allow you to remain at Castleblack for now, but not forever. Only men of the Night’s Watch
can remain here. Of course, you could still take the black. The Lannisters and the Boltons wouldn’t be able to touch you if you did.”

Ser Davos sighed. “That’s a kind offer, my lord. And a wise one, surely. I’ll think about it.” Davos looked up at Jon. “Stannis saw something in you. He believed in you. He trusted you, and believe me, you needed a lot to earn his trust. The dead are coming, and Stannis saw the necessity to fight them. No matter what happens, I will fight them. But with Stannis dead… No other lord in the Seven Kingdoms will be ready to help us.”

Jon realized something. Stannis was dead, his armies scattered. There was no longer an enemy of the Crown at the Wall. “You’re wrong, ser. I just got words from Eastwatch-by-the-Sea. Ships have arrived with two hundred prisoners from the Westerlands. And with supplies too. Lord Tyrion Lannister sent us help, and now that Stannis is dead… He will be able to send us more men. Not only prisoners this time. Soldiers.”

Davos looked at Jon. “Are you sure?”

“Lord Tyrion visited the Wall three years ago. He knows the White Walkers are real and back. He’s married to my sister. He will send us help, now that Stannis is no longer here.”

Davos nodded, though it was obvious he wasn’t eager to accept help from the Lannisters. Jon understood. Despite Sansa’s assurances that she was well treated and happy at Casterly Rock, he couldn’t help but hate House Lannister for the Red Wedding and everything that happened to his family. He wasn’t sure if he could still consider Tyrion Lannister a friend, but he sent them some help at least. That was a beginning.

Ser Davos rose from his seat. “I will go, and take some rest. I need it. Good night, Lord Commander.”

Ser Davos left. Jon was served his dinner by Olly, and like always he ate alone in his solar. He wrote dozens of messages to be sent by ravens to the other houses, and two specially for Casterly Rock. One was for Lord Tyrion, saying Stannis was dead and they needed his help more than ever after the massacre of Hardhome. The second one was for Sansa. Jon wanted to reassure her. He told her he had gone beyond the Wall and that was the reason why she received no ravens from him for some time. He wrote he fought against the dead, but got out of it without injury. However, he scrapped the first version of the message and removed the part about the battle at Hardhome in the second version he gave to Olly. Maybe if he sent enough ravens to all the lords, some would begin to understand they weren’t joking when they said the dead were back. With hope, House Bolton would even understand why he let wildlings go through the Wall, though Jon had some doubts about it. Would the Northerners accept the wildling’s presence on the Gift? Jon knew there would be some opposition, especially from those living close to the Gift.

Late in the evening, at the light of candles, Jon tried to catch up with the ravens he received while away at Hardhome. Many were unread and unrolled because of Maester Aemon’s death and the time Sam spent at his side in his last hours. Some came from the other two castles on the Wall, others were polite answers from lords to who he asked men. Mostly, they refused, giving all sorts of pretexts. With Stannis dead, it was obvious their only chance to get help from the south was Casterly Rock.

Jon found a scroll with the crowned stag on it. It came from King’s Landing, from the king. Jon unrolled it and began to read, his mind half away, tired of the day.

_I, Tommen of the House Baratheon, First of My Name, King of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, and Lord of the Seven Kingdoms, hereby strips House Bolton of all its lands, castles and_
titles. House Bolton is declared traitor to the Realm for the abduction and the forced marriage of the Lady Arya Stark to Ramsay Bolton.

Jon’s heart bumped into his chest. Arya. Arya? Arya was dead. She disappeared after their father died. And now she was back? And married to Ramsay Bolton? Jon went back to reading the scroll, his senses fully alert now.

House Bolton is attainted. All who shall remain loyal to them and follow them are to share their disgrace. Ramsay Bolton raped, beat and sequestered the Lady Arya in Winterfell. All houses of the North are called to fight against House Bolton and to recognize Sansa Stark as Lady of Winterfell and Wardeness of the North. All those who oppose her will be branded traitors to the Realm.

The king’s stamp was at the end of the message. Jon’s heart had stopped. Arya was at Winterfell. Ramsay Bolton raped, beat and sequestered the Lady Arya in Winterfell. A million thoughts were running in his head. Why didn’t Sansa tell him anything? Surely she knew about this if the king knew. Jon looked among the messages the ravens brought. He found the last one Sansa sent, but that was only a few words on her name day and a tapestry Lord Tyrion had made for her, representing all their family with Winterfell behind. Even Jon was on it. How could Sansa speak about a tapestry when their sister was being raped by the Boltons? Right now, Jon only wanted to saddle his horse and ride for Winterfell to save his little sister.

That was when Olly burst into the solar without warning. “Lord Commander. It’s one of the wildlings you brought back. Says he knows your uncle Benjen. Says he’s still alive.”

Jon was too dumbstruck to react first. He just learnt Arya was alive, and now it was his uncle Benjen. Before his lack of response, Olly spoke again.

“He’s outside, my lord. Waiting for you.”

Jon realized what was going on and got on his feet. “Are you sure he’s talking about Benjen?”

“Said he was First Ranger. Said he knows where to find him.”

Jon walked immediately out of his solar, conflicting thoughts in his head. Arya and Benjen were both still alive. He had to save them both. He couldn’t lose another member of his family. He came into the courtyard, putting on his gloves while walking. Ser Alliser Thorne was waiting at the end of the stairs.

“Man says he saw you uncle at Hardhome at the last full moon,” the knight said.

“Could be lying,” replied Jon, though he hoped it was no lie. He followed his First Ranger. If he hoped there was some lie in what he learnt this evening, he hoped it was in the ravens he received form the king and that Arya was not really in Winterfell between Bolton hands.

“Could be,” conceded Ser Alliser. “There are ways to find out.”

“Where is he?”

“Over there.”

Ser Alliser pointed a group of men assembled near a corner of the courtyard with torches. Jon pushed them aside and walked to the man they encircled. But there was no man. Only a wooden cross. With the light of the torches, Jon could see what was written on it in black ink. TRAITOR. There was no wildling. Only the cross with the word. And Jon was standing right before it. He slowly turned to face the men behind him, only to come face to face with Ser Alliser.
Jon felt a sudden pain in his belly. Ser Alliser had planted a dagger into him and looked at him with hatred in his eyes. Jon let a groan escape from his mouth. Ser Alliser’s expression did not change as he said the words.

“For the Watch.”

The knight retrieved the knife. A second man shove another knife in Jon’s belly and said the same words. It was Othell Yarwyck, his first Builder. Then Bowen Marsh, the First Steward, did the same. Jon received other knives. He recognized a man who arrived only recently from King’s Landing. Ser Meryn Trant. The man who poisoned Joffrey. In the end, he was on his knees, feeling blood coming to his mouth. The men were all looking at him. TRAITOR. That was what they thought he was. A traitor. Their eyes said so. They betrayed him. Why? He did what was good. He respected his vows. From the crowd standing before him, a figure detached itself.

It was Olly. No. Not you too. Olly was looking at him. Not with the angry eyes he had all the last times they saw each other, but with something else. Terror. Fear. Jon tried to speak, but he couldn’t. The pain in the belly… He tried to speak to the boy. He couldn’t let him do this. He was only a child, a boy of ten, no older than Bran.

“Olly…” He couldn’t manage to say more. He felt his body getting empty of blood. Olly’s face hardened. The wildlings had taken his home and his family, and Jon let them live on the lands where he grew up. He thrust his own dagger inside Jon’s heart.

“For the Watch.” Only hatred was left on his face as he said the words.

Jon fell on the ground behind him. All was going black around him. Sensations were leaving his body. He thought about his father. About Robb. Did he feel like this when he was stabbed in the heart? About Benjen, who he wasn’t sure if he was alive or dead. About Bran and Rickon, probably still alive. About Sansa, her messages still in his solar. About Arya, who he just discovered was still alive. He could never save her. He would never see them again. Bran. Rickon. Sansa. Arya. He remembered ruffling her hair. First lesson: stick them with the pointy end.

After that, there was only darkness. There was nothing. Nothing at all.

Chapter End Notes

Very similar to the show, though with a few changes. We go back to original chapters with the next one.

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
“I suppose he sent Gerold with the army in part because he didn’t want any other accident to happen. That wasn’t the main reason, but I think it had some role in it.”

“And he sent you away with your husband as well? A lady travelling with an army?” Sansa asked, a little surprised.

“I told Lord Leyton that the people of my family’s lands would be more likely to fight on our side if I was there. I spent several years in the south, but I’m still a Forrester, and the last one. If I’m not here, my family’s men could only see southern invaders coming to take Ironrath.”

Mira’s explanations reminded Sansa of someone else’s situation, though to the opposite of Mira, Sansa didn’t feel like she was still a Northerner. Mira was trying to persuade her she was still a child of the North, but so far her attempts didn’t have more success than Tyrion’s. Sansa suspected her husband was behind Mira’s attempts. She appreciated their efforts, but no matter what they would say, Sansa couldn’t get out of her the feeling that she was now a Lannister through and through. The fact that the path to the North was blocked to her and her sickness when they were almost there seemed to only confirm her doubts. How much time had passed since she last opened her necklace and looked at the direwolf? Instead, during the hours when Tyrion was away, she would look at the golden lion, unable to make her eyes leave it. She missed Cerenna, Genna, Joy, Myrielle, Lanna, even some of the Frey boys, Genna’s grandsons. She was happy to have Mira back with her, but still.

Sansa’s health had improved enough in the three weeks following Mira’s arrival so that she may start again to leave her tent. She participated to war councils, visited the sick and the injured, and spent a lot of time with Mira. They were the two only women in the camp. It was a good thing they were both here. They had a lot to tell each other about their new lives in Casterly Rock and Oldtown. Sansa was shocked about Mira’s tale of the accident that happened not long before they left the Hightower with their men. No one would have dared to raise a hand against Sansa in Casterly Rock. However, when she thought about it, Mira was only married to a grandson of the Lord of the Hightower. Still, that was unacceptable. Sansa almost laughed when she tried to imagine how Mira’s brother-in-law had looked like after the beating her husband gave him. After the Twins, Ser Gerold’s way to deal with someone slapping Mira looked funny.

Sansa had told Mira about the events at the Twins. Sansa was still unsure about what to think about it. Tyrion had ordered two men to be executed right in front of everyone, then their bodies thrown into the river, like the Freys had done to her mother’s body. And then, he had sent their heads over the walls of the Twins with trebuchets. At Riverrun, Sansa hadn’t really cared about the executions of Black Walder and Lame Lothar. They were executed for their crimes. That was justice. However,
at the Twins, that wasn’t really justice. Sansa didn’t really feel pity for the two Freys who had died. They were despicable and had participated to the Red Wedding, but it was the staging Tyrion put in place for their death that worried her. He had done it to force Walder Frey to surrender. That had worked well. They had gotten back all the prisoners and the Frey army was with them on their march to Winterfell. All the same, the way Tyrion had these men killed publicly…

While Tyrion had been conducting the executions, he had seemed… He had looked like… The icy stare. The cold face without emotion that showed no concession would be made. The song when they negotiated with Walder Frey. Words that Genna told her long ago had come back to her mind. Tyrion has a lot of Tywin in him, but also his mother’s compassion. Up to now this compassion has kept Tywin’s ruthlessness away, but I fear one day it might not be enough. When this day comes, Tyrion will need you. It will be your duty to stop him from doing something he may regret for the rest of his life. At the Twins, Sansa hadn’t seen the kind husband who offered his hand after she was beaten before the court. She had seen the son of Tywin Lannister. The cruelty Tyrion used there was only limited to two people, and two people who certainly deserved to die, but all the same, it was disconcerting, and frightening, to see Tyrion look so much like his father. Was Genna right? She hoped not. She didn’t want to see Tyrion turn like his father. For now, everything seemed alright. She hadn’t seen the shadow of Tywin Lannister in Tyrion’s eyes after they left the Twins, and she hoped she wouldn’t see it again. If it came back, Sansa may have to do what Genna told her. She would have to stop Tyrion to do something he may regret for the rest of his life. But what would that something be? How would she stop him? She hoped Genna’s prediction would never become real.

Mira had been surprised and looked uneasy after Sansa told her about the Twins. Her friend didn’t have much respect for the Freys either. She stayed away from all of them, even Olyvar and Ser Perwyn. In the end, Mira had said it allowed to free dozens of people without killing thousands. All the same, Sansa could see Mira didn’t entirely approve what Tyrion had done and was uncomfortable with that.

“I’m glad you’re here, Mira. I needed company,” said Sansa as she took a gulp of wine. Tyrion had made sure they had enough of it when they left Casterly Rock. Too bad they couldn’t bring as much food with them, considering the supply problems they had recently. They were not that major, but they were problems still.

“Well, I’m sure you could survive without me, Sansa. I heard that you get along quite well with Lord Tyrion now,” said Mira.

“Yes. Finally.” Mira nodded. She knew what Sansa meant. “Things seem to go well with your husband as well.”

“Yes.” Mira’s cheeks reddened a little. “He’s not the most fantastic man there is, but he’s kind and gentle, and he loves me. Someone would need to be blind to not see it. Margaery saw it the second she saw Gerold before her.”

Sansa smiled. Mira and her husband had stopped at King’s Landing on their way to the Neck, and Mira had the chance to see Margaery and her friend Sera during the day they stayed in the capital. She had learned there that Dragonstone and Storm’s End had fallen. The last holdouts of Stannis Baratheon were gone. Sansa wished she could see Margaery again. According to Mira, Margaery had a few problems in the capital with religious fanatics and Ser Kevan’s mistrust. Mira hadn’t really liked her stay that night in the capital after Nymeria Sand, Oberyn Martell’s daughter who came to replace him on the small council, had tried to seduce her husband. Mira told her she had surprised Ser Gerold Hightower talking with the Dornish young woman and that her husband had looked ashamed at this moment, when he realized Mira saw her. If Oberyn’s daughters were like their father in private life…
“I suppose anyone who slaps you will end without a few teeth,” supposed Sansa.

They both laughed quietly. “I hope so. Or else they will end dead. Gerold was really going to kill his brother. He would have if they hadn’t been separated.” Mira seemed worried.

It was at this moment that Ser Gerold Hightower entered the tent. Sansa had seen him several times before. He wasn’t a very handsome man, but he wasn’t ugly either. What transpired the most of him in all circumstances was frustration, but also his love for Mira. He was often displeased about himself and the waiting in the Neck, and only his wife seemed able to calm him.

“Oh, excuse me. Lady Lannister.” He bowed before her. He always seemed troubled in Sansa’s presence. Mira thought it was because he rarely saw highborn ladies from other houses. He had acted the same way with Margaery in King’s Landing. “I didn’t want to interrupt something.”

“You interrupt nothing, Ser Gerold,” Sansa said. “I hope everything is alright in the camp.”

“It could be better,” he said with a tired voice. He went to Mira. “Hi, my dear.” He kissed her on the forehead and went to pour himself a cup of wine. He sat next to Mira. “My men are growing restless. I lost fifty when we attacked the fortress.”

“We shouldn’t have attacked it, Gerold,” said Mira. She laid her hand on his. “Moat Cailin has never been taken by force. We had another proof when we tried last week.”

“I know, Mira. But I still don’t understand how a ruin can be impregnable. Moat Cailin is falling into ruins.”

“Just like Harrenhal,” pointed out Sansa.

“And Highpoint,” added Mira. “You remember when I showed you the picture?”

Mira’s husband nodded. “Yes, I remember. Perhaps I should have remembered before I decided to put my men in the vanguard when we assaulted the fortress.”

Suddenly, Sansa didn’t feel very well. “Please excuse me.” She left the tent and came back two minutes later. “Forgive me. It’s these swamps, I’m afraid.”

“It’s alright, Sansa. No need to apologize,” Mira said.

Sansa spoke with her friend and her husband for a few more minutes when Podrick came in. “My lady, Lord Tyrion is requesting your presence. There are people who just arrived who wish to speak with you,” the squire explained.

“Which people?” Sansa asked.

“I don’t know, my lady. One had red robes and the other a patch on the eye.”

Sansa frowned. She knew no one fitting that description, but she excused herself to Mira and Ser Gerold and followed Podrick outside. He led her to the tent of the commanders. When she entered she saw Tyrion and Ser Brynden on one side of the table and the two men Podrick described on the other side. They wore ragged clothes but had chainmail on them too. They looked quite miserable. However, when she entered, they rose from their seats and bowed before her.

“Lady Sansa,” said the one with red robes. “It’s pleasure to see you again after all this time. Perhaps you do not remember me. The last time we saw each other was in King’s Landing. I was fat, and with a burning sword.”
Sansa looked carefully at the man’s face. She had the impression to have seen him before, and then she remembered. The flaming sword. “You are Thoros of Myr,” she said.

“At your service my lady.” He opened the arms and bowed a little again. “And the man at my side is my friend, Lord Beric Dondarrion.”

Sansa looked at the man standing next to Thoros of Myr. She couldn’t recognize the handsome knight she saw during the Hand’s Tourney. “My lady. I’m sorry for your father. He was a good man. I tried to carry out his orders, and sadly I failed,” Lord Beric said.

Sansa tried to recompose herself. “You did your best, Lord Beric. I’m sure my father would have nothing to reproach you. You are of the Brotherhood Without Banners?”

“We are,” answered Thoros. “Or at least we are what is left of the Brotherhood. We are no longer who we were. The war in the Riverlands is over thanks to your husband’s efforts. Many of us have turned outlaws. We could gather only a few of them to follow us here.”

“They are only fifty,” explained Sansa’s granduncle. “But they laid down their weapons, so they can live. Since Lord Dondarrion is a lord, we accepted to let him join us. More men,” scoffed her uncle. “If only we could get a way to breach through this moat with more men.”

“Lady Sansa,” said Lord Beric. “We have some things to tell you. To you alone.”

Sansa looked at Tyrion and Ser Brynden, then back to Lord Dondarrion. “If you want to tell me something, you can tell it before my husband and Ser Brynden. They are my family.”

Thoros of Myr and Lord Beric seemed to hesitate, but finally they accepted and sat. Sansa went to sit next to Tyrion. She noticed Lord Dondarrion was looking at him suspiciously. The two men before her asked for wine and they were given some by Podrick. He also poured some for Sansa, Tyrion and Ser Brynden, though Sansa eyed Podrick to make him understand to not give too much to her husband like always.

“Well, my lady,” began the red priest after a long sip of wine, “let’s go straight to the point. We saw your sister.”

Sansa almost choke on the wine she just drank. “What? You saw Arya? In Winterfell? How is she?”

“No. Not in Winterfell. In fact, we only learned recently that she was there. That’s one of the reasons why we came here. We saw her in the Riverlands. About a year ago.”

“A year ago?” Tyrion asked.

“Aye. A year ago. Not long before the Red Wedding. We found her on the Kingsroad, travelling with two boys, one fat and another one who looked like a young Robert Baratheon. She was dressed like a boy. We brought them to an inn and gave them supper. We didn’t know first who she was. We were about to send them away when the Hound was brought before us.”

“The Hound?” Sansa asked, even more surprised.

“Aye. Sandor Clegane. We captured him not long after Blackwater. We judged him for his crimes in a trial by combat and he won. So we let him go. But before he left he recognized your sister. She spent some time with us, a few months. We were planning on bringing her to Riverrun and give her back to your brother.”

“And get a fine ransom by the same way, I suppose,” said Tyrion.
“We needed weapons to fight for the people,” replied Lord Beric. “And we needed gold to buy weapons. We could simply have sold her out to you, Lannister. We would have gotten much more gold.”

“If you had tried to sell her to my father, he would have had you executed after paying you. A Lannister always pays his debts, but he pays all his debts.”

“And I suppose he was paying debts when he ordered his mad dog to ravage the Riverlands?”

“Enough!” said Sansa firmly before this went without control. “What happened to my sister? What happened to Arya? How did she end up in the hands of Roose Bolton?”

“We don’t know, my lady,” answered Thoros. “As I said, we wanted to bring her to Riverrun, but we did some detours and she didn’t agree with us. She escaped one night, and we never saw her afterwards. That wasn’t long before the Red Wedding. After that, we never saw her again, though we heard a strange tale one day. I visited an inn not long after the Red Wedding. It had been turned down and was a real mess. The innkeeper told me that some Lannister men had visited it and that the Hound showed up not long after they arrived. He was with a boy according to the man, but from the description he gave us, the boy could have been your sister. There was a fight and the Lannister soldiers were killed. Your sister killed two men according to the innkeeper and his daughter. After that, we know nothing of her whereabouts.”

“The Hound and Arya Stark,” said Tyrion on a skeptical voice after the tale was over. “Quite an odd pair. Though Arya Stark was no ordinary girl. What would Sandor Clegane have tried to do with her?”

“Probably ransom her, just like we intended.”

Tyrion looked thoughtful. “Thank you, Lord Beric. Thank you, Thoros of Myr. My men will find some tents for your own.”

“With pleasure.” The red priest rose and his friend did the same, though not with the same enthusiasm. Lord Beric had a strange expression. His face looked… lifeless. “Can we get wine? I need some. If you want, Lord Tyrion, I’ll give you a revenge for our last drinking contest.”

“If I remember well, you’re the one who would need a revenge.”

“I never said whose revenge it was.”

“No drinking contest,” said Sansa harshly.

Tyrion looked at her, then made a twisted smile to the red priest. “Sorry, Thoros. My wife says I can’t.”

Thoros of Myr looked with a queer face to Tyrion, then to Sansa, and burst in laughter. “Did you stop visiting brothels as well?”

“Yes, he did,” answered Sansa for Tyrion. “And before we were married. You would do well to not try to bring it back.”

Thoros of Myr left, laughing, Lord Beric following him with a sour face. Sansa noticed he hadn’t drunk at all. His cup was full. Sansa took it and spilled it on the floor before Tyrion could think about drinking it.

“Well, now we know where Arya was last year. In the Riverlands. Too bad Robb didn’t cross her
“She would have died at the Red Wedding then,” Sansa replied gloomily. “But what happened after. If the accident at the inn is true… Where did the Hound bring her?”

“He probably delivered her to the Boltons. That would explain how she ended up in Winterfell,” assumed her granduncle.

“No, the Hound would never have done something like that.” Sansa knew he wouldn’t have. She hoped he hadn’t. He had wanted to bring her in the North with him. He had protected her in King’s Landing, as rude as he was. She had even thought for a time that he had kissed her before he left her chamber that night of the battle. She had never seen him again afterwards. What happened to him?

“Why would the Hound have brought Arya Stark to the Boltons?” asked Tyrion. “He had nothing to gain from that. He didn’t serve House Lannister anymore, and the Boltons were allies to my father at this time. I think Thoros of Myr was right. He would have tried to give her to someone who would have been ready to pay for her. My father would be the best choice if you want the biggest amount of money, but the Hound has a bounty of a hundred silver stags on his head. He deserted the Kingsguard during the Battle of Blackwater. He would have been executed at the moment he would have set a foot inside King’s Landing again. No one can miss him. His face is too much recognizable. The most logical choice after the Red Wedding would have been Riverrun.”

Tyrion questioningly turned his eyes to Ser Brynden. Sansa’s granduncle shook his head. “I haven’t seen anything resembling the Hound or Arya Stark at Riverrun. Though I never saw your sister, Sansa. I wouldn’t have recognized her anyway. But with his half-burned face, I think I would have recognized the Hound. Anyway, we were under siege. Even if he had wanted to give her to me, he wouldn’t have been able to pass through the Lannister lines unnoticed.”

“You’re right, Ser Brynden. All we know is that Arya was with the Brotherhood for some time, then possibly with the Hound not long later. We don’t know what happened to her afterwards.”

“We know she ended at Winterfell. This is all that matter. It’s not about how she arrived between Bolton’s hands, but where she is now. We have to save her. Let’s hope your Manderly allies will arrive soon, or else we’ll freeze in the Neck when winter comes.”

On that, the Blackfish left after a bow to Sansa. She and Tyrion left not long after and went back to their tent. On the way, Sansa wondered how Arya ended with the Boltons all the same. Had the Hound given her away to them? No, he wouldn’t have. He swore he would protect her if she followed him. That he would bring her back home. He wouldn’t have given Arya to her family’s enemies. Then how did she end in Winterfell? Did she escape the Hound and went there all alone? Where they captured? Sansa wondered if the Hound was still alive somewhere. She hoped he was.

As they approached, Sansa had to excuse herself again and only entered the tent a few minutes later. She dined with Tyrion like always, but she wasn’t very hungry.

“You did it again?” Tyrion asked.

“Yes,” she answered.

“I’m worried, Sansa. You have no longer any fever or cough, but you’re still sick. You should see the maester about it.”

Tyrion really seemed worried about her. “I’ll go and see him,” she promised.

Sansa did it as soon as the dinner was over. Maester Wyllam, who was in service of a small house in
the Westerlands whose name Sansa couldn’t remember, examined her to see what was wrong. He took her pulse and her heartbeat. He had a strange look on his face as the examination went on.

“You’ve been sick recently, my lady. Am I wrong?” he asked.

“Yes. A cold not long after we arrived. Because of the weather,” she answered.

“You were not the only one to catch one. It’s no surprise. All the symptoms disappeared? You don’t feel cold? You don’t cough? No fever?”

“None. It stopped about two weeks ago. But the vomiting persists.”

“Did you eat a lot recently, Lady Sansa?”

“No. I barely eat anything. Everything I eat seems to leave.”

Those damn swamps. Sansa wanted to curse them, though she wouldn’t do it loudly. Tyrion was better than her for this kind of things. Though that changed nothing to the fact she wanted to leave this damn place and go anywhere except the Neck. They were losing time here. Couldn’t these men inside Moat Cailin see that they fought for monsters? They probably knew it. The men serving Joffrey knew he was a monster, and they kept serving him all the same. Perhaps her father had been wrong about the loyalty of Northerners to the Starks. They let her little sister being a toy for a bastard. The maester continued his examination for some time. After many minutes, he had a queer look on his face.

“And?” Sansa asked.

“Lady Sansa,” he began, hesitating. Was it grave? “If I may ask you… Do you remember the last time when you had your moonblood?”

“Yes. That wasn’t long ago. It was…” Sansa realized something. She remembered when it last took place. It was back when they were at the Twins, but it was almost… two months ago. She looked at the maester. That couldn’t be.

Maester Wyllam was now smiling. “I don’t think you’re sick, my lady.”

Without thinking, Sansa ran outside the maester’s tent, not even caring to thank him. She ran through all the camp until she finally arrived to her pavilion. People were yelling inside.

“Where are the Manderlys? Tell me,” asked an angry voice.

Another voice answered. It was her husband’s voice. “I don’t know where they are. I sent them a raven.”

Sansa came in the middle of an argument between Tyrion and her granduncle. That wasn’t the first. They stopped when they saw her at the entrance.

“Oh, Sansa. And? What did the maester say?” asked Tyrion, his voice much softer than before, but showing some exasperation all the same.

“Tyrion.” She couldn’t contain her excitement. “I’m pregnant.”

Tyrion’s face changed completely, going from worry and tiredness to utter surprise and incomprehension. “What?”
“I’m pregnant,” she repeated, a large smile on her face.

Tyrion still didn’t seem to understand. That was quite simple though. She was with child. His child. Tyrion looked back to the Blackfish who looked as stunned as he was. Tyrion looked back at her. “Are you sure?”

“Of course, I am. I’m pregnant.”

Tyrion seemed to understand what she just told him and a wide smile slowly appeared on his face. “That’s… That’s marvelous!”

She couldn’t wait more, knelt and pulled him into an embrace. She was giggling, her head on his shoulder. They stood like that for a moment until she felt a shadow on her. Ser Brynden Tully was standing before them, a little smile on his lips. She broke her embrace with her husband to stand before her granduncle.

“Well,” he said, “I never thought I would live long enough to be a great-granduncle. Your mother would be proud of you.”

He opened his arms and Sansa jumped in them. For the first time since they met at Riverrun, Ser Brynden Tully hugged his grandniece.

Chapter End Notes

To all those who suspected Sansa was pregnant in the last chapter, you were right. She is pregnant. The symptoms in the last chapters might have been caused by the cold she caught or her pregnancy, or both of them, but she was pregnant.

Please review

Next chapter: a new POV
Trystane I

Here begins the arc of Meereen, and with it comes a new POV: Trystane Martell. Yes, it took him about twenty chapters to get there, but he did. There's also another character who makes a first appearance.

One of the crew members came to tell him they were approaching Meereen. Trystane nodded to show he understood and the man left. Trystane Martell had left Dorne many months ago after his father gave him the order to find the Dragon Queen. He had taken a ship at the Planky Town for Lys, then another one from there brought him to Volantis, and a third was bringing him to Meereen. And now he had reached his destination.

Trystane had paid the captain enough to not have to work while on the ship, but not too much in order to not awake suspicion. No one was to know that the heir to Sunspear was going to Meereen. He was travelling under an alias and spent all his time in the crew quarters, speaking to no one, answering to no one, looking to no one. He heard some men calling him “the man without a tongue”. He could have been without tongue right now. He didn’t want to speak. He didn’t want to think. He didn’t even want to live. Not without Myrcella.

As always when her memory came back while he was alone, he let tears come to him. It would be better if he cried alone, when no one was looking, all the crew working on the deck. He remembered her beautiful green eyes. Her shining golden hair, like a crown under the sun. Her soft skin. Her sweet lips when they kissed. Her smile. He loved her, and now she was gone. He hadn’t been able to save her. His father had failed to protect his own sister, and Trystane had failed to protect the woman he loved. She died right in front of him, blood running out of her nose and covering her face. Even in death she had looked like a beauty from another world. Trystane wept for Myrcella, letting the tears flow until his eyes were dry again. When they docked, he was able to leave the ship without showing anyone his sorrow. He wore a hood so that no one may recognize him, even though he thought that was unlikely to happen so far from Dorne.

As soon as he left the ship, he could see the Great Pyramid of Meereen standing tall at the center of the city. Trystane had never seen such a tall building. He wondered if he would be able to climb the stairs to the top. Daenerys Targaryen surely lived at the top of it. He felt the parchment, inside a fold of his tunic, rubbing against his belly. He hated this contract. Myrcella’s body was barely cold and he had to marry another woman. He hated his father for that. But despite this, Doran Nymeros Martell, Lord of Sunspear and Prince of Dorne, was still his father and Trystane had to obey his orders. His father had always taught him to never let his personal feelings bring him to make decisions against the well-being of the people of Dorne. Today, Trystane had to apply this principle, and it was far more difficult then he ever imagined. His father was right. The Lannisters would seek retribution for what happened to Myrcella. Trystane was seeking retribution as well, but he doubted the Lannisters would accept his father’s explanations about the fact Myrcella was killed by Tyene, and his father...
didn’t want to execute a family member. Trystane wished his father no longer considered Tyene like family. Trystane walked in the direction of the Great Pyramid. The part of him who loved Myrcella hoped the Targaryen queen would refuse his father’s proposal, but the part who encouraged him to act as the future Lord of Sunspear, although it was weak for now, hoped she would accept. Trystane wondered how Daenerys Targaryen looked like.

The docks were busy, like it was to be expected, but as soon as Trystane left the area of the port, everything changed. The streets should have been busy with merchants and customers and people walking all around to perform their tasks and go there or there, like he saw in Volantis and in Lys. Instead, the streets were almost empty. Everything was silent. Even the Water Gardens, a haven of tranquillity in Dorne, looked like a noisy market in comparison. There wasn’t a single sound. Some wooden constructions had even fallen apart in some places, and no one took care to clean the debris. Everything was so silent and looked completely frozen in time. The very few people who walked into the streets were walking quickly when they weren’t running. The only people who didn’t try to leave the streets as quickly as possible were beggars, and even then they looked afraid of anyone approaching them. Trystane had converted his Westerosi currencies into money of Slavor’s Bay before he left Volantis. His father always told him to give what he could to the needy when he met some. Their family was lucky to live comfortably and richly. It was their duty to alleviate the sufferings of those who didn’t have their chance. Trystane gave a coin to every man and woman and child he met who asked for some.

The way from the docks to the base of the Great Pyramid was long and climbing. It took him some time before he arrived before the Great Pyramid, and there he was intercepted by men clad in black leather armor, with black helmet, black shield and all carrying a spear. They blocked him the path to the stairs.

One of them asked him something in Low Valyrian. Trystane thought he asked him what he was doing here, though his Valyrian could be better. He mostly knew High Valyrian, the language of the elite in Westeros, but Low Valyrian was another matter, and sadly that was the language spoken by most of the people in Meereen. These men were soldiers, certainly the Unsullied Daenerys Targaryen had found in Astapor. Did they understand High Valyrian like the Low? Surely they would understand it better that the common tongue of Westeros.

Very slowly, choosing his words very carefully, Trystane tried to explain. “My name is Trystane Martell, son of Doran Martell, Lord of Sunspear and Prince of Dorne. I am here to speak to the queen on behalf of my father.”

The men exchanged queer looks between them. One stepped forward and asked a question in the common tongue. “What business have you with our queen?”

His mastering of the common tongue could be better, but Trystane was relieved to see one of them could understand him in this language. “I will state my business to the queen, and only to the queen.”

The soldier stared at him for a moment, then he turned to another man beside him and told him something in Low Valyrian so quickly that Trystane couldn’t understand. The other soldier ran toward the pyramid immediately. The one who knew the common tongue turned back his attention to Trystane. “You will wait here.”

Trystane supposed the man was sent to inform Queen Daenerys of his presence. So Trystane waited, the eyes of a decade of Unsullied staring at him, watching every one of his movements. He wondered if they didn’t receive a similar formation to the one Hotah received in Norvos.

It took a long time before the soldier who was sent came back. Perhaps it was only the long stairs to climb to the top of the Pyramid, but Trystane wondered if Daenerys would like to see him. She
would surely accept to receive him. House Martell had fought loyally for her family during Robert’s Rebellion, and they paid the high price for this. Trystane was a relative for her since his aunt had been married to her brother, Rhaegar Targaryen. At the same time, Trystane had heard terrible tales about Daenerys Stormborn, the Breaker of Chains. It was said she burned thousands of people and the whole city of Astapor when she took the Unsullied from their masters, and some said she executed masters by the thousands in Meereen as well, crucifying them and letting them rot in the sun for hours or days until they were so desperate to ask for death, then she would feed them to her dragons. Trystane didn’t approve slavery, but he didn’t approve cruelty either. If the stories about this young woman were true, then Trystane wondered if the vengeance his father was seeking was really worth it. Did they really want another Mad King? Or a Mad Queen?

The soldier who left finally came back and told something in the ear of the one who Trystane spoke with. This soldier turned again to face him. “Follow me.”

He turned away and walked to the stairs of the Great Pyramid. Trystane did as he was told after a moment. The climb to the top of the Pyramid was long, but at least most of the steps were inside the pyramid and not outside, so they were protected from the heat of the sun. The temperature was quite cool inside. They arrived to what seemed to be an audience chamber, with an simple ebony bench at the top of the stairs, pillars, walls, ceiling and floor all made of marble, about ten Unsullied standing tall, their back turned to the walls. However, it wasn’t a queen sitting on the bench who welcomed Trystane, but a slender man standing straight in black leather without helmet, with a shaved head and a tanned skin, who was waiting at the base of the stairs leading to the bench. He stared at Trystane with a serious look, undisturbed, like he was a statue. Again, this remembered him of Hotah. Trystane supposed he had to be an Unsullied as well, perhaps their commander or at least an officer since he wore no helmet.

“You are Trystane Martell?” the man asked, not caring about welcoming him. His mouth was the only thing that moved as he spoke, the rest of his body unflinching.

“I am,” answered Trystane, trying to put some assurance in his voice.

“What is your business with our queen?”

“I will only talk about it with the queen,” Trystane replied. He tried again to sound sure of himself, though he wasn’t with all these overtrained soldiers in the room. Trystane only had a dagger on him, and it was removed before he entered the Pyramid. He was an unharmed man among armed men trained to kill since they were born.

The expression of the officer standing before him seemed to change a little, but only for a moment. Something like sadness or regret showed up on the face for a moment. “Our queen is gone.”

Trystane stood there for a moment, struggling to find his words, everything silent around him. “Gone?”

“You must be the only one to ignore it. She left about two weeks ago.”

“Where did she go? Tell me where I can find her.” Trystane had to find Daenerys Targaryen. If he didn’t find her, and couldn’t convince her to come to Westeros immediately, then Dorne was lost.

“No one knows where she went. She left on the back of her dragon, and no one saw her ever since the Great Games.”

Daenerys had left on the back of a dragon? That seemed almost impossible, and yet, there had been dragons only a century ago. Now they were back, and she could ride one. The rumors were true.
That meant she could help them. His father was right. The Dragon Queen may be their only chance to save Dorne.

“Where is she?” he asked again.

“We don’t know. We sent two men to find her.”

“Two?” Only two men? How could they hope to find her? Dorne needed her right now. He knew what he had to do. His father gave him a mission, and if he failed, Dorne was lost. “I must find her. I’ll go and search for her.”

Trystane turned on his heels and walked to the exit, only for his path to be blocked by the spears of the two men guarding it. “You’re not leaving. You will stay here until our queen comes back.”

Trystane turned again to face the officer. “You would get yourself killed outside, and no one is leaving the city. You could spread news about our queen’s disappearance. I will have servants organize rooms for you, but you won’t leave the Great Pyramid until our queen returns.”

“Daenerys Targaryen is out there. I have to find her.”

“Our men will find her. She will come back, and then you’ll speak with her. But only when she comes back.”

“And if I refuse to stay?” It was out of question that he remained in that pyramid. He had come to convince Daenerys Targaryen to come back to Westeros, and he wouldn’t succeed if he stayed there while she was outside the city.

“We’ll make you stay,” replied the soldier. “We’ll put you into a cell.”

The answer was placid, cold, serious. Trystane looked around. The Unsullied were all standing tall, ready to intervene. He wouldn’t manage to escape. It was frustrating and humiliating for a prince to find himself receiving commands from former slaves, but it was obvious he had no choice there. He gave up.

Two hours later, Trystane was settled comfortably in a room at the thirty-first floor of the Great Pyramid. He lacked nothing of all the comforts he could ask for. He knew he was still a prisoner, but better to be a prisoner in comfort than one in dark and muddy cells. He wondered if the Sand Snakes and Ellaria thought the same when his father arrested them. Most of the servants were very young and knew the common tongue, hence Trystane had no problem speaking with them. One was very talkative and revealed that his father had once traveled to Westeros. Trystane learnt that these children were wards that Daenerys Targaryen had taken into her service not long after she began to rule Meereen. They were all children from the great families of Meereen, and they seemed to like Daenerys very much the way they spoke of her.

Trystane didn’t have much to do. He was done exploring his new apartments very quickly. There was a box on one of the furniture, and he placed something very precious that his father gave him inside. He shut the box. He hoped the content would see the light of the day again. It had spent almost one hundred and fifty years in the dark. If only the queen was there.

The heir to Sunspear spent much of the day thinking since he had nothing else to do. As always, Myrcella came back to his mind. He wished she was there right now. She would know what to do. But she wasn’t here, because his cousins thought her death would avenge Oberyn’s death. Trystane had liked his uncle. He showed him to fight with a spear, and he made him discover many things despite the very long periods he spent out of Sunspear and the Water Gardens. Trystane’s father had been the one to teach him about ruling, but his uncle thought him about life. He remembered Oberyn
hadn’t seemed happy when Myrcella had arrived, but as time had passed, Trystane had seen him
grow fond of his nephew’s betrothed. Myrcella even played with some of his daughters, especially
the youngest, Elia, Dorea, Obella and Loreza. Three were Ellaria’s children, and yet that woman had
killed her. His father had told him they couldn’t kill their family despite what they did, but for
Trystane it was very difficult to follow his father on this. Myrcella’s memory, how she died and by
whose hands, all of it was still fresh in his mind. He thought he understood how his uncle felt when
his aunt Elia died, or what Ellaria felt when she saw Oberyn die. However, Myrcella didn’t deserve
to die. He could understand they wished to kill Tywin Lannister, or the Mountain, but Myrcella? She
had done nothing. She was so sweet, so kind, so good. She had even wept when they heard Oberyn
was dead. Trystane didn’t think his uncle would have wanted her to die.

Trystane wouldn’t stoop to his cousins’ level. He wouldn’t avenge Myrcella by killing their kin.
Sarella, Elia, Dorea, Loreza and Obella had nothing to see with Myrcella’s death. He wouldn’t make
them pay. But Ellaria… Obara… Nymeria… And most of all, Tyene… They would pay one day.
They killed Myrcella, and she was innocent. He would avenge Myrcella’s death, and not by killing
someone innocent. He would kill her murderers. He didn’t care they were supposed to be family.
They killed the woman he loved. They were no family anymore. Family wouldn’t do that. Trystane
had come to this conclusion on his way to Meereen.

In the evening, after Trystane had eaten his dinner, he received a visit. A slim man with brown hair,
green eyes, a sword at his belt, a slight beard and a moustache entered in his rooms and bowed
before him.

“Prince Trystane. It’s a pleasure to meet you. I wish I could come sooner, but I was rather occupied
with everything going on in Meereen. My name is Malcolm Branfield.”

He extended his hand and Trystane shook it. He stared at the man carefully. His way of speaking
was quite close to the one Myrcella had. “You are from Westeros?” Trystane asked.

“Yes, my prince. I came to Meereen about a year ago. Queen Daenerys took me at her service. We
have a few things in common, Prince Trystane. Both our families suffered a lot during the last war.”

“What do you mean?”

“House Branfield was a minor house in the Crownlands. We fought for the Targaryens during
Robert’s Rebellion. I fought myself in this war, along with my brothers, but like you know, we lost.
My whole family died. I was the only survivor. I, and my sister, Elissa, who was married to a
northern lord. She escaped death thanks to this.”

Trystane understood now. The man standing before him had lost all his family. He shook his hand.
“I’m sorry. My loss is nothing in comparison. I only lost an aunt and two cousins, and I wasn’t even
born. You may sit. Do you want something to drink?”

“Thank you, but I won’t drink.” They both sat at a table. “My prince, as I said, my sister was married
to a northern lord. She was the Lady of House Forrester. Lady Elissa Forrester. I received no news
from her for quite a long time now. Have you heard anything about her, or about the Forresters
before you left?”

Trystane searched into his mind, but the name didn’t bring any memory to him. “No, I’m sorry, my
lord. I heard nothing about House Forrester.”

The man sighed. “And I hoped I would finally get some news.”

“I’m sorry.”
“So, you came here to see our queen,” Malcolm said, changing of subject. “Why? Grey Worm couldn’t really give me detailed explanations.”

Trystane pondered for a moment. Could he reveal the truth to this man? He took his decision. “I came on behalf of my father, Prince Doran Martell of Dorne, to offer our help to Queen Daenerys. Dorne is ready to help her in her quest to take back the Iron Throne.”

Malcolm Branfield looked surprised by this. “So, Doran Martell finally decided to do something. Everyone in the Seven Kingdoms thought he had no spine. Did he get one recently?”

Trystane rose up in anger. “Be careful about what you say. You’re talking about my father.”

Branfield raised his hands in an appeasing gesture. “Alright, alright. Forgive, my prince. That’s not what I meant. Only this is a surprise to see that Doran Martell is ready to do something after so much time. He did nothing for almost twenty years.”

“You’re wrong. My father was always a Targaryen loyalist. He worked in secret to overrun House Lannister and House Baratheon for all these years. It was his plan all these years to bring back the Targaryens into power. Everything he did was to make it possible one day.”

The man sitting before Trystane looked thoughtful for a moment before he asked a question. “Why do you come now? Why didn’t you try to bring House Targaryen back to power before? Why now?”

Trystane couldn’t give him the real reason. “We didn’t know where Queen Daenerys was until recently. We learnt she was in Meereen not long ago. She has an army, and with the support of Dorne, she could take back the Iron Throne.”

“From the last news we had, the Iron Throne is occupied by the son of Cersei Lannister, and he is married to Lady Margaery Tyrell. Even with both our armies, it would be difficult to conquer the Seven Kingdoms.”

“She has three dragons, if rumors are true,” Trystane pointed out.

“She fled on one of them, and the other two are chained under the Great Pyramid. They are untamed. She doesn’t control them yet. Furthermore, if what I heard is true, House Martell has an alliance with the Lannisters. I even heard that the heir to Sunspear was betrothed to Princess Myrcella Baratheon.”

Why did he have to speak of her? Trystane sat back. “Myrcella is dead,” he confessed.

“Ah, I see,” said Malcolm Branfield after a moment. “The Lannisters are not happy about that, I suppose. Did they declare war to you?”

Trystane tried to escape this. “Our alliance with them no longer holds.”

“Sure. It doesn’t hold any longer. How did she die? Was she assassinated? Or of disease? I suppose Cersei Lannister is not happy about that, no matter how she died. Your family is in trouble, don’t deny it. Is that why you’re here? To ask the help of our queen?”

To that point, it was better to reveal everything. Malcolm Branfield had already guessed most of the truth. “My uncle, Oberyn Martell, was recently killed by Ser Gregor Clegane, the same man who murdered my aunt Elia and her children. His daughters assassinated Myrcella in retaliation. My father arrested them, but he won’t kill them. They are family. For now, we’re hiding the death of Myrcella, but sooner or later, the Lannisters will discover it. When they do, they will declare war upon Dorne.”
“So, this is what I thought. You need our queen. To defeat the Lannisters and the Tyrells.”

“If the Lannisters and the Tyrells defeat us, your queen won’t be able to count on us when she invades Westeros. I know she has a powerful army, but like you said, the Lannisters and the Tyrells are allies, and with a Tyrell queen, their alliance is not about to fall apart. Queen Daenerys may have ten thousand men and three dragons, but her dragons are untamed, like you just said, and her own army won’t stand before the might of Casterly Rock and Highgarden. The other houses will never support her. Only Dorne is ready to help her. If she wants Dorne to support her when she comes, then she must come soon. Or else Dorne will be destroyed when she will arrive to seize the Iron Throne and she will have no ally.”

The man sitting in front of Trystane seemed to think about what he just said for some time. “You are right. We will need allies in Westeros. I don’t really see the Vale, the North or the Riverlands siding with our queen. But why should we think you would side with us? I just revealed to you we don’t have so much chance of winning. You could fight for the Lannister boy and get a pardon for that. Why risk everything?”

“My father wants revenge for the death of his sister, his brother, his nephew and his niece.” Trystane got on his feet and walked to take a long scroll he had hidden in a corner. “And because of this.”

He handed it to Malcolm Branfield who unrolled it and read the content. He looked surprised. “A contract of marriage between Daenerys Targaryen and Prince Quentyn Martell, heir to Sunpear, signed in the year 285 After the Conquest by Prince Oberyn Nymeros Martell and Ser Willem Darry at Braavos.”

“As you can see, my father was always loyal to the Targaryens.”

“Quentyn Martell?” Malcolm Branfield asked, a frown and a skeptical look on his face.

“He was my brother. He died a few years ago while hunting.”

“And now, I suppose your father wants you to marry Daenerys.”

“Yes,” Trystane replied shortly, sighing in the process.

“You don’t seem very eager to the prospect,” Branfield commented.

“I loved another.” A sweet girl with green eyes and golden hair. “I had to leave her behind when I left.” I couldn’t even bury her.

Malcolm Branfield seemed to understand. His face showed some empathy. “For what it’s worth, I can tell you Daenerys is very beautiful.”

“Yes, I know,” replied Trystane angrily. He heard all sort of tales on his way to Meereen, but despite their differences, they all spoke of a beautiful young woman with silver hair and purple eyes who had dragons.

“Well, who knows, maybe our queen will accept your father’s offer. I hope she does. For you. But she may refuse, I must warn you about this.”

“My father is offering her twenty thousand spears, maybe more, to help her take back her birthright. Isn’t that enough?”

Malcolm Branfield rose from his seat, sighing in the process. “Daenerys Targaryen fought almost two years now to end slavery in Slavor’s Bay. The people call her Mhysa, which means Mother in
Ghiscari. She sees them as her children. She will not abandon them to the slavers. She swore that no child born in Slavor’s Bay would know what it was to be sold or bought. She will continue that fight to the end. She will not leave Meereen before she can be sure slavery won’t come back after her departure. Anyway, she’s not here right now. She cannot leave for Westeros.”

That was bad news. Dorne wouldn’t be able to stand alone against the Crown. If Daenerys Targaryen didn’t come soon, they were doomed. “If she doesn’t come now, my house won’t be able to help her when she tries to seize back the Iron Throne.”

“You’re right, my prince,” conceded the man. He started to pace slowly around the room. “This means slavery must be ended at once so Daenerys can come back to Westeros. That is the only way she will accept to leave Meereen once she’s back.”

“If she comes back,” countered Trystane. “The man who received me when I arrived, the Unsullied officer…”

“Grey Worm,” completed Branfield.

“Grey Worm?”

“The Unsullied all received names like this during their trainings. Some decided to change their names when they entered Daenerys’s service, but other decided to keep them since they were the names they had when the queen freed them,” the Westerosi explained.

Trystane found it strange for someone to keep such a name. “He said only two men were sent to find your queen.”

“Aye, it’s true, but they’re no ordinary men. They will find her. We can count on them. Our main concern in the meantime is to keep the peace in Meereen and Slavor’s Bay while she is absent.”

Malcolm Branfield then explained him everything about the problems Meereen faced since Daenerys Targaryen conquered it. The discontent of the former masters, the insufficient food stocks, the olives the masters cut and burned as Daenerys approached the city, the attacks of the Sons of the Harpy, including the one they launched during the Great Games two weeks ago, the murders of former masters by former slaves, the resurging power of masters in Astapor and Yunkai, the death of most of the former masters supporting the queen. He also spoke about the murder of Ser Barristan Selmy, the exile of Ser Jorah Mormont, and the death of Missandei, a young scribe and translator who was the queen’s closest confident. Trystane had never seen such a desperate situation. His father had never faced such things from what he recalled.

“You see how the situation is dire,” said Malcolm Branfield as a conclusion.

“Yes, I do. How will you be able to bring back peace to Meereen without the queen?”

“I don’t know. I am a soldier, and Grey Worm too, just like every Unsullied. We can patrol streets, fight the Sons of the Harpy in the city or the masters on the battlefield, but none of us left are fit to rule Meereen. Most of the former masters supporting Daenerys died when the Sons of the Harpy attacked Daznak’s Pit. The ones left are quarrelling about who should rule in their queen’s absence. The city has been without government since the attack during the Great Games. We have no one to rally around.”

The situation really looked desperate. They needed Daenerys Targaryen, but he couldn’t leave right now. “Is there anything I can do?” Trystane asked, not knowing what to do.

Malcolm Branfield looked at him queerly. “Aye, there is something you could do. You are the heir to
Sunspear. Surely your father introduced you to ruling.”

“Of course, he did.” His father would never let Dorne pass into unexperienced hands.

“Then, you may be the solution we were looking for. You want Daenerys to come to your family’s help? Help her, and she will help you. Rule Meereen in her absence.”


“Just like me, and Ser Barristan and Ser Jorah before me. You are a supporter of our queen, you are a prince, the heir to a great kingdom in Westeros. Our actual rulers cannot agree who will rule among them, so let’s put someone from the outside who has the queen’s approval and who is supposed to marry her soon.”

“I doubt they’ll want an outsider to rule their city.”

“They will, if you have the support of the Unsullied. I’ll talk to Grey Worm. If he supports you, the former masters will have no choice but to accept you as ruler of Meereen. And if you do a good job, I’m sure she will accept your father’s offer when she’ll come back.”

The man started to walk away. “Wait. Give me back the contract.”

Malcolm Branfield was still holding the scroll Trystane gave to him before. “I’ll show it to Grey Worm. He will be more willing to support you once he sees it. I’ll put it in a safe place and give it to our queen as soon as she gets back. My prince.”

Malcolm Branfield bowed and left, this time for good. There was nothing Trystane could do to get back the contract anyway. The Unsullied wouldn’t let him. At least, he still had the gift for the queen in the box.

Trystane didn’t sleep well this night. He never slept well since Myrcella died. He dreamed of her. In his sleep, he heard his father repeat the same words he repeated to him every night. Myrcella is no princess. Myrcella is not Robert Baratheon’s daughter. Her father is Jaime Lannister, the Kingslayer. She is of noble birth, but she is a bastard. Even worse, she is born of incest. I could never have let you marry her. Myrcella had the green eyes and the golden hair of her mother and her father. What Stannis Baratheon said was true. Everything is true. When he woke up, he said in a low voice the same words he pronounced every morning for months.

“That’s a lie.”

His second day in Meereen went on without great events. Trystane was kept into his rooms. He spoke a little with the children of the masters, but in fact they did the talking much more than him. They wanted to know more about Dorne, and Trystane reluctantly gave them short answers. Still, they seemed to find Dorne marvellous. Trystane wondered if he would find Dorne as beautiful as it was when he would go back. If he ever went back. What would be life there without Myrcella? What would be life with Daenerys Targaryen, the Mother of Dragons?

As the afternoon was ending, the officer of the Unsullied, the one they called Grey Worm, came to see him, with the same stern face than before. He stood there without speaking for a long time.

“Prince Trystane Martell. Malcolm Branfield tells me you want to help our queen.”

“I do,” answered Trystane. He had no other choice. He was stuck in Meereen. He couldn’t go back to Dorne without the Dragon Queen.
“Malcolm told me you wanted to marry our queen.”

“My father is offering her the support of Dorne and a marriage to me, his son and heir, to help her take back her father’s throne.”

A silence followed as the soldier kept looking at him. “Do you swear that you will do everything you can to restore peace in Meereen and put an end to slavery?”

“If this can help Queen Daenerys, then yes, I will.”

Another long silence lingered until the man they called Grey Worm spoke again. “Then my men are yours, Prince Trystane. As long as you remain loyal to our queen, we will serve you and obey your orders. Meereen is yours, until our queen returns.”

Chapter End Notes

The arc of Meereen will be mostly centered around Trystane, Grey Worm and Malcolm Branfield. Malcolm Branfield is Mira's uncle, the brother of her mother, and he is the second character from Telltale Game who I introduce in this story. The action in Meereen will be told from two people's perspective, and Trystane will be one of them. I let you wonder who will be the second one.

Daenerys will not come back in this fic before some time, since most of what will happen to her will be very similar to what she gets through in Season 6 before her coming back to Meereen. However, the situation of Meereen may turn different since Tyrion is not the one ruling it and that Missandei is dead. Grey Worm will have a different evolution because of that.

Please review

Next chapter: Margaery
Margaery V

Chapter Notes

Back to King's Landing with the Sparrows. Just like Cersei, Margaery seeks allies to reinforce her position, but with different methods than those used by her mother-in-law.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

MARGAERY V

Her husband was being dressed right before her by his squire. There was no problem for the queen to be present while her husband was putting on clothes. She and Tommen shared the same bed for more than long enough, and anyway to be honest, her husband didn’t have much to hide. A small council meeting was about to begin, but Tommen had arrived late. He had been gone for two hours, choosing the next horse he would use, to finally buy a beast that was no better than the average. Tommen was kind and well-intentioned, but whenever he had to take a decision, he needed an hour to take it on his own, or else he would take none. Someone always had to tell him what to do. Joffrey was a stupid monster who took harsh decisions very quickly, but Tommen was the entire opposite. Margaery was afraid she would end like her grandmother.

When the squire was finally done, Margaery was alone with her husband. He turned to her. “Do you think I look fine?”

Margaery put on one of her sweet smiles. She wondered if her lips would get too tired one day, forcing smiles to appear natural on her face. “You look every bit like a king should look.” She kissed him.

“Thank you.” His face was reddening again, and yet she had only kissed him.

“Tommen.” Margaery took a concerned expression, and this was not a fake. “Have you received any news from Sansa or Lord Tyrion? I’m afraid for them.”

“Well... No, I haven’t received any news. I should ask Kevan and the small council.”

“I fear for them. I hope they’re not still stuck in the Neck. I’m worried for Mira as well.”

Tommen nodded, a sad expression on his face. They both worried about Mira and Sansa, and Tommen also worried for Lord Tyrion. “We will ask at the small council meeting.”

He took her hand and they walked out to the small council. Margaery found that Tommen couldn’t share as much information as before with her. She suspected Ser Kevan to no longer inform Tommen like he used to do. He knew Margaery was trying to influence Tommen, and he didn’t want to give her weapons against him. That put Margaery in a rather difficult position. Not that her position as queen was threatened, but her influence on Tommen would be of no use if Tommen had no real power. Kevan Lannister was concentrating all powers between his hands, trying to leave the Tyrells with leftovers. Lord Paxter Redwyne had left last week, heading for the Sunset Sea with his fleet to attack the Iron Islands. Margaery wasn’t unhappy that finally they would attack the Iron
Islands. The Reach would be in danger as long as they didn’t deal with the Ironmen, but she had lost the only person loyal to House Tyrell with any real power on the small council. Her father occupied the position of Master of Ships now, but like her grandmother liked to say, Lord Mace Tyrell was an oaf. He wasn’t a very useful ally, no matter how well-intentioned he was. Margaery felt isolated. She should have forced Mira to stay with her when the Hightower army came to King’s Landing. At least, she would have someone to advise her. She didn’t even have that now. Her cousins, Loras and Sera weren’t of great help when it came to politics. It was a chance that Cersei was out of the capital, or else life would be a living hell for the queen.

They arrived at the small council. Margaery took place at Tommen’s left like always, her father sitting on the same side of the table than her. Ser Kevan was facing her, with Ser Harys Swyft and Grand Maester Pycelle at his side. The small council was always divided this way with Lannisters at the king’s right and the Tyrells at the king’s left. Lord Varys was sitting with the Lannisters this time, but he always changed his seat. He was on no one’s side. The other members of the small council all stood up when Margaery and Tommen entered, except for Nymeria Sand, who was sitting at the end of the table, to the opposite of the king. She never stood before Margaery and Tommen, and Margaery was tired of her attempts of seduction on Tommen. Not that Tommen was about to fall under the spell of that Dornishwoman, Margaery made sure of that, but still.

“Your Grace, I’m afraid we must begin this small council with a very unpleasant matter,” began Ser Kevan. “The High Septon was surprised in a brothel again. The Sparrows forced him once more to walk naked in the streets. We closed the eyes on the first incident, but this time we can’t. Ser Addam Marbrand intervened quickly enough to arrest the Sparrows who took part to this walk of atonement. However, the people saw their High Septon naked for a second time. That situation cannot last.”

“A High Septon who visits brothels…” Like always, her father’s comments proved useless.

“What do you suggest we do, Ser Kevan?” asked Tommen.

“I propose that this time, we put the Sparrows involved in this to death,” declared the Hand. “We warned them. However, the High Septon should be forced to resign his position and retire to Quiet Isle. We cannot have a High Septon with such a soiled reputation in these times. Some of the people in the streets are starting to support the Sparrows in saying the Faith has been corrupted.”

“Is that wise to remove the High Septon?”

“I’m afraid we have no choice. Lord Tyrion influenced the septons to choose the actual High Septon. I think that by allowing the Faith to choose its own High Septon this time, we would extinguish some of the protests. In the meantime, I would like to reinforce the City Watch. The Sparrows are becoming increasingly reckless. We must reinforce security in the city.”

“Do we have enough gold for that?” asked Margaery.

“Ser Harys will be in charge to find the money. We have no choice. We must maintain the peace, and for that we need to reinforce the City Watch. There isn’t a day without an incident involving at least one Sparrow.”

“Very well,” said Tommen. The matter was closed. “Ser Kevan, we still have no answer from Princess Myrcella.”

The Hand of the King turned to Nymeria Sand. “Lady Nymeria, two months ago you sent a raven to Sunspear. How does it come we have no news about Princess Myrcella yet?”

“I don’t know,” answered the girl. “I sent three other ravens ever since, but without answers. I
suppose there must be a problem that stops my uncle from sending any raven. But I can assure you that Princess Myrcella is well. Prince Doran would never dare to harm her, nor would he ever let someone hurt her. His son is in love with her and he likes the princess very much himself. I can assure you she is alright.”

Margaery turned her head to Tommen. She made him understand it was time with a very slight move of her head. They had talked about it. It was time for Tommen to show he was the king. Tommen stood up on his feet and looked straight into the eyes of the Sand Snake.

“Lady Nymeria, this is completely unacceptable. My sister is living with your family at Sunspear. We gave her to you so you would look after her. I will write myself to Prince Doran for news. If we get no reply in two weeks, I will send one of my kingsguards with one hundred men to Dorne to bring her back to King’s Landing. With or without the approval of Prince Doran.”

Lady Nymeria didn’t seem impressed by the speech, but Tommen didn’t flinch either. Margaery had made him repeat this a few times before this meeting. “As you wish, your Grace.” The Sand Snake replied as if nothing was amiss. Tommen sat back, shaking a little. Margaery took his left hand in hers and he relaxed. She shot a glance to Ser Kevan with a smile at the same time. This controlled outburst was more destined to attract the attention of the Lannister knight truth be told.

“Your Grace,” said Lord Varys at this moment, “I think you will be glad to learn that my little birds confirmed the death of the usurper Stannis Baratheon. He was effectively executed by Roose Bolton after his defeat at Winterfell.”

They had learnt it last week. Stannis Baratheon had tried to take Winterfell with the army he had brought in the North, but they hadn’t survived the cold and the snow. The desertions had almost defeated Lord Stannis before he reached Winterfell and what was left of his army was destroyed by the Boltons.

“So, it is sure now? My uncle is dead?” asked Tommen.

“Yes, your Grace,” confirmed Varys.

Tommen looked sad. He was never happy to hear that someone died, not even an enemy. “I know that for many, Stannis Baratheon was an enemy of the Crown, and an usurper. But still, he was my uncle. I would like us to observe a minute of silence in his memory, and to regret that he died as an enemy instead of dying in service of the Crown.”

They observed a minute of silence. Ser Kevan was the one to break it in the end. “Of course, your Grace, despite the fact that we can regret that your uncle never saw the injustice of his cause, you now have no one to contest your place on the Iron Throne. The only enemies left are the Greyjoys on the Iron Islands and the Boltons in the North.”

“Since we are talking about it,” intervened Margaery, “has there been any progress near Moat Cailin? I hope they’re not still blocked there.”

“I’m afraid they are, your Grace,” answered the Spider. “A garrison of northern lords loyal to the Boltons occupies Moat Cailin and makes any attempt to penetrate in the North impossible. The army of Ser Gerold Hightower has reached Moat Cailin, but they are stuck there with the troops from the Westerlands and the Riverlands.”

“How many men do we have waiting before Moat Cailin?”

“About twenty-five thousands, your Grace,” answered Ser Kevan.
“Can’t they just storm the fortress?” asked Margaery.

“No, your Grace. Moat Cailin was never taken by storm. They won’t succeed this way. We need another army to attack Moat Cailin from the north. Then it could fall.”

“Is there no one in the North who could attack Moat Cailin from the north then? Don’t tell me no one rebelled against Roose Bolton? He’s been attainted by the king. Lady Sansa is following the army in the Neck, and she is the eldest living child of Eddard Stark,” said Margaery. She couldn’t believe the army was blocked there. She didn’t want Sansa to die in the swamps of the Neck with the army there, even less considering that Mira was there too and the Hightowers, her mother’s house, had an army engaged in this conflict.

“Most of the northern houses are staying away from this conflict,” explained Ser Kevan. “There is little love for the Lannisters in the North, but they don’t love the Boltons either. Many may decide to not get involved in this conflict and to let our armies and the Boltons fight each other.”

“The Manderlys have taken action against the Boltons not long after the decree stripping them from their titles was enacted,” said Varys. “My little birds reported to me recently that the Manderly army is besieging the city of Barrowton.”

“They shouldn’t be there,” said Ser Kevan. “With your permission, your Grace, I would send a raven to White Harbor and order Lord Manderly to leave Barrowton and to attack Moat Cailin from the north. One of his sons is in the Neck with our armies, so he should not hesitate to comply.”

“Very well. Do it, Ser Kevan,” Tommen said shortly.

The rest of the small council meeting concerned essentially the Redwyne fleet that was moving to the Arbor and the preparations for an invasion on the Iron Islands. Lord Varys also gave them news about Daenerys Targaryen in Meereen. The city was in chaos and the masters were trying to take back the cities of Yunkai and Astapor now. The last Targaryen had apparently left the city on the back of her dragon according to certain stories, but other said that wings had grown on her back and that she flew away herself, or that she was burned alive by her own dragon. In all cases, Daenerys Targaryen didn’t look like an immediate threat.

The small council was over quickly and Margaery could return to her rooms with Tommen, not without noticing the smirk Nymeria Sand was shooting at her. Margaery wouldn’t dine with her husband this evening. She had invited the Hand of the King to eat with her instead. They had important matters to discuss.

When Sera and the other handmaidens had brought all the food and were gone out, Margaery decided to bring up the topic for which she invited Ser Kevan.

“Ser, I think we both agree this is rather unlikely for the Martells to not have given any news concerning Princess Myrcella unless they didn’t want to give these news,” said Margaery.

“I have to admit this is rather strange that we sent four ravens and that none of them returned,” recognized the knight.

“The Martells are planning something, I can feel it. Don’t tell me you find Lady Nymeria’s behaviour normal.”

“No more normal than the behaviour of her father.”

Margaery changed of topic. “The Sparrows are becoming a real problem. They are no longer simple beggars in the streets. Some people within the Faith have started to support them. A few even speak
for them openly. I have discussed with septons, septas, brothers and sisters while working for my charity works, and they are all afraid of the Sparrows. When I visited an orphanage today, the septas running it almost fought because some refused to let me enter to give them food and money. The Sparrows know that we are trying to turn the people against them.”

“There is nothing new in what you’re telling me, your Grace. I am fully aware of the growing power of the Sparrows. Varys has spies everywhere and he keeps me informed about everything going on in the city.”

“Do you really believe that hiring more gold cloaks will be enough to neutralize them? Cersei tried to maintain her hold on the city this way, and in reward she got riots.”

“What are you trying to tell me, your Grace?” asked Kevan, stopping to eat.

“All I want to say, Ser Kevan, is that we have two enemies. The Martells outside, and the Sparrows inside. I am married to his Grace, so his enemies are my enemies. Whoever threatens his reign threatens my position as queen, and the alliance between our two families. I propose we put aside our rivalry and that we work together against the actual threats.”

“Why would you want to do so, your Grace? You want the king’s ear for yourself, don’t deny it.”

“It’s quite useless to have the king’s ear when he cannot make decisions or when he is no king at all. We both whisper different things into Tommen’s ear, and that leads him to behave erratically. We cannot allow that right now. Princess Myrcella is in Dorne, and with the death of Oberyn Martell, I’m afraid something may have happened to her. I don’t know her, but Tommen loves her, and I would rather not see her hurt.”

“Are you telling you care for Princess Myrcella because you love Tommen?”

“No. But I like Tommen. He is a very kind and sweet boy, and I am married to him. Anyway, if anything happened to Myrcella, we will have to face the Martells, and you will need the support of my family for that. The Martells may even try to use Myrcella and to declare her Queen instead of Tommen, and we both have no interest in allowing this to happen. As for the Sparrows, if they take control of the Faith, we are doomed since the Iron Throne promised to protect the Faith long ago. There is nothing we could do against them if they take control of it. We must stop to fight for the influence on Tommen and deal with our current enemies. We must focus Tommen on the actual dangers by both telling him the same things, or else he will be unable to act against the Sparrows and Dorne.”

“The idea of an alliance is tempting, your Grace,” recognized the Hand. “However, what tells me you won’t try to use the situation to your advantage?”

“Nothing, but we need each other, Ser Kevan. Be sure that I won’t whisper thoughts against you in Tommen’s ear, that is not in my interest. I know that you resent me for marrying my handmaiden to a Hightower, but considering that with your initial plan she would have ended with a Whitehill, I think I rather made a good choice by preventing the reinforcement of Bolton’s bannermen.”

Ser Kevan was silent for a moment, looking thoughtful. “I can’t argue with this, your Grace. I recognize the silence from Dorne is preoccupying, and I know the Sparrows are a real threat. I know that our quarrels make Tommen quite confused, and that none of us can hope to get a complete influence on him. It’s all right. I accept the idea to ally our forces against our present enemies. We both know that we cannot trust Varys entirely anyway, so we can use your relations among the Faith and the people to get information. The first thing is to make sure the septons will not choose someone supporting the Sparrows. I would like you to use your influence on the members of the Faith you
meet to bring them to consider a candidate who will neither be an instrument of the Sparrows nor a source of scandals. If we bribe some septons discreetly with that, that should be enough.”

“We may have to use force against the Sparrows all the same,” pointed out Margaery.

“You’re right. This is why I will strengthen the City Watch. We could use the financial help of your family for this.”

Margaery nodded. “I will speak with my father about this. However, more gold cloaks won’t be enough. We need someone to lead them who would be able to suppress an uprising if it comes to that.”

“What do you mean exactly, your Grace?”

Margaery spoke carefully. “You occupy the office of Master of Laws while being Hand of the King, Ser Kevan. Don’t tell me you’re not exhausted. We know this isn’t true. I propose to bring someone at this office who could lead the gold cloaks to suppress the threat of the Sparrows.”

“Who are you thinking about?” Ser Kevan looked skeptical.

“Lord Randyll Tarly. If someone can deal with an uprising from the Sparrows, that will be him.”

“Randyll Tarly? Master of Laws? We can be sure he will apply the law to the letter, but he’s not very useful in times of peace.”

“But if fights break up with the Sparrows, he may help us a lot.”

Ser Kevan obviously didn’t like the idea, but Margaery was sure that he admitted himself that if they were to fight the Sparrows, then Lord Tarly would be the man of the situation. “Very well,” conceded Kevan. “Lord Randyll Tarly will be appointed Master of Laws. I will remain at this office until he arrives. However, I believe your father, Lord Mace Tyrell, should leave. If you allow me to say so, he is not very helpful, just like Lady Olenna loved to tell everyone. He will be more useful in Highgarden, and anyway the Reach will be well enough represented on the small council with you and Lord Tarly.”

“What about the office of Master of Ships?”

“For now, there is no longer much to do with Stannis defeated. The Iron Islands are the main threat. I intend to give the office back to Lord Redwyne.”

Ser Kevan was excluding her father from the small council and appointed another lord from the Reach to the office he occupied, though Lord Paxter wouldn’t be there. Margaery had to make this alliance work. She wasn’t in position to refuse. That may be the price for this alliance. Ser Kevan would not allow her house to become too powerful on the small council. These concessions had to be made to bring Randyll Tarly here.

“Let my father stay until Lord Randyll comes. Or else, we’ll be missing two members on the small council in the capital.”

“Very well,” agreed Ser Kevan. That was a small victory, but a victory all the same. Even with the departure of her father, the arrival of Lord Tarly would reinforce her position and help to deal with the Sparrows if it came to fight. Margaery hoped it wouldn’t. Nobody would love Tommen or her if there was blood in the streets.

After the dinner, Margaery went to the gardens and sat on a bench. Her father would leave soon.
Loras would stay with her, at least. She wouldn’t like it to have no one of her family with her in the capital. She already felt lonely with Mira, Sansa, her grandmother and her mother away. Now her father would leave too. It was no small task to be queen. She wondered what was going on in the North. She hoped nothing bad had happened to Sansa or Mira, and that they would get back their homes. Margaery didn’t know how she would feel if Highgarden was burned to the ground and all her family slaughtered. How difficult it had to be for her friends. They had better husbands than her, but Margaery would rather have a mean husband and all her family alive than a fantastic husband with all her family dead.

Margaery walked back to the rooms she shared with Tommen. They would have to make their duty as husband and wife tonight again, until she was with child. Margaery started to be bored by this. Tommen was kind and gentle, but not a very good lover, even if he loved her. Maybe her grandmother had been right and she would have been better off with Tyrion Lannister. She decided she would go to the Great Sept of Baelor tomorrow with Tommen and pray for Sansa and Mira. She would light a candle to the Mother to deliver her a son and to have mercy on her friends, to the Crone to show her the path to wisdom in these troubled times, to the Maiden to protect Mira and Sansa, and to the Warrior to give courage to the men in their armies.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
“This farce of a siege cannot go on forever,” declared Ser Perwyn Frey. “We have been here for more than two months now, and we still have no way to get through Moat Cailin. The fortress cannot be taken without support of an army from the northern side. Our men are growing impatient and tired. We won’t be able to maintain this situation much longer.”

The commander of the Frey forces hadn’t said that on an angry tone. It was merely an observation, but that was an unpleasant observation, especially when it was made in front of the war council on a bitter tone. The council included all the commanders of the armies that participated to the invasion of the North. Ser Brynden Tully represented the Tully forces, along with Karyl Vance and Clement Piper. Ser Perwyn Frey and Olyvar Frey were there to represent the Frey forces. Ser Gerold Hightower, Mira’s husband, was there as well. Lord Beric Dondarrion was there for the Brotherhood Without Banners. Ser Daven Lannister, Ser Forley Prester and Ser Lyle Crakehall were there to represent the Westerlands, whose forces constituted most of the twenty-five thousand soldiers camped in the Neck. Tyrion and Sansa were there too, sitting at the head of the table with Ser Brynden. Sansa had to assume the double role of Lady of the Westerlands and Wardeness of the North.

Sansa often felt useless at these councils, and alone in some way despite Tyrion’s presence. Mira should assist these meetings as well. She had as much right to attend these councils than her husband. Sansa’s presence was quite questionable since she had no men under her command here. No Northerner had joined them up to now. Not even the crannogmen went to their side, despite the long friendship of her father with Lord Reed. However, for Tyrion, it would be stupid to not have the official Wardeness of the North sit at the war council when the purpose of the army was to free the North. At least that was what he said. If only the Northerners saw them as liberators and not as invaders.

“We have more and more difficulties to keep control on our men,” added Lord Piper.

“My lords,” started Tyrion. “I think we are all aware that our current situation is far from desirable. However, it could be far worse. We receive supplies and fodder from the Twins, from the Westerlands, and even from the Reach since the Hightowers have arrived. Our army will not starve to death. We could still stay here for six months, with full supplies.”

“We cannot stay here for six months. We still have no word from the Manderlys. Without their help, we won’t be able to take Moat Cailin and to penetrate in the North,” pointed out Ser Brynden.

“Are you suggesting we should retreat, Ser Brynden?” asked Tyrion.
Sansa’s granduncle didn’t answer, but Ser Vance did. “I think we should, my lord. We cannot hold here in the Neck forever. Yes, we are well supplied, but we lose men to sickness and cold every day. Not many men, of course, but we keep losing them slowly. If the Manderlys are our allies, then we should go to King’s Landing and sail for White Harbor from there. Or we could sail from Gulltown.”

“I doubt Lord Arryn will allow us to travel through his lands, and with the royal fleet that was destroyed, there will never be enough ships to carry enough men to the North by the sea. The Redwyne fleet will have left for the Sunset Sea by the time we reach the capital.”

“But we cannot stay here,” insisted Ser Vance.

“My lords,” Sansa said loudly and with an authoritarian voice. She stood up. She was the only one to sit among the people here. “You all know why we are here. We are here because we all decided to overthrow House Bolton. Roose Bolton killed my brother, the king he swore to serve, with his own hand, the same king many of you here declared their king. He plunged a dagger in his heart. His son skins people alive and forces himself upon my sister as we speak, and upon many other innocent girls, before he let them to be fed to his dogs. We are fighting against monsters. We received an order from the king to kill these monsters and to bring them justice. Are you going to let Roose Bolton and Ramsay Bolton get away with their crimes? To let them rule the North as if it was theirs, as a reward for killing innocents? Are you going to run away? If you do so, then we lose. The Boltons will keep the North, and their crimes will remain unpunished. The Red Wedding will remain unpunished. That’s not something I will allow. The question now I am asking you: Are you going to allow it?”

They all listened to her. They didn’t have much choice. Sansa’s condition as a pregnant woman had its advantages. No one could be rude with her and everyone showed her more respect than ever. She knew her words had much effects on the Freys, the river lords and on Lord Beric, and also on Tyrion, though she didn’t need to convince him. It had less effect on Ser Gerold, but Sansa relied on Mira to keep him in line outside the war councils if he ever thought about abandoning. The Lannister commanders were the ones that her speech probably affected the less, except for Ser Lyle. Ser Daven respected her and Robb enough to be affected in a small way, and he was the one to speak first after her intervention.

“I think we all know at this stage that if we withdraw from our actual position, then the North will be lost to us for good. Yes, winter is coming, but if we retreat, even temporarily, then when we’ll come back winter will be here for good, and this one will last several years. Whether we abandon the North for good, or we stay here until the Manderlys show themselves at the north, which will probably happen sooner or later. We’ve been all over this discussion more than once. We have orders from the king, so we have to carry them out. Our position is still good right now. We can keep it without too much loss for the time being. When our losses will become too heavy, then we should discuss about withdrawing, but not before.”

“I agree with Ser Daven,” said Ser Brynden bluntly. “We stay here. We’re not going to abandon the invasion when it could be about to begin at any time.”

“We stay,” agreed Ser Perwyn. “We swore to avenge Robb Stark, and we will have no rest until it is done.”

“I won’t fly away from a fight before it begins, nor before it is over,” declared the Strongbear.

“My men will stay here as well,” said Ser Gerold Hightower.

Everyone agreed to stay in the Neck in the end, at least for the time being. They wouldn’t abandon their plans to overthrow the Boltons. The war council ended with Tyrion and Ser Brynden encouraging the other commanders to organize sparring and fighting competitions for their men with
tourney weapons so they would be prepared to fight and to occupy their time. Their worst enemy was boredom, even more than sickness or cold. If they kept the men occupied, they wouldn’t desert.

The council was over and the lords began to pour out of the tent, but Ser Gerold came to her as she stood up. “Lady Sansa, my wife would like to know if she could visit you today.”

“Of course, she can visit me whenever she wants. We are friends.”

Ser Gerold bowed and left, but as she walked to the exit with Tyrion, her granduncle stopped her. “Sansa, I would like to speak to you. Alone.”

She turned to face him. He was looking at Tyrion. His face was not threatening. It was almost a plea for understanding, though not entirely. Tyrion was looking at her, waiting for her to answer.

“It’s alright. I’m following you,” she told him.

He left with a smile. He always smiled at her these times. Her pregnancy had made her husband very happy, and it had also lifted the spirits very much for a time. However, there were times she thought Tyrion was… afraid. She didn’t know why, but he seemed concerned from time to time. Anyway, to learn that the Lady of Casterly Rock was with child was a cause of great joy among the Lannister soldiers. The reactions were more mixed among the men of the Riverlands. Sansa suspected they didn’t know whether to be happy that Catelyn Tully’s daughter was pregnant or to be angry that a Lannister put a child in her. The Frey commanders, Perwyn and Olyvar were all happy about it, though she doubted their men shared their enthusiasm. As for the Hightower men, they were happy for her, but not excessively. Mira was the one to be really enthused when Sansa told her.

“Let’s sit,” told Ser Brynden. “You are with child. You mustn’t tire yourself.”

“You care a lot about my well-being, uncle,” Sansa commented.

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“Your mother would never forgive me if I didn’t.”

“I suppose she would never forgive Tyrion for taking care of me.” Sansa didn’t say the latter sentence without gloom.

Ser Brynden sighed. “Probably not. I can almost consider Lord Tyrion as someone I can trust, at least temporarily, for the time being. But your mother would never have accepted your marriage.”

“Do you?”

A long silence followed. “He treated you well. And up to now, he kept his word, so I can do with it. But if he ever harms you in any way…”

“You will put an end to our marriage in a permanent way,” Sansa completed. “I know, he told me. That won’t be necessary. He will never hurt me.”

“So you say.” She hoped she didn’t hear any skepticism in Ser Brynden’s voice. “How are you? How is the pregnancy going?”

“I’m only three months in it. I’m alright. I still have morning sickness, but nothing more. And Tyrion makes sure I have everything I need. Maester Wyllam comes to see me every day.”

“Be careful all the same. Your mother would never forgive me if she was to lose another grandchild before he saw light.”
Sansa nodded. She understood. “Brienne accompanies me everywhere. I am safe.”

Her granduncle remained silent for a moment before he cleared his throat. He straightened up in his chair. “Sansa, you can’t stay here.”

Sansa didn’t understand. “What do you mean, I can’t stay here?”

“I’ve been thinking about this lately. We could send you back to Riverrun. Edmure and Roslin will take care of you there, and of your child, of course.”

“I can’t leave!” shouted Sansa, outraged. “Arya is still prisoner at Winterfell. I have to go there!”

“Sansa, you are pregnant. An army is not the place for a pregnant woman.”

“Robb’s wife followed him everywhere, even while she was pregnant,” she protested.

“First, we learnt about her pregnancy on our way to the Twins, when we were almost there. Second, have you forgotten what happened to Talisa? She’s dead. She was murdered. If she had stayed behind, at Riverrun, she would still be alive, and your nephew as well. Third, Talisa was a healer. She helped to treat the men who were injured. Do you?”

“No. But I am the Lady of Winterfell, and the Wardeness of the North. How could you invade the North without me? You already look like southern invaders. Even you talk of it as an invasion. What do you think it will be if I’m no longer with you? No one in the North will side with you if I’m gone.”

“Sansa, you are pregnant. Your condition is going to get worse as time passes. It will not only be the morning sickness. It will become hard for you even to walk as your belly grows. What if you were to enter labor while we are stuck in a tempest? Or during a battle? This is no situation to deliver a child. I forbid you to come with us.”

Sansa’s fury flared. “I am the Lady of the Westerlands and the Wardeness of the North. You have no power to give me any order. Most of the men in this army are Tyrion’s and mine. Monsters have taken my home. I will not stay behind in comfort while Arya is being raped and the Boltons are feasting in our halls. I will go in the North with you, whether this pleases you or not.”

Sansa got on her feet and left, not allowing her uncle enough time to reply. She stormed out of the tent, Brienne following her as she walked to the pavilion she shared with Tyrion. She wouldn’t go back to a warm and comfortable castle while her sister was being beaten and worse by a monster. Sansa would have his head, but before that, she would save Arya. At Winterfell, it would be the same than Riverrun. She would avenge and save her family at the same time. She would make the Boltons pay for every bruise, every cut, every scratch they did to her sister. Sansa had enough of her family suffering. She was in position to protect the people she loved now, and she would use it. And she would make everyone who made her family suffer pay for what they did. A Lannister always pays her debts.

Sansa arrived at her tent and found inside a pair she wasn’t expecting. Lady Mira Forrester and Ser Perwyn Frey. They got on their feet when she entered. Ser Perwyn bowed as Mira curtsied.

“Ser Perwyn, I wasn’t expecting you,” said Sansa. She certainly didn’t expect him here with Mira furthermore. Mira stayed away from all the Freys.

“Forgive me, Lady Sansa. I didn’t want to invade your privacy.”

“It’s alright. Are you well, Lady Mira?”
“Yes, my lady. Ser Perwyn and I were just discussing.” There was no sound of disdain, hatred or harshness in Mira’s voice. In fact, she seemed calmer than usual.

“Well, I think I will take my leave. Is your child all right, my lady?” Ser Perwyn asked to Sansa.

“The maester says he is alright,” she answered. “For now, I can’t feel him. Not yet.”

The knight nodded. “My sister was pregnant not long ago. Everything went well. I’m sure nothing wrong will happen to you, Lady Sansa.”

He bowed to both Mira and Sansa and left. Sansa was alone with her friend. She turned her face to Mira, a questioning look on it.

“He just came to apologize,” the Forrester girl explained. “For what happened to my father at the Red Wedding. Apparently, he didn’t know my father died there. He seemed to be honest.”

“He is,” Sansa assured her. She took place in a chair and Mira sat as well. “Ser Perwyn wasn’t there during the Red Wedding. His family thought he was too close to my brother and the Northerners to take part in it, and that he could betray them. It was the same for Olyvar. He was Robb’s squire. He didn’t want to leave him after he wed Talisa. Ser Perwyn accompanied my mother when she went to negotiate with Lord Renly. I think he really wants to help us. I saw his sister Roslin at the Twins, with her son. I could hardly believe she was a Frey.”

Mira nodded in silent. “You remember about my brother Asher? The one who was exiled. You know why he was exiled.” Sansa nodded. “I met Gwyn Whitehill one day. I liked her. She wasn’t at all like the rest of her family. And she loved Asher. She loved him very dearly. When we think about it, if Ludd Whitehill had accepted to let her marry Asher, maybe there would have been no war between my family and hers. They would have been linked, like they were a long time ago.”

“A long time ago? What do you mean?”

“I read something while I was in Oldtown. When I visited the Citadel. A book on northern houses. Apparently, the Whitehills and the Forresters have a common ancestor. A certain Lord Regald Ironwood, a lord from a lost house. There would have been a split in House Ironwood that would have given birth to my house and to House Whitehill. Our two families may have been only one once. It’s sad to think that we ended killing each other.”

“Personally, I hope I share no common ancestor with the Boltons,” commented Sansa dryly.

“Don’t get me wrong, Sansa. I’m not eager to be related to Ludd Whitehill. I just… wish my family hadn’t died.”

Sansa could understand that. She wished the same. “We cannot bring them back, but at least now we avenge them, and make sure those who murdered them won’t make other people suffer.”

A long silence settled in the tent. Sansa knew they were both lost in their thoughts. It was difficult to not let a conversation slip sooner or later to a sad or gloomy subject these days, but she preferred to spend some time in silence with someone else than to spend it alone.

“How is the baby?” asked Mira suddenly.

“I can’t feel him for now.”

“Him? You believe it’s a boy?”
“No. It could be a girl. Maester Wyllam cannot tell if it’ll be a boy or a girl. I hope it’s a boy. This way the succession will be solved about Casterly Rock.”

“Does Lord Tyrion think the same?” Mira asked.

“He says he doesn’t care if we have a son or a daughter. He will be happy with one or the other. But… I think he says that to not indispose me. He does everything to keep my mood up these times. I think he hopes it will be a boy too.”

“We can’t blame him. You need two sons. One for Casterly Rock and one for Winterfell. I hope he won’t be deceived if it’s a girl.”

“No, he won’t.” Sansa was sure of that. She couldn’t imagine Tyrion hating their child because she was a girl. “Though I find him a little overzealous when it comes to my well-being. He always tells me to not go out without heavy warm gowns and furs on me, to never approach the swamps. He even told me I could skip the war councils if I wanted.”

“He’s not entirely wrong, Sansa. He cannot allow something to happen to you, or to the baby. Especially with the weather. It’s getting colder out there. Winter is almost here.”

Sansa knew it only too well. “Winter is coming.”

“What happened at the war council?” her northern friend asked.

“Nothing much. Mostly some commanders complaining about the length of the siege, the men getting bored and impatient for action. It’s hard to maintain discipline here. We’ve been stuck in the Neck for too long. More and more commanders are getting unnerved about this. Don’t worry, your husband isn’t among those who asked for retreat, but I would like you to make sure he doesn’t come with that idea.”

“I will. Gerold listens to me.”

Sansa remembered something she thought during the war council. “Mira, perhaps you could attend the meetings of the war council. We are invading the North, and I am the only Northerner at the table. And the only woman too. I think you should be more involved.”

Mira smiled in gratitude. “Thank you. Yes, I think I’ll like that. There isn’t much to do around here anyway. But do you think the other commanders will accept my presence? I don’t think Gerold will mind. He would cut his veins for me. But the other men?”

“Tyrion won’t oppose. He respects you. As for the others, I’ll only have to remind them that you are the Lady of Ironrath and that we should have all the Northerners we can find at the council.”

“I’m not yet the Lady of Ironrath, Sansa.”

“You are. I am the Wardeness of the North and I say you are the Lady of Ironrath. That’s all it takes.”

“Perhaps officially, Sansa. But our homes are both into the enemy’s hands, and we haven’t even been able to penetrate into the North. Our titles don’t mean much in the North for the time being. They are only titles in the end.”

“Indeed.” Sansa thought for a moment. Then she decided she could trust Mira. “Mira, do you think I should be the Lady of Winterfell?”
“Of course you should, Sansa. And you are, like you just said.”

“I don’t think so, Mira. The Northerners may never accept me. I bear the name of House Lannister, and my children will bear this name as well. Perhaps I should let Arya have Winterfell when she is freed. She looks more like a Stark anyway, and I don’t remember any case where someone held two of the Seven Kingdoms.”

“It certainly happened in the past, Sansa. I don’t think it would be good to give up your rights on Winterfell. You are the eldest living child of Lord Eddard Stark.”

“I’m not. I have a brother.” Sansa had come to be angry when Jon was set aside because he was a bastard.

“Forgive me, Sansa. I didn’t use the right words. I meant that you are Lord Eddard’s heir because you are his eldest legitimate child now and all your legitimate brothers are dead. Winterfell is yours, whether you want it or not. Anyway, even if Jon Snow was a legitimate son, it wouldn’t change anything since he is in the Night’s Watch. But that’s not the point.” Mira’s expression was pained. “I hope this won’t happen, but it is quite possible that Lady Arya won’t be alive when we will free Winterfell. Or she could even be pregnant.”

Sansa’s heart jumped inside. She wasn’t sure what would be worse for her sister between death or being alive with Ramsay Bolton’s child in her belly. Mira resumed. “I’m afraid you have to accept to be the Lady of Winterfell. If… If your sister was with child, and that you gave her Winterfell, then a Bolton would rule the North one day, and not any Bolton. It would be Ramsay Bolton’s child.” Mira looked as if she wished to do what Sansa did every morning these last times. “Is that what you want? As for me, I would rather see Lord Tyrion’s child than the bastard’s child at Winterfell.”

Sansa knew why Mira said these things. Her brother Ethan was killed by Ramsay Bolton. She wanted to see Ramsay Bolton die as much as Sansa wanted, and she probably couldn’t support the idea of the monster’s son ruling the North. The discussion wasn’t lightening the mood very much. Sansa would try to see if that was possible to make Arya the Lady of Winterfell once she was free. She tried to imagine her sister as a lady, and she almost laughed at the idea. She tried to bring it in a more pleasant direction. “How are things going with your husband?”

Mira’s face lightened. “Things are good. He’s eager to see the North, and Ironrath. He’s impatient. And not only about seeing my home. I had to refrain him recently.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I convinced him we should be more careful about our nocturnal activities.” A wicked smile appeared on Mira’s face. Sansa giggled a little.

“What? Are you bored already?”

“No. Not at all. Though I’m sure I’m much closer to being bored than he is. Only, I don’t think it would be good if he got me with child right now. Not while we’re marching on Ironrath. A military campaign in the middle of winter is all but the time to have children.”

Sansa hated to hear her granduncle’s arguments again. “So, you’re not expecting children anytime soon?”

“Not right now. I had my moonblood two weeks ago. But as soon as we get Ironrath back, we’ll be able to work on it.”

When Sansa thought about it, Mira was probably right. It wouldn’t be easy for her on the way to
Sansa hadn’t been entirely sincere when she told Ser Brynden that she only had morning sickness. She fell things much more than before, and ate much more. She often asked for more food at dinner, and ate between the meals, only to give it back next morning. She also needed to make water more often. Maester Wyllam had told her these were among the things that could happen when women were pregnant. When she had asked what were the other possible symptoms, she hadn’t liked the answer: exhaustion, pain to the breasts, bleeding, blackouts, fainting, headaches, back aches, heat, constipation, cramps and many other pains she couldn’t remember. Was that so difficult to bring a child into the world? She only worried about if her children would be dwarves, but she never thought about asking Creylen for details about the pregnancy itself. She had been like the little foolish girl of Winterfell, thinking everything would be alright.

Sansa and Mira kept speaking until time for dinner arrived with Tyrion. Mira excused herself, leaving Tyrion and Sansa together. “Are you well?” he asked her immediately, like every time they saw each other since they knew she was pregnant.

“I am. Don’t worry for myself. Maester Wyllam looks after me every day.” But she knew he would all the same. Tyrion was a caring husband, and he had become even more so since they knew she was with child. She decided to turn the conversation to another subject. “I would like Mira to attend the meetings of the war council. She is the future Lady of Ironrath after all.”

“Well, I won’t say no. I would like more clever people on the council, and she seems to be more clever than her husband. I’m afraid she is the mind in the pair.”

“And who’s the mind in our pair?”

“I don’t know. Who do you think it is?” Tyrion asked, a wicked smile on his lips. Sansa returned it.

“I don’t know.”

Their heads got close and they kissed. Sansa was tired, and she felt better when they were together. She was sitting while Tyrion was standing up, and still she had to lean, but it didn’t matter. All that mattered for now was their lips, their breaths, and his hand caressing her chin.

“My lord. My lady.” To her regret, Tyrion broke the kiss to look at Podrick who was standing at the entrance of the tent with a tray of food. He was looking away and all red in the face, like every time he surprised them in some intimate moment, even if that was only kissing.

“Come in, Podrick. That’s not as if were fucking each other,” said Tyrion with a grin. Her husband liked to tease his squire. Podrick obeyed and put the food on the table, his face turning redder. Willia, Sansa’s handmaiden who followed her from Casterly Rock, came as well with more food.

“Thank you for your help, Podrick,” Willia said.

Podrick smiled widely at the girl as she walked out. He took the same path some time later, probably realizing he had nothing to do here.

“I believe my squire is in love,” said Tyrion.

“There’s nothing wrong with that. I am in love me too,” Sansa said.

Tyrion smiled fondly at her. There had been a time when he didn’t seem sure that she loved him after their first real night together, but now she was sure he believed her. “I just pity all the women who will never get to know Podrick’s talents.” Tyrion took a sausage with his fork as he said that.

“Is Bronn still trying to get some answers out of him?” Ser Bronn of Blackwater had come back last
week from his mission in King’s Landing. The mission had been a success.

“Yes, he is. But Podrick doesn’t seem about to speak about it. I’m afraid Bronn will have to wait before he knows how to leave a brothel without paying.”

“I thought he was married.”

“That won’t stop him. You don’t know Bronn well if you think a marriage will make of him a respectful man. He is a sellsword, and he will always be a sellsword. Even he won’t deny it. A marriage won’t put an end to his wanders into whorehouses.”

“That put an end to yours,” Sansa pointed out.

“Yes. But luckily for you, I’m not like Bronn.” He said it on a mourning tone.

“You’re not like any man.”

Podrick and Willia had put an extra share of food for Sansa. She engulfed it all. She went to bed not long after dinner was over. Night was already falling. Days grew shorter. Willia helped her to change into nightclothes, but in the end, when she had left, Sansa removed them as well. She didn’t find it cold enough yet to sleep with them, and she wasn’t sick anymore, only pregnant. She got under the furs. She really felt tired, though she hadn’t done much today. It seemed she had another symptom of pregnancy.

She didn’t fall asleep however. She looked at her husband. Tyrion hadn’t joined her in their bed. Instead, he worked. Like in Casterly Rock, he always went to sleep after her. Only this time, he wasn’t confined in a solar or separated from her by floors, not even by a door. They were always in the same tent. Sansa contemplated him. Back at the beginning of their marriage, she hadn’t wanted to see anything good in him. She even hated him in some way because she had to marry him, even if they were both forced to marry. She hadn’t wanted to consider the good sides of her marriage. At the time, this marriage only meant another prison. A different kind of prison, like Tyrion had told her. Then she had begun to enjoy her time with Tyrion after she understood he would never hurt her and he wouldn’t consummate their marriage as long as she didn’t want, until the Red Wedding happened. She had needed his arrest afterwards to realize how Tyrion had been good to her, and how a good husband he would be. She needed more time to love him, and even more before she accepted him into her bed as a husband. Now, Sansa couldn’t imagine her life without him. She watched him reading scrolls and studying maps. From time to time, he raised his eyes to her, she smiled at him and he smiled in return before he went back to the map, but it was obvious he couldn’t focus on it. Finally, he gave up.

“How am I supposed to stand here planning a war while I know that you’re right before me, naked under the furs?”

“Do you want me to remove them?” she asked playfully.

Tyrion chuckled. “My mind commands me to say no, but there are other parts of my body who wouldn’t agree.”

They kept looking at each other for a long time, then Tyrion came next to her, standing by the bed, and began to caress her cheek, removing a lock of hair there and there. She loved his eyes, and his face. Again, she could only think that Margaery was right when she said Tyrion was rather good-looking, especially with his scar. In her actual position, she couldn’t see he was short of legs and arms. She could have been on a high raised bed and he could have been of normal height as far as she knew.
“Can you leave the war for one night?” she asked him.

“For you, yes, I can.”

He kissed her, slowly, tenderly, almost timidly, then more deeply as she took his face between her hands. His hand went down to her chin, her neck, and lower. Soon he was climbing into bed with her, and Sansa was removing his clothes. Some time later, she was lying over him, her head right under his own on his chest, his hand stroking her hair and massaging her shoulders. However, she felt a thin, almost imperceptible shaking in his body as his fingers wandered on her bare skin. After so many nights with her body pressed against his, she could feel many things unusual about him that no one else would be able to detect.

“What is it, Tyrion? You’re nervous.”

Tyrion took a deep breath. “Yes, I’m nervous. I’m afraid.”

“What are you afraid of?”

Tyrion needed some time before he spoke. “I’m afraid for our child. I mean… I’m a dwarf.”

Sansa understood what he meant. “I will love him, no matter how he or she is.”

“I know that. I don’t doubt it. That’s not what I’m afraid of. I don’t want someone else to go through everything I went through.”

Sansa rose her head to lean over him, looking deeply into his eyes. “I won’t allow that to happen. We won’t allow that.”

Then Sansa kissed him and they started all over again. All her worries, her doubts, her sorrows were forgotten in these moments. There was only her and Tyrion, and no one else. Everything around her didn’t matter anymore. Her world was limited to her husband and the bed they shared. When they were done, Sansa rested her head again on Tyrion’s chest, panting and sweating. Her eyes were closed and she could listen to the beating of his heart in her right ear. He was breathing heavily as well, his hands tangled into her hair, unmoving. Everything seemed right for the moment and Sansa wanted to enjoy this moment of joy as long as she could.

She felt a current of cold air on her back. It had started before she and Tyrion were done, but she hadn’t taken care of it. Was the flap of the tent opened? Sansa didn’t want to care about that. Couldn’t she enjoy a night without problems with the man she loved? All the same, she lazily opened her eyes to see if a sudden gust of wind had opened the flap. It was quite dark in the tent and the candles were burning out, but there was still some faint light left. It took some time for Sansa to realize it in her dozing state, but there was someone else in their tent.

She almost had an heart attack. Someone was standing right next to their bed with a spear, looking at them with a strange expression. Sansa thought it was revulsion. She sat quickly in the bed.

“Who are you? What are you doing here?” she asked loudly.

“What is it?” Tyrion straightened to sit as well, then noticed the intruder. “BRONN!”

His shout was immediately followed by a scream from the intruder. He charged with his spear. Instinctively, Sansa moved to be right before Tyrion, and he happened to be the one the intruder was targeting. The spear penetrated her shoulder. A strong pain spurted from her left shoulder and she screamed. She heard footsteps and yelling, then she looked at the intruder. He was staring in shock. She noticed his eyes. She knew them. As the pain overcame everything else, all Sansa could
perceive was Tyrion screaming her name and the grey eyes of the intruder. She knew these eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the cliffhanger again, but I love to make them too much.

The passage of Tyrion and Sansa together during the night is mostly inspired by the scene between Robb and Talisa on their way to the Twins before the Red Wedding. This chapter was to show the situation of the army at Moat Cailin, to have Mira beginning to get more involved in the North, and it brought some action too at the end.

Some might find that things are going too well for the army in the Neck. A great army, stuck between swamps on a thin road for three months, and there wasn't a mutiny yet, they only lost a few men each day, and they are well provided? I admit it doesn't look very realistic, but when I realized it I was already too far gone into the siege of Moat Cailin and I couldn't change it without writing again many chapters. Furthermore, the good situation of the army supplies can be explained by the food they bring from the Reach (untouched by the war) thanks to the presence of the Hightowers, from the Twins (the Frey lands weren't too much affected by the war and are very close) and from the Westerlands (Robb plundered them in Season 2, but he stopped at Lannisport in the books, so the southern part of the Westerlands weren't touched by the war and can still produce something). The lack of sickness can also be explained by the weather. The army is stuck in the Neck in a time of the year where it's quite cold, but not too much. It's still autumn, and not winter. The soldier's clothes are still warm enough, and insects are less active than in summer. So, ironically, invading the North with winter coming is risky, but if your army is to be stuck in the Neck, then better to be stuck there during autumn than during winter or summer.

Please review

Next chapter: I leave it to your speculations (I'm quite eager to have you read it)
For all those who said that it was Arya in the comments in the previous chapter, you were right. It was Arya. Sorry I didn't confirm it, despite the fact it almost jumped to the eyes of many, but I had to keep some uncertainty. Now, we get Arya's thoughts on the situation, and a proper reunion between the Stark girls.

It was raining. Not that Arya complained about that. She was past caring about things as natural as rain. What bothered her the most was her cell, or more precisely her cage. She was imprisoned with nine other crannogmen, including Lord Fenn. They were all kept in the same iron cage, exposed to the elements of the nature and the weather, rain falling heavily on them. They weren’t so bothered by that. The crannogmen were used to live in very rudimentary ways among the swamps of the Neck, and Arya had seen worse. The actual situation was much better than the one she was in at Harrenhal. At least, they weren’t tortured. What bothered the most was they could barely move in it.

Arya had spent the last months among the crannogmen, mostly around Greywater Watch. She had liked her time there. She could always find something to do. Lord Reed and the other crannogmen had taught her how to hunt and fish in their own way, and Arya had liked that. Lord Reed himself was surprised that she loved to live in the Neck so much. Sansa would have hated that in her stead.

Thinking about her sister, another wave of rage went through Arya’s mind. They had planned everything so well. A little more than two months ago, a few people hunting close to Moat Cailin had warned Lord Reed that Northerners had gathered and occupied the fortress. About the same time, other hunters in the southern swamps had informed them that a great army was following the Kingsroad in the direction of the North. There were banners of House Lannister and House Frey in this army. The golden lion rode alongside the twin towers. They were attacking the North. Arya had wanted to go immediately on the Kingsroad and use her new knowledge of the environment of the Neck to kill as many Lannisters as she could. Lord Reed, however, had forbidden her to do so, but he had allowed her to follow groups of crannogmen in charge of watching the progressing army.

Without any surprise, the army of the Freys and the Lannisters had been blocked on their way to the North when they reached Moat Cailin. Two attacks on the ruined castle failed. In the two months that followed, they kept watching the army camp that stretched on leagues and leagues along the Kingsroad. Not long after the Lannisters and the Freys had arrived, another army had joined them. An army with the sigil of a tower with fire at the top of it. Arya remembered this sigil for being the one of House Hightower. What was very strange however was that there were banners from the other houses of the Riverlands, and what almost paralyzed Arya was that the sigil of House Tully, her mother’s family, was among them. She could understand that the Freys and the Lannisters could invade the North. They probably turned against the Boltons in the end. She could even understand that the Hightowers had joined them. After all, House Hightower was sworn to House Tyrell, and the Tyrells were allies to the Lannisters. But the other river lords, and especially House Tully? She
However, all that had been nothing to the shock Arya had when she had seen her sister. It had taken three weeks for that, but she had seen her in the end, and not in a situation Sansa would have liked to be found. She was vomiting. Arya laughed when she saw her, but she laughed and cried at the same time. Her sister was alive. She was taller than the last time she saw her, looking more like their mother. Arya also noticed, not without a hint of jealousy, that Sansa had grown more beautiful. She was a woman now. Despite the fact Arya had been happy to see her sister alive and well, there had been a bitter aftertaste to this discovery. Sansa was wearing a red gown with golden lines, the colors of House Lannister. One day, looking very closely to her, Arya had even distinguished a golden necklace. Arya had also seen the Imp, impossible to miss. He hadn’t changed much since the time she saw him at Winterfell, except for the fact he had now a huge scar crossing his face. She also saw Freys, almost impossible to miss as well. She had wanted nothing more but to go right now and take her sister away. She may complain about the poor lifestyle at Greywater Watch, but it didn’t matter. It would be better than living among Lannisters and Freys. Unfortunately, the other crannogmen had stopped her from doing so. She wouldn’t be able to take her sister away from the Lannisters by herself. They needed a plan, and Arya had to agree with them.

They had reported all their observations to Howland Reed. One day, Arya had gone back to Greywater Watch to tell Lord Reed about her sister and that they had to rescue her. Lord Reed had agreed, but also informed her that the Boltons had been declared enemies of the Crown. Sansa was now officially the Wardeness of the North. Arya had found it strange that the Lannisters had made her sister the Lady of Winterfell, but after her discussion with Howland Reed, she had understood why. Sansa was married to the Imp. By declaring her the Wardeness of the North, they wanted the children Sansa would have with Lord Tyrion to rule the North one day. The thought of Sansa having children with Tyrion Lannister disgusted Arya. She also learned at the same time that there had been a battle near Winterfell between Stannis Baratheon and the forces of House Bolton, and that Lord Stannis’s army had been defeated. Stannis Baratheon was dead as well.

The Lord of Greywater Watch agreed that they had to save Sansa, but they needed a few more weeks to put the plan into practice. They watched the routine of the guards, took note of the position of all patrols and the tent where Sansa was living, and prepared a rescue on night. Arya used all these weeks to notice all the little details about the camp, day and night. She followed Sansa almost everywhere she went. She spent most of her time in her tent. Another thing that disgusted Arya was that her sister seemed to live in the same tent than the Imp. She saw Sansa walk and talk with him a few times. Even worse, she saw her sister smile and even laugh with him. There were a few Freys that Arya saw discussing with Sansa as well, and she witnessed her sister smiling at them a few times. There was also a young girl with black hair who had to be around Sansa’s age who spent a lot of time with her. Arya had never seen her before, but Sansa seemed to be very fond of her. Arya also saw Thoros of Myr and Beric Dondarrion once. She never saw so many people on her list together in the same place.

Seeing Sansa with the Imp remembered Arya of what Littlefinger told her at the Eyrie. Was it true after all? Was Sansa really happy with the Imp? Did she really like to be a Lannister? She seemed to, by the way she behaved with her husband and the other Lannister commanders. One night, there had even been something that looked like a feast and Arya had heard toasts made for her sister. All that unnerved Arya. She only wanted to go into that damn camp, get her sister out and she would never be again close to a Lannister. Arya already enjoyed how Sansa would complain about everything at Greywater Watch.

Finally, three days ago, Arya and a group of twenty crannogmen had infiltrated the Lannister camp at night, while most of the people were asleep or drunk. They had killed the few guards on their way to the tent, and those guarding it. According to the plan, Arya was the one to enter the tent alone.
They thought she would have more success in convincing Sansa to follow them. However, when she had entered, she heard strange noises. There was a screen, and the sounds came from the other side of it. Arya had gotten around the screen and seen the last thing she expected. The scene before her was... indescribable. Sansa had shouted a muffled scream the moment she had come in, and afterwards her sister had laid on the Imp. They were both naked. Arya had been paralyzed by the shock caused by the scene. Neither Sansa nor the Imp had noticed her presence. In the end, she had managed to approach closer until she stood only a few feet from the bed, still recovering from her shock. That was when Sansa had noticed her presence. She hadn’t recognized her. Arya wasn’t surprised when she thought about it. She was unrecognizable in her crannogman’s clothes and with her short hair. Anyway, Sansa was always only concerned by Arya because she was her sister and no more. She wouldn’t have even noticed Arya if they didn’t have the same parents. The Imp had shouted for help when he had realized she was there. Finally leaving her trance, Arya had acted and threw her spear in the direction of the Imp. However, Sansa had moved before him and the spear had thrusted into her shoulder. Again, Arya had been stunned. She had just pierced her sister with her weapon. She hadn’t been able to react in time when guards had penetrated the tent and seized her.

Now here she was, with half the people sent to save Sansa The operation had been a disaster. They had failed miserably. Of the ten who were not arrested, two or three managed to escape, but the others were killed. Most of those who were in the cage with her were wounded, some very badly. The maesters had tended to their injuries, but Arya wasn’t sure they would all survive. She found it a great change in comparison to the treatment she had at Harrenhal, but she wasn’t much happy all the same. She had been captured by the Lannisters again. With some luck, they wouldn’t recognize her, but even then Arya doubted that would help her. She had tried to kill their lord. The punishment for such a crime was death. Arya was angry. Why didn’t Sansa let her kill the Imp? They could have escaped afterwards. Though now that she thought about it, Arya wasn’t sure they could have escaped. The crannogmen had been noticed before the Imp ever screamed for his men. Some other patrol or man wandering by luck had probably found one of the guards they killed. Arya had lost time because of her utter surprise when she had found Sansa. If she had acted immediately, they might have gotten a chance to get away with Sansa and they could all be safe right now.

Arya was angry after herself. She shouldn’t have lost time when she found Sansa. However, she was even more angry at Sansa. She was angry at her for not recognizing her sister, and for getting in the way when she tried to deal with the Imp. She was even more angry at Sansa for something Arya hoped that wasn’t true. Arya was afraid Littlefinger had been right when he said Sansa had wanted to marry Tyrion Lannister. She remembered how she behaved with him while Arya spied on them with the other crannogmen. That wasn’t the behavior of a prisoner, far from it. She even seemed to like the Freys. Arya’s sister had betrayed her.

Arya hoped that wasn’t the truth, that there was something else to explain this, and yet that was the only plausible explanation she could find. She was also furious because she had attacked Sansa. That wasn’t like one of their stupid quarrels. These were funny, at least for Arya. This time, Arya was afraid she may have killed her sister. She had seen the blood spurting out of her shoulder after she thrust the spear into it. Was Sansa dead? She had tried to ask the guards, but they wouldn’t give her an answer. In the end, she had stopped. Maybe they didn’t know yet that she was Arya Stark, and she didn’t want to give away her identity.

Arya saw a man approaching from afar. She knew who he was. His name was Bronn. He was a knight and one of the men who had arrested her the night she had tried to save Sansa. He seemed to be high ranked in the Lannister army. Arya wasn’t sure if she hated him. He didn’t look like one of these so called honorable knights they saw in King’s Landing, but he wasn’t Rorge or Armory Lorch or Gregor Clegane either. He even seemed kind in his own way and was always joking around. However, she wouldn’t like him either. He worked for the Lannisters.
He ordered the guards to open the door of the cage for him and stepped inside, looking at them one by one. “Sorry if the accommodations are not to your taste, lads. But I’m sure you understand. If that was Tywin Lannister’s wife you had tried to kill, you wouldn’t even be alive, so consider yourself lucky that he’s dead.” He grinned as he said that. Bronn looked at her and made a movement with his chin in her direction. “You. Follow me.”

Arya had a hard time getting on her feet. She almost hadn’t moved for three days and her legs were rusty. She also had shackles to her ankles and her wrists. Her back was sore as well. They walked in silence to the tent Arya recognized to be the one where Sansa and her husband were sleeping. They entered and found the Imp pacing the room. He turned to look at her as soon as she was inside and eyed her for a moment.

“Last time we saw each other was at Winterfell, isn’t it? You asked me if I really was an imp. Do you remember what I answered?”

He knew who she was. Unless he only suspected and was trying to be certain about it. Should Arya lie? He would probably find out sooner or later, and she didn’t see any chance for her to escape right now. Three days of reflection had been no help.

“You told me you walked on rainbows and carried sacks of gold to Casterly Rock.” She told him what she remembered.

The Imp had been grinning back when he told her that, but now he wasn’t. Strangely, his stare remembered Arya of the way Tywin Lannister stared at his own men. “I didn’t believe Sansa when she told me the first times. I thought she was raving. She wasn’t very lucid these last days, but she seemed better this morning and she still believed it was you. Now I see she was right. You grew up, you changed your clothes and the way you arrange your hair, and you are unwashed, but it’s you. Arya Stark. Second daughter to Eddard and Catelyn Stark.” He let a pause follow his statement. “I suppose I should be happy about your presence here. We thought you were at Winterfell in the hands of a torturer, but you happen to be here, in the Neck. If your reunion with Sansa had happened differently, I would be very happy.”

Again, Arya saw the same icy stare Tywin Lannister had at Harrenhal. She wasn’t moved by this. She was used to it. “Where is Sansa? How is she?”

“She will survive, but she is in quite a bad state. Are you happy about it?”

“Happy?” Why would he think she was happy?

“Yes. You tried to kill her. I thought you would be sad to learn she survived.”

Arya’s fury flared. “I didn’t want to kill her. I didn’t do it on purpose.”

“Well, you planted a spear through her. For me, this is an attempt of murder.”

“I was trying to kill you.” She had nothing to hide. He knew who she was, and what she had done. Better to shout at him before he killed her. She wished she could kill him right now, but he stayed away from her at a respectful distance and he had his man, Bronn, very close to her.

“Me? Why? Why did you want to kill me?”

Arya scoffed. “You killed my father, my mother, my brothers, you burned my home, you tortured my friends and you forced my sister to marry you. And you… You… You forced yourself upon her.”
Arya wasn’t stupid. She knew what her sister and the Imp were doing when she found them. Tyrion Lannister listened to her in silence, then let the silence linger between them before he spoke.

“It seems I’ve been a very busy man. First, I want to precise one thing, Lady Arya.”

“I’m not a lady!”

“As you wish. First, I want to precise one thing, Arya. When a man forces himself on a woman, he is usually on the top of her. Since you surprised me and your sister in the act, I’m sure you noticed she was the one on top. So you should know that I didn’t force myself upon her. But I will answer to all your accusations. I didn’t kill your father. I wasn’t even in King’s Landing when this happened. I was in the Vale because your mother believed a brothelkeeper when he told her I had tried to have your brother Bran killed. I was the one to be almost killed because your aunt accused me as well to have killed her husband, and I was almost thrown through the Moon Door because of that, on no evidence. If you want to blame someone for your father’s death, blame Joffrey and my sister. I wasn’t there to save your father and to stop Joffrey because your mother had arrested me with no reason. I didn’t kill your mother either. I had no part in the Red Wedding and I knew about it only after it happened. My father and Walder Frey are the ones you should blame for that. They are also to be blamed for the death of your brother Robb. As for Bran and Rickon, and for the destruction of Winterfell, Theon Greyjoy is the one who did this, and I hate him as much as you do. I never tortured anyone in my life, so I doubt that I ever tortured any of your friends. And I never forced your sister to marry me. In fact, we were both forced to marry each other by my own father, and I never mistreated Sansa. I was among the very few in King’s Landing who tried to protect her in fact, and she may be dead right now if I hadn’t been here, just like your father is dead.”

Arya hadn’t meant that he was the one to kill all her family himself. “That wasn’t what I meant. I mean that you all did this. The Lannisters. You destroyed my family, and you made Sansa one of you.”

There was something that passed on the Imp’s face for a moment. A shadow of a doubt, or of regret, Arya wasn’t sure, but it disappeared as soon as it appeared. “I never made Sansa a Lannister. I didn’t consummate the marriage on our wedding night. I let her choose the moment we would share the same bed, even if that moment would be never. After my father died, I offered her to annul our marriage, and she refused. She chose to remain my wife. I’m happy she did, but I didn’t force her to be my wife. Everything that happened between us, that was her choice, or at least she agreed to it. You blame me for the actions my family did. Do you know what is my family for me, Arya? I am a dwarf. My mother died the day I was born. For that, my father and my sister hated me for all my life. They both tried to have me killed more than once. When I was sixteen, my father put me in charge of the drains and cisterns of Casterly Rock to humiliate me. Not long after, I married a woman I loved, and because she was lowborn, my father had her raped by his guards right before me and cancelled our marriage. He put me in the vanguard at the Battle of the Green Fork in the hope that I would die. When he returned to King’s Landing, he forced me to marry your sister, and not long after, he had her family slaughtered at a wedding. And the best thing he found to tell me after was that I should rape your sister to get a son from her and that he wanted to throw me into the sea the day I was born. When he died, my sister accused me of killing him without proof and tried to have me executed. When the trial decided that I was innocent, she had an assassin try to kill me. Before that, she had a kingsguard try to kill me as well, in the middle of the Battle of Blackwater. THAT is my family. My father, my sister and Joffrey all hated me, and they were the ones to slaughter your family. Do you know that Joffrey wanted to serve your brother’s head on a plate to Sansa after the Red Wedding? I opposed that, and it was used against me at my trial later. I was the only one to try to make peace with your family, and I even tried to send your sister back to her mother during the war. I’m guilty of being a dwarf. I’m guilty of whoring, of drinking, of gambling, I even had people killed, but I didn’t take part in the destruction of your family. Your father was good and honorable and he tried to do his
best for the good of the Realm, and there aren’t many men like that today. I admired your mother, even if she wanted to have me executed. She was a strong woman, and she was fierce when it came to protect her children. I didn’t know your brother Robb. He seemed to be a good man, and honorable just like your father, but I didn’t know him. Your brother Bran was a sweet boy who was unfairly crippled. I gave him the plans of a special saddle so he could ride again when I passed by Winterfell on my way back from the Wall. I didn’t see much of your brother Rickon, but he seemed like a nice boy too and I had no wish to see him dead. And I liked your brother Jon Snow. He is bastard, and all dwarves are bastards in their father’s eyes. I helped him at the Wall. He is good lad. And I love your sister. I have protected her from Joffrey’s and my sister’s cruelty from the day I arrived in King’s Landing. I stood up for her against my own blood, against my own interest, without anything to gain from it. When I was forced to marry her, I let her remain a virgin even if I had every right to take her and even if my father was pressuring me to get a son from her. I put myself in danger for her, even before my father was thinking about marrying us. I have protected her, I love her, and I will protect her and love her until the day I die. If you want to blame someone for the death of your family, blame Joffrey, my father, my sister, even my brother if you want, but leave me out of it.”

Arya was speechless after this long tirade. Tyrion Lannister had gotten closer to her while he spoke. If she had wanted, she could have killed him right now by strangling him with her shackles, but something told her to not do this. Lord Tyrion wasn’t over.

“I almost gave up everything for your sister. I risked my life, what little good reputation I had, even my father threatened me to send men in our rooms to force us to make a child if I didn’t do it myself. It’s a chance he died of a heart attack the night before he was supposed to execute his threat. I have brought my army here, in the Neck, when winter is almost there, risking the life of thousands of people if not more, to save you from a psychopath and a sadist, because you were Sansa’s sister. And you come into our tent, try to kill me, and almost kill the woman I love, your own sister. After that, you blame me for everything that happened to your family, like if I was the one to stab your brother in the heart or to burn your two little brothers alive. I’m tired of this. Taking the blame for everything the others do because I’m a dwarf.”

The Imp stared at her for a time, then he sighed and looked on the ground before he looked at her again. He seemed more calm when he spoke again. “Sansa wants to see you. That’s why I had you brought here. Bronn will escort you to the tent where she’s being taken care of. He will ensure your safety, but I warn you. If you try anything on Sansa, I’ll have you killed without any hesitation. I didn’t allow Joffrey, or Cersei, or my father, or anyone else to mistreat her, and I will not allow you to hurt her either because she’s your sister. Now go.”

Arya could tell by his face that he was serious. If she tried anything on Sansa, he would have her killed. She wouldn’t try to kill her of course. Sansa was her sister after all. But Lord Tyrion made it clear that he would execute anyone who would try to hurt Sansa. Bronn led her outside the tent and they walked away. It was still raining and the sky was grey like a stone. On their way, the Imp’s man talked to her.

“You know, these men you and your lot killed the other night, some of them were my men. Some of my best.” Another one who would complain to her. “I’m impressed. You did a good job.”

“What?” asked Arya, bewildered.

“I can only be impressed. You see, I choose my men according to their talents, not because of some title or name they have. These men were hard to kill, but you killed them all the same. I wouldn’t want you as my enemy.”
“What if I am?”

“Then I shall watch my back very carefully. Or I could try to hire you.” He said all of it while grinning.

“I just killed some of your men, and you would be ready to have me work for you?”

“I want the best under my orders. If someone manages to kill my best men, the better to have him, or her, with me than against me.”

“I’m a girl.”

“So what? We have a woman here. A woman warrior. She’s quite good at fighting. She beats most of the men. Though she may be too honorable. All the same, she’s better than most of the men, including mine. If a girl is better at killing or fighting than a man, then I’ll hire the girl. But I doubt you want me to hire you.”

“No.” She hated him.

“Alright. Then I’ll watch my back closely.”


They arrived before another red tent, and there a surprise was waiting for Arya. The surprise was about six feet tall, with blond hair, broad and muscled shoulders, a flat chest, strong arms, a square face with hard traits, all clad in armor from head to toe, a sword at her belt, her hand resting on the pommel. It was a woman, everyone could say that, but dressed like a knight, guarding the entrance of the tent.

“I told you about a woman warrior,” said Bronn. “There she is. Brienne of Tarth. Also called Brienne the Beauty, the Kingslayer’s whore, or wench for the most intimate people.”

“I’m not a wench, Ser Bronn,” the woman answered hardly. Arya agreed with her.

“Alright, my lady.” The man who was supposed to be a knight raised his hands in the air in an appeasing gesture, but he kept grinning all the same. “I brought the girl our lady asked for. You want me to go inside with her while you stand guard outside, or we do the other way around?”

“The other way,” the woman answered coldly. She looked at Arya and her face softened. She looked for a very long time. “Come in.”

Brienne of Tarth pointed the flap of the tent with her chin. Hesitating a moment, Arya decided to go inside. If this was a trap, there was no way for her to escape. Bronn and Brienne were both obviously trained warriors and she had no chance to get away with her shackles. She stepped forward and entered the red tent.

Sansa was sitting in a heavily cushioned chair, her eyes half closed, looking away to one side of the tent. Brienne was behind Arya and followed her inside. Sansa looked at them. Slowly, her face lightened and she seemed to recognize the intruders. Arya’s sister was wearing a blue gown this time, something Arya preferred very much to the red ones she saw her wearing most of the time since she arrived in the Neck. She could see bandages where her gown wasn’t covering her skin on her left shoulder and her red hair were falling on her shoulders. Sansa stood up from her chair, slowly, wincing in the process, but her blue eyes, the same eyes than their mother, were shining. She advanced slowly towards Arya. The youngest of the Stark sisters didn’t know what to do. How would Sansa react to her presence? She had almost killed her. Arya felt guilty for almost killing her
sister, who was among the few members of her family still alive. Sansa stopped close to her. Arya had grown up since the last time they met, but Sansa had too and she was quite taller than her. A huge smile appeared on her lips.

“Arya?” Sansa’s voice was hoarse, tired.

“Arya,” replied Arya, a smile coming at her face too. Despite the circumstances, she was happy to see her sister. How long since they last saw each other?

Sansa’s own smile only widened even more. Slowly, she closed the few steps separating them and hugged Arya. They both cried in each other’s shoulder. Sansa was her sister. She didn’t hate her. Not really. They couldn’t support each other back at Winterfell, but they were family. Almost all that was left of their family.

They broke their embrace. Sansa had tears in her eyes. Arya looked at her shoulder. “Does it hurt?” she asked.

Sansa looked at her left shoulder and winced again. “Yes, but I’m no longer in danger. The maester says that I’m safe. And the baby too.”

Arya didn’t understand for a moment, and then her eyes widened as she understood what Sansa just said. “The baby?”

“Yes. I’m pregnant. I’m with child.”

Sansa had a timid smile on her lips. Arya had thought about many possible scenarios for the time she would be reunited with her sister, but Sansa being pregnant had not been one of them. If she was pregnant… Arya remembered how she found Sansa with the Imp.

“How?” she asked.

Sansa seemed taken aback by the question, and uneasy as well. She looked at Brienne. Arya followed her eyes, and the woman warrior looked uneasy like her sister. Arya stared back at Sansa.

“Well, the same way Father and Mother made us,” Sansa answered, still seeming uncertain.

“The Imp? He’s the father?” Arya was thunderstruck, and as if to mark the moment, they heard thunder far away.

“Yes. Tyrion is the father.” Arya had a hard time to assimilate the information she just received, and the memory of what she witnessed the other night didn’t make her feel better. “I know it’s a lot to take,” tried to explain Sansa. “But Arya, I would like you to not try to kill him again.”

“Why?” Arya was outraged. “He’s a Lannister. The Lannisters murdered our family. Father, Mother, Robb.”

“Please, Arya. Tyrion was not the one behind all of this. He took no part in their deaths. And the Lannisters are not all monsters. I met the other ones at Casterly Rock. Most of them are no worse than you and me. Only Lord Tywin, Cersei and Joffrey are really monsters, and they’re the ones who killed our family. Tyrion is different. I love him.”

Arya didn’t think she could trust her sister then. Sansa had been in love with Joffrey once, even after he killed Mycah and that she saw he was a coward and a monster, but because he was a prince, Sansa had continued to love him.
“You once loved Joffrey too,” Arya commented.

Sansa sighed and slowly went to sit back into her chair. “Arya, please sit. I have a lot of things to tell you.” Arya came to sit not far away from Sansa, her shackles and chains clicking as she walked. “Do they hurt?”

“I’ve seen worse,” Arya commented darkly as she sat.

“Brienne, go find the guards and take the keys to remove these things.”

“My lady, Lord Tyrion forbade to remove them,” argued the woman called Brienne.

“If he complains about that, he will complain to me. You are in my service, Lady Brienne. Not Tyrion’s. I’ll take the blame for everything that will happen.”

The tall woman finally bowed and left. Arya looked at Sansa. “The Imp ordered you to keep me in chains?” she asked.

“Don’t blame him too much, Arya. You threw a spear through me. I was half conscious for the last days, and the maesters weren’t sure if I would survive. I could have died, and the baby too. He only wants to protect me.”

“I didn’t want to hurt you. I wanted to kill him. To save you.”

“I don’t need to be saved, Arya. I’m safe with Tyrion.”

Sansa started to tell her tale of all the events that had happened after their father died. While she spoke, Brienne came back with the keys and released Arya from her chains. Arya sighed in relief as she felt the heavy shackles leave her wrists and her ankles. Sansa told her the horrible things she endured because of Joffrey. The kingsguards hitting her, the threats, the way she was forced to look at their father’s head on a spike, the beating in public, the insults. Arya regretted she wasn’t the one to kill Joffrey more than ever. She told Arya that only very few people tried to help her, and Tyrion and had been one of them. He had apologized for their father’s death, rescued her when Joffrey had ordered her stripped of her clothes and beaten naked before the court, put people in her service to watch out for her. He had been forced to marry her and never forced himself upon her. She remained a virgin during their wedding night, and he was among the few to try to console her after the Red Wedding. When Tywin Lannister died, he was accused of murdering him by his sister, Cersei. Sansa had organized his defense and saved him, but he was almost killed by one of Cersei’s men. Tyrion later forced Joffrey to acknowledge her as Lady of Winterfell and Casterly Rock, and they left the capital not long after Joffrey died. At Casterly Rock, Sansa had met the other members of House Lannister. Some were arrogant, but they treated her very well and even helped her. Sansa also told her about the secret pact Tyrion made with their mother to return both Arya and Sansa to their family for his brother, and the role Brienne had played in that. The Lannisters hated the Ironborn, the Boltons and the Freys just like them. Then they had received information that Arya was at Winterfell, a prisoner of the Boltons, and Tyrion had called the banners to rescue her.

When she had finished, Sansa asked her a question. “How did you manage to escape Winterfell?”

Arya had to correct her sister’s story. “I never escaped Winterfell, Sansa. I haven’t seen it since we left with Father. I spent the last few months at Greywater Watch, with Howland Reed and the crannogmen.”

Sansa’s face showed utter surprise. “I don’t understand. Tyrion’s men in the North told us you were there. That you married Ramsay Bolton.”
“Not at all! It was Littlefinger who wanted me to marry him. That’s why I left him when we were at Moat Cailin.”

A thick silence followed. Arya witnessed the eyes of her sister burning with fury. “Littlefinger?”

“Yes. He tried to bring me to Winterfell to marry Roose Bolton’s son, but I escaped and went to Howland Reed. He was Father’s friend.”

Another long moment of silence followed. “Arya, tell me what happened. Everything that happened since Father died.”

Arya did as Sansa had done a few moments ago and told her all that happened to her since that horrible day in King’s Landing. Sansa almost laughed when Arya told her she had been Tywin Lannister’s cupbearer at Harrenhal, but she didn’t seem to believe her when Arya said they were helped by a man who could change his face. Sansa was already aware of her time with the Brotherhood Without Banners. Beric Dondarrion and Thoros of Myr had told her. Sansa was horrified when she described the events at the Red Wedding, and seemed about to cry when she told her how the Hound died. But all this was replaced by fury and anger when she told what Baelish had done. Sansa didn’t seem particularly outraged, only surprised, when Arya told her about their aunt’s death. Both of them didn’t seem to like their aunt Lysa very much. However, Sansa looked as if she wanted to assassinate Littlefinger.

“This man! That’s not enough for him! After everything he did. Does he want to have all of us dead?”

“He betrayed Father. He sold him to Cersei. The Hound told me,” Arya informed her.

“I know. Tyrion told me too. But that’s not all he did. He lied to our mother. You probably don’t know, Arya, but someone tried to kill Bran not long after we left Winterfell.”

“What?!”

“It was Joffrey. He paid someone to kill Bran for some petty reason and gave him a costly dagger that belonged to King Robert. When Mother tried to discover to who belonged the knife, Littlefinger told her it was Tyrion’s. She arrested him because of that, and that started the war between the Lannisters and the Starks. He tried to kidnap me at least twice, and I think he had a hand in Joffrey’s murder as well. And now this! He tried to sell you to the Boltons.”

Arya was furious as well before these revelations. “I should have killed him when I could. We must do something about him.”

“Yes, we will. Don’t worry. Tyrion and I decided a long time ago we would deal with him one day. Tyrion spent weeks in the sky cells because of this man.” Strangely, Arya found herself sympathizing with her brother-in-law. She knew what the sky cells were like, and if Sansa was telling the truth, then Littlefinger was their real enemy.

“What should we do then?” Arya asked to her sister. They had a common goal.

“For now, there isn’t much we can do. We have to take back Winterfell from the Boltons first. And after that… We must go and meet Jon. He’s Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch now. We will have to see him once we have dealt with the Boltons. There is… something beyond the Wall. Something dangerous. We may not be able to leave the North before long.”

Arya didn’t understand what Sansa meant, but she was ready to fight the Boltons and to kill Roose Bolton. He had killed their brother. They would deal with Littlefinger later. For once in her life, Arya
thought she and Sansa understood each other.

“I’m sorry, Sansa. I didn’t want to hurt you, and… I didn’t know the Imp helped you.”

Sansa smiled sadly. “That’s alright. No one is dead. Just don’t try to kill him or me again in the future.” They both giggled a little. “I had a pavilion arranged for you. You won’t miss anything. However, we cannot tell everyone you are here yet. Only me, Tyrion, Brienne and a few other people know about your presence.”

“What about the crannogmen? The people who were with me?” Arya was glad she wouldn’t have to sleep outside anymore, but she didn’t want her friends to stay outside like this.

“I’ll speak with Tyrion and see what we can do. They killed some of his men, so that won’t be easy to make things better for them.”

Arya protested. “They were trying to help you.”

“I know, but they killed some of his men. I’ll do my best. Tyrion will listen to me. He’s not like his father.”

“Sansa, do you really trust him? And… love him?” Arya till had a hard time believing this. Her sister who always dreamed of marrying a prince or a handsome knight, in love with the Imp?

“Yes, I do.” In a strange way, the expression on Sansa’s face reminded Arya of the expression their mother had once when she was talking about their father. “He really wants to help us, Arya. He brought his army here to save you, and to give back Winterfell to us. He already gave back the Riverlands to our uncle Edmure, and he executed the Freys who murdered Robb and his wife, and a few others too. He regrets what his family did and he’s trying to make amends now.”

Arya wasn’t sure if she could really trust the Imp. He was a Lannister after all, and even if Sansa was in love with him, her sister hadn’t proved to love the right people in the past. However, Sansa didn’t seem to be stupid like she was when they left Winterfell. She hated the same people (or almost the same people) that Arya hated, and she wasn’t complaining anymore about stupid things.

“Tyrion is the first person I met who didn’t look at me like a frightened child dreaming of charming princes and knights in shining armor. Though we both know that’s who I was before.” Sansa seemed to read Arya’s mind. She had a smile as she said the last sentence and they both slowly burst into laughs. Her sister took back a serious expression after some time. “I’m sorry about how awful I’ve been with you, Arya. You were right about Joffrey. I was stupid to love him. I needed Father’s death to realize who he really was. If I had been clever like you, perhaps he would still be alive.”

That was the first time Sansa apologized to her. Arya got on her feet and hugged her sister. She was careful to put her head on her right shoulder to not hurt her again. They stood there for a long time. Arya had found back her sister. They had both changed, and Sansa had become a better sister for her. Sadly, Sansa broke the embrace.

“I need to rest now.” Sansa effectively looked tired. She turned to the tall woman who had stayed there all the time their discussion had gone on. “Lady Brienne, bring Arya to the place we prepared for her.”

“Yes, my lady,” answered Brienne.

“And Arya, please stop to call Tyrion the Imp. He has a name, and he is your brother-in-law now.”

Arya nodded. She wouldn’t argue about that, at least not now. Arya left with the armored woman,
casting a last glance to her sister. Sansa smiled at her as she laid back in her cushioned chair. Things were better than Arya expected. She thought about the Imp. Sansa’s tale and the things he told Arya before she met her sister quite agreed. There was probably some truth in all this. Arya wondered if she should keep him on her list. Or at least, she wondered if she shouldn’t wait before she was certain she should kill him. She looked at Brienne of Tarth who escorted her. She was a very tall woman, and Sansa said she had saved her and served their mother before they met. Arya was also intrigued by this woman. It was the first time she saw a woman all clad in armor and bearing a sword at her belt.

“Is that true, everything Sansa said?” Arya asked her.

“It is, my lady. As strange as it may seem,” she answered.

“I’m not a lady.” Arya was bored to repeat that to everybody.

“Sorry, Arya.”

“The Imp really protected her?”

“Yes. In fact, I never saw a man behave so well with his wife and care so much for her. I saw him slap Joffrey because he mocked your brother’s death.”

“Really? He slapped Joffrey?”

“Yes.” They both smiled and chuckled. Arya would have liked to be there and see the Imp slap that coward.

“Are you a knight?” Arya asked her.

“No,” Brienne replied. She remembered her father telling her one day that women couldn’t be knights. Arya never understood why.

“But you know how to use that sword?”

“I do.”

“Does it have a name?”

“Oathkeeper. It was forged with the steel from your father’s sword, Ice.”

“What?” Arya looked at the sword.

“Tywin Lannister had it melted down after the Red Wedding. He made two swords out of it. One was given to Joffrey at his wedding, and now it belongs to Tommen. The other one, this one, he gave it to Ser Jaime, and Ser Jaime gave it to me. He told me to protect Catelyn Stark’s daughters with Ned Stark’s steel. And that’s what I did. I protected your sister, and now I will protect you as well.”

“Why did he give it to you?”

“He swore to your mother to bring you and Sansa back safely to her. We thought you dead, but your sister was still alive. So I protected her with it. I would have tried to find you if I had known you were still alive.”

Arya kept looking at the sword. Ice had been twice longer. No wonder they could make two smaller swords out of it. Her father had been killed with his own sword. At least, it was no longer Ilyn Payne
who had Ice, but Ice didn’t exist any longer.

“I had a sword before, but I lost it. Her name was Needle,” said Arya. She missed her friend.

“Good name. Was it thin?” commented Brienne with a smile.

“Yes. Who taught you how to fight?”

“My father.”

Arya envied her. “Mine never wanted to. Said fighting was for boys. It was Jon who had Needle made for me before I left Winterfell.”

“My father said the same. But I kept fighting the boys anyway. Kept losing. Finally, my father said, If you’re going to do it, you might as well do it right.”

They both laughed a little. “Do you think you could show me? How to fight?”

Brienne of Tarth stopped and looked at Arya, a strange expression on her face. “I’ll see if I can. I think I might.”

They resumed their path to a red tent where a dozen men clad in red armors were standing around. Arya understood that she was still a prisoner. A well provided and comfortable prisoner, but a prisoner all the same. For now, she wouldn’t try to kill Tyrion Lannister, but she wouldn’t trust him either. He was a Lannister, and she wouldn’t put her life in the hands of a Lannister, even if Sansa loved him. In fact, Sansa’s love for the Imp didn’t encourage her at all to trust him.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
Peter Vaughan, who played Maester Aemon Targaryen, died two days ago at the age of 93, on December 6, 2016. And now his watch has ended.

TYRION XXII

A boat was approaching with a white banner and the green banner of House Reed. There had to be about ten men in the boat, all rowing except one holding the helm. Tyrion was standing on the side of the Kingsroad with the Blackfish and Bronn, waiting for Howland Reed. The Lord of Greywater Watch had come to negotiate with them after the failed attempt to kidnap Sansa and kill Tyrion in the middle of the night. Tyrion still didn’t forgive the crannogmen and Arya Stark for attempting to kill him and take Sansa away from him. They could have tried to speak with him, but Tyrion supposed Howland Reed had no wish to speak with him after Ned Stark’s execution and the Red Wedding. Again, Tyrion had to thank Cersei, Joffrey and his father for having him almost killed.

If Howland Reed came for a parley now, it was because he had no choice. They had eight of his people, including one of his bannermen, Lord Aran Fenn. Even more important, they had Arya and Sansa. If Howland Reed was to get them, he had no choice but to negotiate. Knowing the character of Northerners, Tyrion didn’t expect these negotiations to be easy. The boat reached the bank and some of the men started to get off. One of them took their lead and walked to Tyrion and the other men with him. He stopped right in front of Tyrion, a suspicious look on his face.

“Lord Lannister. Ser Brynden,” he said.

“Lord Reed,” replied the Blackfish.

So here was the Lord of Greywater Watch. There was nothing about him to distinguish him from the rest of his people. He wore the same clothes, was as small as the others, and he was among the oarsmen in the boat. However, despite being smaller than all the other men, the crannogmen were still taller than Tyrion. Even among them, he would be a dwarf.

“I’m surprised to see you standing at the side of the Lord of Casterly Rock, Ser Brynden. However, that explains why there are Tully banners in this army. I’m sure you have good reasons to march with the Lannisters,” said Howland Reed, not paying attention to Tyrion.

“I have,” confirmed the Blackfish. “And I will explain you everything, but not here. You want to see Sansa and Arya? Then follow us.”

Howland Reed hesitated. He looked at Tyrion, then to Brynden Tully, and finally he nodded. It was a good thing the Blackfish was there, or else the Lord of the crannogmen may never have followed them. They walked in silence to the pavilion where the others were waiting for them. There were all the people they thought who were needed for negotiations. Sansa sat in a comfortable chair. The maester still said she should move as little as possible, and Tyrion was not about to argue with him.
Not only was she badly injured, but she was also pregnant. Tyrion had feared the worst not only for her, but for the baby as well.

Sitting next to Sansa was her sister, Arya Stark. Tyrion had not expected Sansa’s sister to try to kill him, and almost to succeed in killing her own sister, when they would meet. He didn’t expect to find her in the Neck either, and certainly not in the middle of the night in his own tent, while he and Sansa were making love. During the first two days following the nocturnal attack, Sansa had been raving, saying it was her sister in their tent that night. Tyrion hadn’t believed her in the first place, but the third day she had seemed more conscious and told him in the most serious way that it was her sister, and that she wanted to see her. She had almost ordered him to let her see Arya. Tyrion had Bronn fetch the girl, and he had recognized her after some time. That was Arya Stark.

Now here she was. She still wore the garments of the crannogmen. Only a few people knew who she was. Tyrion didn’t want the news that Arya Stark was in their camp to spread. Almost everyone who knew who she was stood in the tent right now. Tyrion and Arya were both staring at each other. Arya Stark didn’t forgive him for marrying Sansa, and Tyrion didn’t forgive her for almost killing his wife and their child. He remembered how pale Sansa had seemed for days, the blood spurting from her shoulder, the fear he had to lose his wife and his child in the same night. All that because of this little girl who thought he should die. Because Sansa asked, he had allowed her to live comfortably in a tent without chains, but he maintained heavy guard around her at all time. If it had been up to him, he would have let the Stark girl in the cage with the other crannogmen. He had lost thirteen men when they had invaded his camp to kill him in his bed, with Sansa lying next to him, and his wife had almost been killed in the attempt. He wasn’t about to forget. Yet, he accepted to receive Howland Reed. No matter what grudge he had against the crannogmen now, he needed them.

Brienne of Tarth was standing guard close to Arya and Sansa, and Lady Mira Hightower was sitting next to Sansa as well. Sansa thought they could trust her, she was a Northerner, and anyway Sansa had told her about Arya’s presence, so it would be better if she was there. It would be better if there were as many Northerners they could gather to speak with Howland Reed. There was also Lord Beric Dondarrion who was present. With Tyrion, Bronn, the Blackfish, Howland Reed and Aran Fenn who just entered, the men were barely outnumbering the women, something Tyrion had never expected to happen anywhere in this army. The Lord of the Fenns had revealed his identity after they received the request for a parley from his liege lord. There really seemed to be nothing to distinguish highborn from lowborn among the crannogmen.

Howland Reed looked at Tyrion’s wife. “You must be Lady Sansa.”

“Well?” Sansa didn’t seem to realize it was a lord who was standing before her. Tyrion would probably have made the same mistake in her place.

“My name is Howland Reed, my lady. Your father was a good friend of mine. He was a good man, and an honorable one.”

Sansa stared at Lord Reed in utter surprise. She turned her eyes to Tyrion, asking a silent question, and Tyrion nodded to mean it was true. He noticed Arya Stark was repressing laughs.

“Lord Reed,” said Sansa, returning her attention to the small man, “it is a pleasure to meet you. My father always spoke highly of you. And fondly.”

Howland Reed nodded, a pained expression on his face. “I was heartbroken when he died. I wept for him for days.” The Lord of Greywater Watch turned his eyes to Arya. “Are you alright, Arya?”

“Yes, I am,” the young girl answered.
The crannogman turned once again to Tyrion. “Lord Lannister, I don’t wish to linger here any longer than I need, so I will get straight to the point. I want my men who are in your captivity released and allowed to go back to their families. I want Arya and Sansa Stark to come with me at Greywater Watch where I will take care of them. In return, I will allow you to leave the Neck and to go back to your lands without fight. If you refuse, we will wage war on you and harass you from all directions. Your men will die by the thousands in the Neck until almost none of them are left. This is my offer, and it is to take or to leave.”

The negotiations wouldn’t be easy with that one, as it was to be expected. Tyrion looked at the Blackfish before he replied to Howland Reed. “Lord Reed, I have a counter offer to make. You acknowledge Sansa as Lady of Winterfell and Wardeness of the North. You pledge your banners to her. You join us in our campaign against the Boltons. You harass the garrison of Moat Cailin loyal to House Bolton and help us to take the fortress. Once it has fallen, we do not oblige you to follow us at Winterfell, but you are free to do so if you wish. Your men will be released once the terms are accepted, to the exception of Lord Fenn who will remain with us during the siege of Moat Cailin. Once it has fallen, he will be free to go. You will allow our convoys and men to freely get through the Neck. Arya Stark will remain and accompany us at Winterfell where she will live. After all, this is her home as much as it is Sansa’s.”

Tyrion wasn’t about to let Arya Stark in the hands of Howland Reed so he could use her to eventually challenge Sansa’s claim, and he was even less willing to let him take Sansa away from him. Furthermore, they needed the crannogmen to take Moat Cailin, as much as Tyrion hated them for what they did this night last week.

Lord Reed was looking at him intently. “You are bold, Imp, to make such a proposition and expect me to accept it.”

“Someone must be bold to attempt an invasion on the North when winter is almost there,” replied Tyrion.

“Bold, or stupid.”

“Sometimes the difference between stupidity and boldness is not as evident as it seems. People would have said Aegon the Conqueror was stupid when he ordered all the kings of Westeros to bend the knee to him before his invasion, and yet his progeny ruled Westeros for the three centuries that followed.”

Lord Howland Reed kept a hard stare at Tyrion. This one wouldn’t taste his japes. He began to understand why he and Ned Stark got along so well.

“You must be rather stupid, my lord,” said Howland Reed, “to believe that I could accept an offer like this one.”

“Truth be told, I didn’t expect you would accept. At least not immediately,” quipped Tyrion.

“You expected well. I will never agree to those terms.”

“Lord Reed.” Sansa stepped in the conversation. “We all know who rules Winterfell right now. Roose Bolton. He’s the man who murdered my brother Robb Stark. He was the eldest son of your friend, my father, Lord Eddard Stark. Do you really want him to be your liege lord?”

The Lord of Greywater Watch looked at Sansa with a softened expression. “No, and I will never bend the knee to a Bolton. But I am not a fool. I know very well what the Lannisters intend to do. They want the North.” He turned again to Tyrion. “And I will not help you to take it.”
Just like Tyrion feared, the Northerners had no wish to support Sansa because she was married to him. Was he condemned to suffer the consequences of his father’s cruelty until the end of time? Was Sansa condemned to that as well?

“Lord Reed,” started to explain Tyrion. “I don’t know if you read the decree depriving the Boltons from their hold of the North, but it is clearly stated that Sansa is the Lady of Winterfell and the Wardeness of the North. I just said you had to pledge your banners to her, not to me. I have no real position of power in the North.”

“We both know this isn’t true, Imp,” replied the crannogman. “Your house is trying to take the North through Sansa, and I am quite sure that as soon as she has given you a few sons, you will kill her. So I repeat my conditions. Give me back my men, Arya and Sansa, leave the Neck in peace, and no one will die.”

“I will not leave,” said Sansa. “We will not leave. Roose Bolton holds Winterfell. He’s holding my home. And his son is a monster. Arya and I have a brother in the Night’s Watch. I don’t think the Boltons will leave him to be quiet for long. He is our father’s last living son. They will try to kill him sooner or later. We must take back Winterfell.”

“Do you really think the Lannisters will spare your… brother, Sansa? They won’t. He is a threat for them as much as he is for the Boltons.”

“No, he’s not,” intervened Tyrion. “Jon Snow is honorable like his father. He will never break his vows to the Night’s Watch. I have absolutely nothing against him being Lord Commander. In fact, I’m quite glad he is. I met him at the Wall when I visited it. He’s a good lad. And surprisingly more Stark than his brothers and sisters.”

“Lord Reed, you can trust Lord Tyrion,” said Sansa.

“Trust him? Let me doubt about it, my lady,” replied the little lord.

“My lord, if you allow me, you are in no place to judge Lord Tyrion.” Lady Mira was the one to speak. “You don’t know him, you never met him before this day. We are four Northerners here, and of these four, only Lady Sansa and I can claim to know Lord Tyrion. And I agree on everything she just said.”

The Lord of Greywater Watch looked at the young lady with a perplexed expression. “Who are you?”

“My name is Mira Hightower, but until recently I was Mira Forrester. My father, Gregor Forrester, rode side by side with the King in the North during the war. He died for him at the Red Wedding. My brother, Ethan Forrester, was butchered by Ramsay Snow, and my other brothers, my sister, and my mother all died when Roose Bolton’s bannermen slaughtered them and burned my home. Now these men feast in my family’s halls. Maybe the Lannisters had a hand in the Red Wedding, but they didn’t kill my father. The Freys did. They didn’t kill my family either, the Boltons and the Whitehills did. I will have no peace as long as I know that the man who put his dagger through my brother’s throat is to rule the North one day. Would you rather see the man who killed your king and his bastard rule the North, or the daughter of Lord Stark? And know this. My husband and I have our own army here. You may force the Lannisters to leave, but you won’t force us to leave. I have come to take back my home, just like Lady Sansa, and I’m going to take it back, no matter the cost.”

The head of House Reed eyed the northern girl suspiciously. Lady Mira didn’t look very much like a Northerner with her actual attire, and maybe Lord Reed knew nothing about House Forrester. This family wasn’t that known after all, and the crannogmen didn’t look like the ones to know every
northern house, small and great.

He finally answered. “I understand what you feel, my lady. I have nothing against the Hightowers, so I won’t get in your way, but I will not help a Lannister to become Warden of the North.”

“Alright, Sansa,” intervened the Blackfish before Sansa could speak. “You don’t need to repeat everything you once told to me, Edmure and our bannermen. I’ll do it this time.” The hero of the War of the Ninepenny Kings faced the Lord of Greywater Watch. “Lord Reed, I know this is probably difficult to believe, but you can trust the Imp. I, for myself, don’t like him, and I doubt I will ever like him, but I trust him, as hard it can be to believe it.”

Lord Howland Reed looked at the Blackfish, great skepticism plain on his face. Tyrion thought he didn’t know what to think anymore. This wasn’t a terrified girl in his eyes who was telling him to trust a Lannister. It was the Blackfish. The two stood there, looking at each other.

“I’m listening, Ser Brynden,” Lord Reed finally said.

The Blackfish cleared his throat. “Not long ago, the Freys and the Lannisters were besieging Riverrun. However, Sansa and Lord Tyrion received information that Arya Stark was being held at Winterfell and forced to marry Ramsay Bolton. The information was wrong, but that’s not the matter. They came to Riverrun with an army. They got the boy who sits on the Iron Throne, Tommen, to give back Riverrun and the Riverlands to my house. I accepted the terms Tyrion Lannister gave to me. Now, my nephew Edmure is free and alive, and he is the Lord Paramount of the Trident again. All the houses of the Riverlands were forgiven, the Freys were forced to release all their hostages, and now the Twins are occupied by a garrison of both Lannister and Tully men. The people who played important roles at the Red Wedding have been executed. The dwarf kept his word. And now, we are all marching together to Winterfell to deal with the man who murdered our king. We have an opportunity to make the Boltons pay for their crimes just like the Freys paid, and also to give Winterfell to Sansa. I know this is not what we would like, but… I never thought I would think that one day, and even less say it, but I would rather have Tyrion Lannister as Lord of Winterfell, especially if Sansa is his wife, than to have Roose Bolton eat at the high table where my niece and her children once took their meals. If that’s the price for having Roose Bolton’s head on a spike, then so be it.”

The Lord of Greywater Watch remained silent for a time after the Blackfish was done with his explanation. He seemed unsure about what to think, though still looking resolved. Tyrion knew it was difficult for a man like Howland Reed to believe what Ser Brynden Tully just said, but it was also difficult to think the Blackfish had lied. Finally, Ned Stark’s friend left his silence.

“I won’t speak about it any further in the presence of any Lannister or their men.” He stared at Tyrion, Bronn and Brienne.

“I hope you don’t include Sansa among the Lannisters, because there are already more than enough river lords who are seeing her this way,” said Tyrion.

“She is not a Lannister. Lady Sansa is Lord Stark’s daughter, hence she is a Stark,” declared Howland Reed. Finally, someone who looks at Sansa like a Stark without seeing her like an enemy.

“Lady Brienne will stay, Lord Howland,” said Sansa. “She is not in service to the Lannisters. She is sworn to me, and only to me. And before that she was my mother’s sworn shield.”

Lord Reed looked suspiciously at the lady in armor. “Very well.”

Tyrion took his leave with Bronn. He tried to shot Sansa a reassuring smile as he left. He hoped that
the fact Howland Reed didn’t see a Lannister in her would make her feel better.

“Not angry that you were kicked off the meeting?” asked Bronn.

“I’m not happy about it, but anyway I doubt Howland Reed would listen to me,” Tyrion replied. “It will be better to have the Blackfish and Sansa to discuss with him. He will listen to them.”

“Sure the Blackfish is on your side?”

“He knows the crannogmen can help us to take Moat Cailin. We need them. And even if he doesn’t like me now, he may trust me in some small way. As much as a stubborn Tully can trust a Lannister dwarf.”

“I hope so, you gave him back his home and had a tenth of House Frey slaughtered, which means a lot of Freys dead. And he should be thankful you didn’t fuck his grandniece before she asked you for it.”

“My family still murdered three Starks and imprisoned his nephew at the Red Wedding. I am still a Lannister in his eyes, and I will always be a Lannister for him. Just like you’ll always be a sellsword for many people.”

“I don’t care. As long as I have wine, gold and women.”

They took some ale and sat away from the other soldiers taking a pause. Most of them were training with spear, arrows and spears or standing guard around the camp, looking around for any crannogman attack. The events of last week had shaken the men, giving them something to worry about. They had no complaints about bored men anymore. Tyrion wished they hadn’t needed Sansa to almost die for the men to gain back some discipline.

Strangely, the attempt against Sansa had united the different armies again. All the commanders had shown great concern about her, and the men too. The Lannister men had become fond of Sansa in some way, and the men of the Riverlands and the Reach as well. She visited the sick regularly, which the soldiers appreciated very much, though it was before they learnt she was pregnant. The soldiers of the Westerlands had come to respect Sansa very much after Riverrun and the Twins, really seeing her as their lady. The men from the Hightower army respected her, and as for the soldiers from the Riverlands, even if some still weren’t sure whether she was a Stark, a Lannister or a Tully, they didn’t hate her anymore after they brought back House Tully to power and neutralized House Frey. Only the men in the Frey army didn’t show much love to Sansa. Bronn and Ser Perwyn even told him there were some who were happy and hoped she would die. Tyrion had wanted to execute any man in the Frey army who would show any pleasure or happiness about Sansa’s injuries, but he knew that would be useless. When you tear out a man’s tongue, you are not proving him a liar, you’re only telling the world that you fear what he might say. And if you killed him for what he said, it did the same. Instead, Tyrion warned that any fight a Frey man would start by showing disrespect to the Lady of Casterly Rock would be immediately punished. Three Frey soldiers made the mistake to ignore this and were hanged. After that, the Frey soldiers remained calm.

“What about the stocks?” asked Tyrion to his friend. “Are they well kept?”

“Aye. Under heavy guard, day and night. I’m still not sure if that’s a good idea.” Bronn seemed worried.

“We may need it in the North. You know the Boltons are only the first enemies we’ll have to face there.”
“You don’t really believe it, don’t you?”

“I know you think I’m stupid, but this is the truth. I believe it. Dead men are marching on the Wall.”

“I hope you’re wrong.” Bronn seemed worried again, but not because of what he brought from King’s Landing.

“You’ve been north of the Wall, Bronn. Surely you heard stories about it back then.”

“Aye. The White Walkers. More than one wildling said he had seen one. To me, it looked like they invented it.”

“I thought the same when I visited the Wall. But now, Ned Stark’s son says he saw one of them. Unless Jon Snow found a sense of humor at the Wall, I doubt it was a joke.”

“Or maybe he had an illusion. When it’s cold like this, you can imagine all sorts of things. Let’s hope we won’t have to use the stocks.”

“We’re probably going to need it. Remember how we kill a dead man?”

“Aye. We burn him.”

_When winter does come, Gods help us all if we’re not ready._ The words of Maester Aemon echoed through Tyrion’s head. He would have to speak with him again when they would be at the Wall.

Tyrion went through the camp with Bronn later to see everything was in order. He also had a discussion with Daven and Ser Forley about the state of the siege engines before Moat Cailin and their defenses on the sides of the camp. Just like Tyrion, they thought they wouldn’t get a chance if the crannogmen started to attack them from all sides. They couldn’t protect themselves from their poisoned weapons, and wouldn’t be able to pursue them in the marshes. Tyrion hoped Sansa and the Blackfish would succeed in their talking with Howland Reed.

After two hours, Podrick came to see Tyrion and Bronn. The lord of the crannogmen wanted to see him. They came back to the tent where everyone was still there. Howland Reed faced Tyrion as soon as he entered and spoke immediately.

“Lord Tyrion, I have decided to help you. I will join your campaign against House Bolton. I don’t want to see Roose Bolton as Lord of Winterfell any more than you or anyone else here. However, I will help you on my own terms. My men will all be freed. Arya Stark and Aran Fenn will remain with your army for the time needed to break Moat Cailin, but not as prisoners. Lord Fenn will be my representative at your war councils. He and Arya Stark will be given everything they need as they are your guests and you won’t stop them to meet other people, including your wife. I will also help some of your men to get around the fortress and to reach its northern side to establish a link with the Manderlys. I will have a hundred of my men follow you at Winterfell. They may not be many, but they will be especially useful as scouts if you want men who can go undetected and unnoticed. I will personally follow you to Winterfell once Moat Cailin has fallen. However, I ask for two hostages of high birth to ensure your loyalty. I will release one of them after Moat Cailin is taken, and the second one once Winterfell is taken and Lady Sansa has been acknowledged Wardeness of the North and Lady of Winterfell by all the northern lords. I will swear my banners to Lady Sansa, and only to her. I will make no pledge to you, and you will not be recognized officially as Lord of Winterfell or Warden of the North. These terms cannot be negotiated. You can accept them or refuse them.”

“I would like the two men I will give you to serve as advisors for your men while they harass the garrison of Moat Cailin. Since Lord Fenn will be welcomed at our own war councils, I think this is
only fair.” Tyrion couldn’t let his men believe he gave hostages to the crannogmen. He would have liked a deal with House Reed to be less severe, but that was probably the best he could get, and anyway he never really intended to declare himself Lord of Winterfell or Warden of the North. These titles belonged to Sansa.

Howland Reed pursed his lips. “Done.”

“Another thing, Lord Reed. Something I think you will like.”

“I doubt it very much. I told you I wouldn’t negotiate the terms.”

“I am not negotiating. I’m only informing you. In fact, I’m informing all of you. And I’m sure you will like it.” Tyrion looked at Sansa. “Does he know?”

“I told him. He knows I’m pregnant,” Sansa answered.

“Yes, I do know, and on that I recognize that I owe you an apology for the… incident that happened that night. That was never our intent to kill the Lady Sansa, and even less while she was with child. On that, you have my apologies.”

Tyrion noticed Howland Reed was looking very hardly at him. He hadn’t liked the new that Sansa was pregnant, for sure. Surely he wasn’t sorry either about trying to kill Tyrion. He was only sorry that Sansa was close to get killed. Tyrion decided to say what he wanted to say. “Very well. You all know my children to Sansa and I are going to be heirs to both Casterly Rock and Winterfell. The first in line will get the Rock, and the second will get the North. There must always be a Stark in Winterfell. When our son will become Lord of Winterfell, he will take the Stark name.”

Tyrion expected it to surprise everyone, and he wasn’t deceived. Everyone was astonished, except for the Blackfish who knew it from the discussion they had at Riverrun. Even Bronn seemed taken aback, and that didn’t arrive often.

“Why would you do that?” asked the crannogman.

“First, because I am no fool. Perhaps you think I am, but I’m not. I know very well the Northerners will never accept a Lannister dynasty at Winterfell. I told so to my father not long after the Red Wedding, along with the fact that the first Northerner who would cross my path in the North would try to kill me, and I wasn’t wrong.” Tyrion shot a look at Arya Stark. “I think he knew, but he probably didn’t care. He has wanted me dead since the day I was born, but I don’t intend to satisfy him. Second, like everyone always remembers me, my family slaughtered the Starks. I think the least I can do is to prevent House Stark from disappearing. Wouldn’t you agree?”

The Lord of Greywater clearly didn’t seem to know what to make of it, and most of the people in the tent neither. Tyrion had been thinking about this possibility for a very long time now, but he hadn’t talked about it to anybody, not even to Bronn or Sansa. But after months stuck in the Neck, he had no doubts left that it would be necessary if they ever wished for Sansa to remain Lady of Winterfell for more than a few months in practice, and not only in name. Tyrion waited for the crannogman to react. Lord Reed finally gained back some of his composure, still unsure what to do with what Tyrion just told him.

“Very well.”

“So, we have a deal?”

Tyrion extended a hand, and after a moment of reluctance, Howland Reed clasped it. The rest of the day was spent in arranging details of the alliance. There would be an official ceremony tomorrow for
Howland Reed to publicly swear loyalty to Sansa. He wanted to swear loyalty to House Stark, but finally Tyrion convinced him with Sansa and Lady Mira’s help that he needed to pledge his banners specifically to Sansa. They reached a compromise by allowing him to swear his banners to Sansa Lannister of House Stark. Ser Serion Lannister and Lord Ryman Sarwyck were chosen to serve as advisors for Lord Reed’s men while Ser Forley Prester was chosen to bring a hundred men past Moat Cailin to the north to join with the Manderlys with the help of the crannogmen. The crannogmen still held prisoners were freed.

In the evening, Tyrion was dining with Sansa. “Why didn’t you tell me, about giving the Stark name to our second child?” she asked him.

“Aren’t you happy about it?”

“Yes, of course I am. I just wonder why you didn’t tell me before.”

“I’ve been thinking about it for a very long time, Sansa, but I wasn’t entirely sure until recently. There are a few cases of children named after their mother’s name through history, but it is rare. We will need a royal decree for our child to be named Stark. I don’t think Tommen will oppose, nor the queen, but Kevan will be more difficult to convince. Once the war is over, I’ll go to King’s Landing and speak with him. I think I can convince him. And anyway I must.”

“We could still have him named after you. That wouldn’t bother me.”

“Do you want your family to disappear?” Tyrion asked.

“No. No, of course. Only… I just meant it wouldn’t bother me.”

“The Stark name will disappear without this, Sansa. All your brothers died without children, except Jon Snow, but he’s not a Stark. Not in name, at least. Anyway, he’s forbidden to have children, and I believed what I said. The Northerners will never accept a Lannister to rule in Winterfell. They will only accept a Stark. I’m afraid if our son was to be named Lannister, he wouldn’t survive long as Lord of Winterfell. I don’t want him to be killed because he has the wrong family name.”

They had been close to losing their first child when Sansa’s sister attacked them, and Tyrion didn’t want to risk the life of another of their children, and even less Sansa’s life. That was the element that decisively decided him to give Sansa’s family name to their child who would get Winterfell. He wouldn’t be the cause of the death of one of their children.

“Thank you, Tyrion. Thank you, really.”

Sansa’s eyes were full of gratitude and thanks as she said it. They held hands. The next morning, the commanders and officers of all the armies taking part to the invasion were assembled to bear witness to the pledge of Howland Reed to fight for Sansa. He got on his knee, and he and all his bannermen who were present swore to serve Sansa Lannister of House Stark, and to help her take back Winterfell from the Bolton traitors. The black lizard-lion was flinging in the wind on the green standard of House Reed. Other standards, like the violet banner of House Fenn with three black lilies, were also there. Arya Stark wasn’t on the stage they had made for the occasion. Her identity was still kept hidden. They had agreed it would be better to have the soldiers believe she was still at Winterfell in Bolton’s hands. This way the men would keep wishing to take Roose Bolton’s head for Sansa’s sister. Instead, she stood with Lord Aran Fenn, pretending to be his daughter. Tyrion was on the stage, but behind Sansa. Howland Reed pledged his banners to her, not to him. Still, as Howland Reed swore to serve Sansa and her children and grandchildren, Tyrion felt the wind was turning in their favor. They had succeeded. Howland Reed became the first northern lord to pledge his banners to Sansa. Tyrion knew he wouldn’t be the last.
We must interpret the words of Brynden Tully very carefully in this chapter. He say he trusts Tyrion, but we must remember he already told Sansa in a previous chapter that he could almost trust Tyrion. Almost. The Blackfish doesn't trust Tyrion with everything, but he trusts him with overthrowing Roose Bolton, and the Blackfish knows they need Howland Reed's help to take Moat Cailin and defeat the Boltons.

I know Arya was quite silent in this chapter, but she will have more lines in future chapters. Don't expect her to stay still for long.

Please review

Next chapter: Roose
ROOSE III

To Roose Bolton, Lord of the Dreadfort and Warden of the North,

Before the threat of the White Walkers, the Night’s Watch has allowed all men, women and children living north of the Wall to come south and to settle on the lands of the Gift. They will not trouble the people living outside the lands under the Night’s Watch’s rule, and if they ever do, the Night’s Watch will not intervene in the matters involving northern houses and the people living in the Gift, as long as the northern houses do not penetrate in the lands belonging to the Night’s Watch. Any lord will be free to give justice for any crime people from the north of the Wall would commit on their lands. Any action to be taken in the Gift will have to be discussed with the Night’s Watch first. The brothers of the Night’s Watch will cooperate with the lords of the North to ensure peace and safety for everyone.

Jon Snow, Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch

Roose Bolton, Lord of the Dreadfort and Warden of the North, put the letter aside. It had been almost three months now that wildlings had been allowed south of the Wall by Jon Snow, and the northern lords complained about it without any surprise. Roose Bolton didn’t believe the wildlings would pose such a problem. The only house that could be really bothered by their presence would be the Umbers, and the wildlings may keep them occupied for a moment.

However, recently, they had received news that Greatjon Umber was dead. His son, called Smalljon, had taken his place as Lord of the Last Hearth. Surprisingly, he had written last week to say he was riding to Winterfell with a gift for the Lord of the Dreadfort, and to propose an alliance against the wildlings. It could help. Roose Bolton could already rely on the help of the Karstarks, and if the Umbers joined them, they may have enough forces to fight against the army in the Neck if they were to get into the North. For now, the Lannisters, the Tullys, the Freys and the Hightowers were still blocked south of Moat Cailin, but with the rebellion of House Manderly, Roose Bolton was afraid they wouldn’t be able to keep them in the Neck for long. The ravens from Moat Cailin were talking about an army so great that it stretched on leagues and leagues, farther than the eye could see. On the Kingsroad inside the Neck, it was no surprise. Even an army of five thousand men may have to stretch on leagues to hold out of the swamps and stay on the Kingsroad, but that meant they had no way to know the number of men behind Sansa Stark.

The Umbers would probably ask House Bolton to help them get rid of the wildlings for their help against the Lannisters, though Roose wouldn’t trust this house for this. They were staunch supporters of the Starks, and to the opposite of Harald Karstark, Jon Umber’s father hadn’t been executed by Robb Stark. He would have to be careful with the Umbers, but they would certainly need their support against the Lannisters. Roose Bolton seized another raven that had arrived from Barrow Hall in the morning. It had been written quickly, showing the distress of the maester who wrote it.

Barrow Hall had fallen. It was the seat of House Dustin. Lady Barbrey Dustin, his sister-in-law, was here at Winterfell with most of her men, and Roose had stopped her from going to the rescue of her keep. Her men wouldn’t be enough to make a difference against the Manderlys, and he wouldn’t send some of his men to die. He couldn’t allow to lose men, not at this moment, when they just defeated Stannis. He may need Lady Dustin’s men if the Umbers asked him to slaughter the wildlings for their help against the Lannisters. Roose may have to march in the Gift for that, but it wasn’t as if Jon Snow could do something against it. No northern lord would complain if he penetrated in the Gift to kill wildlings threatening their lands.

All the same, things weren’t going very well. There was an army besieging Moat Cailin. White Harbor had raised its banners for Sansa Stark. The alliances Roose Bolton made with other houses (Dustins, Ryswells, Karstarks) were fragile at best. Lady Dustin had been furious when she learnt that Barrow Hall had fallen this morning, and she was probably still fuming somewhere. Ramsay’s presence didn’t make her any happier. They lost few men in the battle against Stannis, but many were wounded. All the same, he would keep assembling lords who didn’t want to see Southerners rule the North. It was their best chance to bring the other Northerners to their side against the invading army.

The Lord of the Dreadfort didn’t mention Arya Stark anymore in his messages. He had denied the accusations of the Crown and the Lannisters against Ramsay, but since they were true and that Ramsay’s reputation was spreading through the North, it was better to not speak about it anymore. The less Ramsay and Arya Stark would be mentioned, the better. They had to speak about the southern invasion, and only about that. This way, the northern lords would think less about the way Ramsay treated his wife. It was better to ignore accusations when you had denied them once than to deny them again and again. You were only bringing them back to the surface if you did that. If you didn’t talk about it, the word may just die and the others would stop to talk about it as well.

“Elmar,” said Roose in his casual soft voice, not lifting his eyes from his papers.

His squire stood inside his solar, unmoving, not speaking. “Yes, my lord.”

“Go and see how Lady Walda’s labor is going.”

“Yes, my lord.”

Elmar Frey left without another word. Roose didn’t need, and didn’t like to speak more than was needed with his men and servants. He gave them orders and didn’t expect them to say more than Yes, my lord. When he asked them questions, they had to answer shortly, only with the necessary words. He didn’t even need to look at them to give an order or to ask a question sometimes.

He hoped Lady Walda’s child was a son. This way, if Ramsay was to die one way or another, he would have another heir. Ramsay was his firstborn son, and he couldn’t kill him, but Roose didn’t rely on his bastard son to carry out his dynasty, not with the way he behaved right now. He couldn’t even get a child inside Arya Stark. The Lord of the Dreadfort kept working, looking at the accounts to see if they would have enough to feed their men for the next battles. Elmar Frey came back.

“Maester Wolkan says everything is alright. She is still in labor. The child is not born yet,” he said.

“Very well,” the Lord of the Dreadfort replied, with nothing else to add.

Elmar Frey left to stand outside before the door. Roose Bolton went through the reports concerning
their food storage. He had kept replenishing them after the battle, and they now had enough food to last nine months. The Lannisters and the Tullys would hardly find enough food to feed their army, especially if it was a big one, if they came to besiege Winterfell. The best way to defeat the Lannisters would be to keep them south of Moat Cailin, and if they broke through it, to let them march on Winterfell, then let them besiege it. Hopefully, their men would freeze and starve in the snows. They didn’t have the men to fight them in open grounds. The northern lords wouldn’t like him for allowing the Lannisters to march through the North without problem, but they didn’t like him already and wouldn’t like him better if he was defeated by the Lannisters in open field. Staying at Winterfell was the best strategic decision to make. Perhaps Ramsay could try to repeat the feats he performed with Stannis’s army.

The door opened and Roose’s squire entered again. “My lord, Lord Karstark has arrived.”

“Thank you,” Roose replied.

The Lord of the Dreadfort rose up and walked to the Great Hall. Elmar Frey gathered some ink and paper and brought it with him. The Lord of the Dreadfort would keep working in the meantime before Harald Karstark came in. He had ordered the Lord of Karhold to come to Winterfell to help getting rid of the remnants of Stannis Baratheon’s army. And to prepare for the war against the Lannisters and their allies. Roose Bolton could only work for five minutes before Harald Karstark arrived, but it was still five minutes of work. The Lord of Karhold came in with Ramsay. Roose stood up to welcome Harald Karstark, not Ramsay.

“Welcome, Lord Karstark. I hope your journey from Karhold went well,” he said with his usual soft voice.

“Lord Bolton.” The Lord of Karhold bowed before his liege lord. “The journey was eventless, except for a few men of Stannis’s army we came over. They were dealt with very quickly and didn’t oppose much resistance.”

“This is no surprise, considering their commander is dead.” Roose sat down. “What do you have to report?”

“Stannis’s men have not regrouped in any way. His generals most likely all died during the battle.”

“They did,” confirmed Roose Bolton.

“The survivors are wandering without purpose. They won’t pose any threat, and most will die of cold and sickness very soon. Those we met on our way barely knew where they were.”

“They don’t know the North. I think we can discard these men as a potential threat. We have more pressing matters to deal with, and enemies far more dangerous than a few abandoned soldiers.”

“I agree.”

“Thank you for this report, Lord Karstark.”

Ramsay chose to intervene at this moment. He stood near the window, arms crossed. “We all know what is our main threat now. The wildlings have gotten through the Wall. They are threatening our lands and our allies.”

“I am quite aware of that,” Roose replied coldly.

“Jon Snow allowed them to settle in the North,” Ramsay resumed.
“Ned Stark’s last surviving son?” asked Lord Karstark, looking very interested all of a sudden.

“Jon Snow is a bastard, not a Stark,” Roose pointed out.

“So was I, Father,” said Ramsay.

“Your hold on the North will never be secure as long as a Stark can walk through that door,” began to explain the Lord of Karhold. “Jon Snow allowed the wildlings south of the Wall. He let our enemies come to our lands. This is no coincidence. He’s trying to undermine your rule.”

“Maybe,” recognized the Warden of the North.

“Castleblack isn’t defended on the southern side.” Ramsay stepped into the discussion once more. “And the few men left are barely men at all. Farm boys and thieves.” They have a lot in common with you, then. “With a small force, we could storm the castle, kill Jon Snow…”

“All the northern lords had a deep respect for the Night’s Watch. If they were to kill Jon Snow, all of them would rise in rebellion immediately, and everything Roose worked to build since he killed Robb Stark would be reduced to nothing. Since the Lord Commander was Eddard Stark’s son, the murder would be twice worse for the Northerners. Jon Snow may be a bastard, but he was still Eddard Stark’s son. To murder him so plainly was suicidal. All the people in the North would rebel.

“We don’t need every house in the North,” replied Ramsay, an indifferent pout on his lips. “The Umbers, the Manderlys, and the Karstarks command more soldiers than all the other houses together. With their support, none could challenge us.”

At the mention of the Umbers, Harald Karstark was nodding all the time as Ramsay spoke. He agreed with him. That could give ideas to Ramsay. Very bad ideas. “The Starks lost my house the day King Robb cut off my father’s head. It’s time for new blood in the North.”

The two wanted Jon Snow to die. Karstark was only after revenge for his father’s death, so he supported Ramsay’s madness. However, Roose wouldn’t support this madness. Ramsay’s plan was foolish. Even if it worked, it would divide the North. House Bolton was supposed to rule the North, not to fight it and divide it. That was what Ramsay’s plan would give. Anyway, the plan couldn’t be achieved. The Karstarks may support them, but the support of the Umbers wouldn’t be strong and they would turn against them as soon as they had no interest in helping House Bolton anymore. They broke the guest rights to kill Robb Stark. The Umbers would never forget that. As for the Manderlys…

Roose Bolton slowly rose from his seat and walked on his left a little before he looked at his son. “Are you aware that the Manderlys have declared for Sansa Lannister? You seem to have forgotten about this detail.” Again, Ramsay was agape. He never thought about his plans through and through before he decided to adopt them. “Your plan will divide the North at a moment we need it to be united behind us. If you acquire a reputation as a mad dog, you’ll be treated as a mad dog. Taken out back and slaughtered for pig feed.”

If only Ramsay would understand the lesson. He was still too harsh. He did well against Stannis, but the best way to strengthen your power wasn’t by killing your enemies. The best ways were alliances, marriages, hostages and negotiations. Ramsay didn’t understand that. He enjoyed torturing and killing people, and nothing else.
Roose Bolton heard chains clicking from the door. “My lords.” It was Maester Wolkan. Roose turned to face him. “Lady Walda has given birth. A boy. Red-cheeked and healthy.”

Finally, there were some good news. The maester was smiling widely, and Roose almost wanted to do the same. He had two sons now to continue his line. He would have to protect the new one to prevent Ramsay from killing him like he killed Domeric. Hopefully, his new son would be more like Domeric than Ramsay.

“My congratulations, Lord Bolton,” said Karstark.

Roose Bolton sketched a smile for a moment as he looked at Lord Karstark, but it vanished almost immediately. He looked at his son whose expression was somewhere between terror and uncertainty. Ramsay walked slowly to him. Roose was waiting for his reaction. It would tell him what were Ramsay’s intentions.

“Congratulations, Father.” He pulled in for an embrace and Roose put his arms around his son’s shoulders as well. “I look forward to meeting my new brother.” Roose had no doubt about it. He pulled away and put a hand on the shoulder of his eldest son.

“You’ll always be my firstborn.” It was true. Ramsay was his firstborn son. He was his heir, and Roose wouldn’t kill him, no matter what Ramsay did or would do. He was his son. He could see it every time he looked into his eyes.

“Thank you for saying that. It means a great deal to me.” Ramsay was looking up at him. He was his son. He would always be his son.

Ramsay moved quickly and Roose felt a great pain in his belly. He groaned. He felt a knife through his stomach and bowels, and blood rising to his mouth. Ramsay put it deep into him, reaching his heart, then pulled it away as quickly as he had thrusted it inside. He looked into his son’s eyes. He saw the usual madness, but also the calm he had himself. That was the thing Ramsay inherited from him. As soon as he wanted, he wouldn’t show any emotion. He just used it against him.

Roose Bolton fell on the floor. He felt sensations and feelings leaving his body. He remembered Robb Stark. He had stabbed him in the heart the same way. Now he knew what the King in the North had felt at this moment, betrayed by the men he trusted. Roose thought him a fool, but as he died, he realized he had been a fool as well. He had trusted his bastard to never kill him. As he laid on his back, he saw Ramsay one last time. No one was more accursed than the kinslayer. His son stabbed him. House Bolton would be accursed forever. He died with these thoughts, cursing the day he raped the miller’s wife and made this monster.

Chapter End Notes

We shall never see his like again. I know this isn’t very imaginative for a chapter, but we got to know more about the things going on north of Moat Cailin through Roose’s perspective. All the same, I know there are some (I’m thinking about someone in particular) who will be happy to not have to suffer chapters from Roose Bolton anymore.

Please review

Next chapter: Trystane
Here were are. The 100th chapter of "A Shadow and a Wolf"). This is quite a short chapter for the occasion however, I have to admit it. It was supposed to be longer at first, but I split it in two parts, and the next chapter is the longest part of the two. If we don't consider the prologue as a chapter, then the next chapter would be the 100th. I hope you'll enjoy it all the same.

After 530 128 words, 1490 comments, 755 kudos and 85 bookmarks, I am surprised of the size this fic took with time. I'm not entirely sure at which point I am and where it will end. I'm probably at half of the story. So there is still a lot ahead.

Thanks to you all, this story is already the longest of all the Tyrion/Sansa fanfics on AO3. (At least, it is officially, but there is the serie "The Changing of Seasons" from SerGoldenhand that is longer, but divided into two fics and not focusing so much on Tyrion/Sansa, especially in the second part.) It is also in 6th position for the number of words among all the fanfictions of ASOIAF and 3rd for the Game of Thrones fanfictions. Among the Tyrion/Sansa fanfictions, it is also the 3rd most read, the 5th most loved (or kudoed), the 2nd most commented (the first being "UNDER THE SUMMER SUN" from Tativi, one of my most regular commentators who's in part responsible for the great number of comments left on my own fic), and the 10th most bookmarked. Everyone who read it encouraged me to keep going on. I thank you all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

TRYSTANE II

“There have been seven murders last night,” said Skahaz mo Kandaq. “Seven freedmen butchered by the Sons of the Harpy.”

“There were also two former masters who were murdered, including Hizdahr zo Loraq’s brother, Akhar,” added Reznak mo Reznak.

“There were thirteen deaths overall,” stated Grey Worm, taciturn as ever. “Seven freedmen, two former masters and four Unsullied.”

They were in the council room of the Great Pyramid, Trystane with Grey Worm, Skahaz, Reznak and four other men who were supposed to rule Meereen. Right now, this couldn’t be called ruling. The city was in chaos, and if they were safe at the top of the Pyramid, the streets of the city were dangerous for everyone, whether you were former slaves or former masters, whether you were loyal to Daenerys Targaryen or to the slavers. There were murders daily, though most of them happened at night and were the work of the Sons of the Harpy. There were few in the light of day. Trystane wondered if some murders against former masters were the work of the Brazen Beasts instead of the Sons of the Harpy. Skahaz was the most zealous supporter of Queen Daenerys, and he had constituted a secret police, freedmen called the Brazen Beasts for the masks they wore, to fight the Sons of the Harpy. The Brazen Beasts had few commanders, and Trystane only knew one, Marghaz
zo Loraq, a member of the family whose Hizdahr zo Loraq came from. He had sworn to avenge his cousin by killing as many Sons of the Harpy and their supporters as possible. Trystane had asked to see the other commanders, but Skahaz hadn’t brought them to him despite many demands.

Trystane often had the impression he had no control, even here in the Great Pyramid. About two months after he arrived, he still had to rely entirely on Grey Worm and Malcolm Branfield to keep what little control they had on Meereen. He didn’t know the city, or its people, well enough. The other nobles of the city had acknowledged him because the Unsullied supported him, but they obviously had no love for him and obeyed his orders, when they obeyed them, with reluctance at best. The most fervent supporters of the queen thought he wasn’t strong enough, and the moderate ones thought he wasn’t ready to make the necessary compromises. For them, he was a boy from a foreign land. Malcolm Branfield and Grey Worm had entrusted him with the task of bringing back peace and order to Meereen. So far, Trystane had failed. He couldn’t even bring the members of the government to heel.

“Make the noble families pay like we always do,” said Trystane. Queen Daenerys created a tax while she was still there to discourage the murders. All families of Meereen had to pay each time there was a murder committed by the Sons of the Harpy. So far, it hadn’t proved to be a success, but it was still better than nothing. “What about the fleet? It burned about one month ago. Is there nothing we found about who did this and how?”

“We’ve been searching for the men who did it ever since it happened, but we found nothing yet,” answered Grey Worm.

“What about the Brazen Beasts? Have they found anything?”

“No. They found nothing,” shortly answered Skahaz mo Kandaq. Trystane didn’t know if it was best to hope for this to be true or false.

“Then keep searching. We still have no clue about who leads the Sons of the Harpy. If we discover who burned our fleet, he or they could lead us to their leaders.”

“We have a better way to get the names of the Sons of the Harpy.”

Trystane knew Skahaz would come back with this idea. He always brought it back on the table. “We will not execute innocent children for the crimes of their fathers.”

“What’s the use of hostages if we do not execute them when their parents murder freedmen?”

“We don’t know for sure if their parents are the ones who murder people during the night.”

“Proclaim through all Meereen that you will kill one of the hostages for each night when a freedman is killed, then execute the threat after it happened, and I can promise you someone will speak once they’ve realized we are serious. They will think twice about murdering people in the night when they see their son’s and daughter’s bodies.”

“That’s out of question. Queen Daenerys refused to execute these children while she was there, and I do not intend to go against her will.”

“The queen is no longer here. She was expelled by the Sons of the Harpy, and now Meereen is in chaos.”

“Yes, you’re right. The city is in chaos, but murdering children will not bring back the order. It will only infuriate the great families even more. They will retaliate with even more murders, and all we’ll get through this will be the death of innocent children. We are here to bring back order to Meereen,
“I agree with Prince Trystane. It is in our interest to keep these children alive,” said Reznak mo Reznak.

Trystane was glad of the support from the man, but he knew he would have to argue about this matter again later. He wouldn’t change his mind. Myrcella was killed because of the crimes of her parents and grandparents. He wouldn’t commit the same atrocities than his cousins. He wouldn’t create more enemies to Daenerys Targaryen. She already had too many of them, and he didn’t want to take the risk of killing a child from a family who wasn’t supporting the Sons of the Harpy.

“Do we have more news from Astapor and Yunkai? Have the masters made their intentions clearer?” asked Trystane, trying to get to a matter where they could make some progress.

“They don’t need to,” replied Skahaz. “We know what they want. They want to expel us from Meereen, take it back and re-establish slavery. I say we send them a strong message of our own. Tell them they are not welcomed anymore in Salvor’s Bay.”

“And how do we send them this message?” asked Akaz zo Nobaq, another Meereenese noble. “A simple letter? Or do we send the Unsullied to take back the cities?”

“Out of question,” said Trystane immediately. “The Unsullied are needed here to maintain what little order we have. If they leave, then Meereen will destroy itself from the inside. We cannot take back Astapor and Yunkai, even less keep them. For now, we’ll do nothing about it. We won’t send anything to the two other cities, to not give away any information about the state of Meereen. They may hesitate to act if they have no idea what we’re about to do. Anyway, they will need time to deal with their own internal problems. You cannot take control of a city without difficulties. We all know that only too well.”

They then went to discuss about the olive problems. They had all been cut and burned by the Great Masters when Daenerys Targaryen had marched on Meereen. She had begun to plant them back, and Trystane strived to keep them growing, but they would need years before they began to produce again. The council meeting was dissolved after this and Trystane went back to his chambers, sitting heavily in a chair.

Ruling was much harder than he believed it would be. He hadn’t been prepared to face desperate situations like the one Meereen was in. His family had problems in Dorne with some bannermen, and his father had taught him to handle these problems so that they wouldn’t have to face or neutralize rebellions. However, he didn’t have to experience rebellions, uprisings, revolts or civil wars. He wasn’t ready for this, and yet he had to put an end to the chaos in which Meereen was sent, and to stop slavery from returning at the same time, all this while composing with members of government whose trust he couldn’t be sure of. He even wondered if some of them were not working for the Sons of the Harpy and faking loyalty to Daenerys Targaryen.

Trystane didn’t know what to do. Astapor and Yunkai had fallen back into the hands of the Good Masters and the Wise Masters. Would Meereen follow? If Meereen fell to the slave masters, then Dorne would fall to the Lannisters and the Baratheons. He had to keep the control over Meereen. He couldn’t send their army against Astapor and Yunkai. Then how to deal with the masters who now held these cities? Should he try to negotiate with them? To make peace? Should he do nothing and wait for the masters to attack? He remembered that when Aegon the Conqueror had invaded Dorne, all the houses, great and small, had set aside their differences and united to fight the common enemy. Maybe all the people of Meereen would fight together if war was declared upon them by the other cities, though Trystane feared the Sons of the Harpy would fight against them. No, peace was the only solution, but how to make peace with your enemy when you were weak? Were the slave
masters weak like them? He didn’t know. He barely knew what was going on in Meereen outside the Great Pyramid.

The council had taken place at the end of the afternoon. Trystane spent the rest of the evening reading reports about the state of the finances, the fortifications and the food supplies of the city. They needed more money, they needed to repair some sections of the battlements and some towers, and they needed more food. He could still repair the fortifications he supposed. They didn’t lack workers. He should just hope the people would accept to work without fearing reprisals from the Sons of the Harpy. They would also need money to pay these people. He thought they had probably enough for that. He couldn’t order the people of Meereen to work for free, or what would be the difference with slavery? Furthermore, people would be much more motivated to work if they were paid than if they simply ordered public work for the citizens to rebuild the walls.

The cupbearers brought him his meal for tonight. Among them was Bhakaz zo Loraq. He was the son of a cousin of Hizdahr zo Loraq. Trystane liked this one. He was always playful, and was unaware of the terrible events outside the pyramid. After a day of holding court, presiding an unruly council, reading documents and trying to solve problems impossible to solve, Trystane decided to take a glass of wine to soothe his nerves. Ruling Meereen was nothing compared to ruling Dorne from what he saw of his father’s rule. In Dorne, they had peace and prosperity, and their duty was to maintain this peace and this prosperity, not to get peace and prosperity out of war and misery. Trystane was afraid he would deceive his father and fail Dorne, something he couldn’t.

Grey Worm came in, straight like a pillar as always. “What is it, Grey Worm? Another murder?” Trystane asked. Light was gone, and night was dark and good for death. The Sons of the Harpy always worked at night.

“No. I just wanted to say something.” His face was impassive like always. “We conquered Astapor and Yunkai once. We can do it again, and this time execute the masters.”

Trystane sighed. He hoped he could have a quiet night at least. “If the Unsullied march off to reconquer Astapor and Yunkai, who will remain to defend the free people of Meereen?”

“If we do not fight them, how can we stop them?”

“You asked me to bring back peace in this city, and to make sure slavery would never return here. If we abandon Meereen and fail to take back Astapor and Yunkai, all this will have been for nothing.”

“You swore to put an end to slavery. I supported you for this.”

“I will not put an end to slavery by sending you to death against the Good and the Wise Masters. For now, we must deal with the problems of our city. The problems here, in Meereen. Once we can be sure the Sons of the Harpy are no longer a major threat, we can deal with the other cities.”

Despite his stony face, it was obvious the Commander of the Unsullied didn’t agree with him. Trystane wondered if he would keep them on his side for long. Only Malcolm Branfield seemed to be truly loyal to him, and maybe a few cupbearers.

“Come on, Grey Worm. Let’s not think about the problems of Meereen for some time.” Trystane poured a second cup of wine on the small table before him. “Here, take one.”

“Unsullied never drink.”

Trystane frowned. “Why not?”

“Rules.”
“Queen Daenerys forbade you from drinking?”

“Not Queen Daenerys.”

“Then who? Your former masters?” Trystane supposed it was the case with the absence of answer that followed. He sighed. “Drink it. See it like a way to fight against the slavers.”

The Unsullied took the cup after some time and carefully took a gulp. He grimaced and put it back on the table. “Tastes like it has turned.”

“Fermentation. You really never drank?”

“Unsullied never drink,” he repeated, still standing tall while Trystane remained sitting.

“It’s not the best wine there is. I find the ones in Dorne much better.” He took another sip. “Myrcella loved them. She knew some when she arrived at Sunspear. She said her uncle had made her try a few ones when he visited her in King’s Landing. He was drunk most of the time and made jokes that had her and her little brother laugh until they couldn’t breathe. She said he was the one she loved the most in her family, even more than her mother. She told me she would have liked him to be present the day we would wed.”

Trystane dropped off his cup. Grey Worm was looking at him skeptically. “You loved the Princess Myrcella?” he asked. Grey Worm was aware that Trystane had been betrothed before he came here, and he knew as well why his father had arranged this betrothal.

“I did,” conceded Trystane. “My father said she was born of incest, but… but I can’t bring myself to believe it. She was so good, and kind. Maybe she was the only legitimate child of Robert Baratheon and her two brothers come from an incest. I hope so.”

The Commander of the Unsullied nodded slowly. Strangely, he looked sad now. “I will go back to patrol.”

He bowed and left. Later that night, Trystane thought about what he should do about Astapor and Yunkai. He didn’t have the means to go to war against them, and if he couldn’t go to war against them, he had no choice but to make peace with them. But at what price? Trystane doubted the masters would accept peace if it involved the abolition of slavery. They were fighting for slavery. How could he bring back peace to Meereen without giving the masters what they wanted? Could a compromise be reached? His father managed to deal with the Lannisters and to make compromises with them. However, he had worked against them in secret for all these years. Trystane would be ready to bet the masters would do the same if they ever accepted a deal without full return of slavery.

When he fell asleep, Trystane Martell dreamed. And like every night, Myrcella was there. They walked around the Water Gardens, like they used to do. She was beautiful like always, her golden hair shining more than ever in the sun of Dorne. For hours, they walked, Trystane admiring her. When he woke up, he was crying like he always did each morning, wishing his dreams were real and the reality was a nightmare. As he was getting dressed, Malcolm Branfield came to see him.

“There’s someone asking to see the ruler of Meereen,” he said.

“Can’t it wait?” asked Trystane. He never felt like he could receive petitioners early in the morning. “He could wait for the time when I’ll be holding court.”

“I’m afraid this person won’t wait.”

“What does this man want?” Trystane was exasperated. What was so important for this man to not
wait until the time for petitioners?

“Who said anything about a man?” replied Branfield.

Chapter End Notes

Since we reached the 100th chapter, I would like to know what you think of it up to now. Tell me what you liked and what you hated (you can tell me it's too long, as if I didn't know it already :D). You can also tell me what you wish to see in the future chapters, though I must warn you most of the story is already decided and fixed, but I could add a few details or minor plotlines... if that doesn't make it even longer. I would also like it if you could put a note on 10.

Next chapter: a new POV (I wish it had been the 100th chapter, since I was very eager to introduce this new character)
Here's a character I was very eager to bring in this story. Kinvara will have a huge role to play in this fic, and I can't wait to show you more of her.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The ebony bench was empty. She knew it would be, but to know and to see were two different things. There were unpleasant truths, truths we didn’t want to face, truths we refused to accept as the truth because we didn’t want them to be the truth. There were also truths we couldn’t be sure of. When we couldn’t be sure of something, then we had to believe in them. Here, she had to believe. Belief was her life. Faith was her life, and now she needed to believe in her god more than ever. She needed to have faith in the Lord of Light, that he would bring Daenerys Stormborn, Of the House Targaryen, the First of Her Name, the Unburnt, Queen of Meereen, Queen of the Andals and the First Men and the Rhoynar, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, the Breaker of Chains, the Mother of Dragons, back to her people. The world would need her very soon. Kinvara saw it in the flames. The Lord of Light had talked to her for years, and her last visions showed her the time was coming. The young woman with blond hair, flying on the back of a dragon. The vision came back again, and again. Daenerys Stormborn was the only one who could save them. She was the prince that was promised, and her dragons would breathe the fire that would keep the living away from the dead, but for that she would need Kinvara’s help. Meereen couldn’t fall. Astapor and Yunkai had gone back to the Masters. If Meereen went back to slavery, then all would be lost, for Essos and for Westeros. She knew what she had to do. It was what the Lord willed. And she felt this was what she had to do.

The journey from Volantis had been long, but they had no problem on the way. The Lord of Light had assured her their journey would only be tiresome, and everything went as the Lord of Light showed. They met no ships of slave merchants, which was a good thing for the slavers they would have possibly met. Kinvara had arrived three days ago, accompanied with forty priests of her order, the best ones. She had met the other priests who were already in Meereen. Some came from Volantis, others came from other cities, but they acknowledged her high rank. They didn’t need a lot to see that she was serving the Lord of Light.

The situation in Meereen was very poor. People were being assassinated each night by the men hiding behind masks. These men served the Evil, the Great Other whose name must never be said. They hid in the shadows, waiting for the right moment to strike the innocents. They waited, just like their master. Just like the Masters. There were so many things alike between the Masters in Essos and the Great Other. There had been a time when she thought there were no differences between the two. Now she knew better, but still, the resemblance was striking. All the more reasons to fight the Sons of the Harpy.

Two men came from the passage behind the bench at the top of the stairs. One was very young, barely a man. He had black curly hair and wore clothes that were obviously not from Essos. He was certainly the foreign prince. The other man at his side was older, with brown short hair and a beard,
and foreign clothes as well, though not in the same style. They both carried a sword at their belt.

Zanrush stepped before to introduce her. He had come to Meereen on Kinvara’s orders not long after the city was taken by Daenerys and the people listened to him with attention. To the opposite of many people speaking against the former masters, he hadn’t been killed. The servants of the Great Other who hid behind masks and hit in the night couldn’t kill him.

“You stand in the presence of Kinvara, High Priestess of the Red Temple of Volantis, the Flame of Truth, the Light of Wisdom, the First Servant of the Lord of Light.” Zanrush stepped aside and let her move forward.

“Welcome to Meereen,” said the young man in a poor High Valyrian. “I am…”

“Prince Trystane Martell,” completed Kinvara in the common tongue before he could finish. “Prince of Dorne and heir to Sunspear, son of Doran Martell and Mellario of Norvos.” She turned towards the other man. “And you must be Malcolm Branfield, son of Ethan Branfield and Talia Branfield, last surviving member of House Branfield. We may talk in the common tongue. I know it very well and your Valyrian seems limited.”

They both looked surprised that she knew who they were and such details. “Thank you. May we know why you asked for this audience, my lady?” asked the young prince in his mother tongue.

“I am no lady, Prince Trystane.” Red Priestesses were no ladies. Those few who were before they joined the order abandoned their titles. Kinvara may wear costly gowns, but she was no lady. She never was a lady, and she would never be.

“Forgive me. How shall we call you?” He was clearly uncomfortable. Kinvara allowed a quick smile to appear on her face.

“You can call me by my name, but if you want to use a proper title, I suppose High Priestess will do.”

“Very well, High Priestess. May we know…”

“I came to help.” She slowly walked to the stairs, climbing them. “Daenerys Stormborn is the one who was promised. From the fire she was reborn to remake the world. She has freed the slaves from their chains and crucified the Masters for their sins.”

“She did, indeed.” Trystane Martell looked uncertain.

“Her dragons are fire made flesh, a gift from the Lord of Light. The dragons will purify nonbelievers by the thousands, burning their sins and flesh away.”

The two men looked at each other before the young prince replied again. “Our queen has followers of many different faiths. I don’t believe she has the intention of burning people who don’t follow the Lord of Light, or that she would like the idea.”

Kinvara smiled again. They heard what she said, but they didn’t understand the words. They didn’t know. “Many people believe in many gods. All of them, they’re looking for the true god, the only one that is true, even if they don’t know it. They are all looking for the truth. These people are believers, no matter the face or the faces their worship takes.”

“I follow the Seven for myself, High Priestess,” intervened Malcolm Branfield. “I have seen one of your kind in King’s Landing once. Thoros of Myr. He spent more time drinking and whoring than anything else.”
“What became of Thoros is very regretful. The High Priest of the time wanted him to bring the Lord of Light in King Robert’s heart, but instead Thoros abandoned the Lord of Light. We pray for him each day, in the hope that he will find his way back to our Lord.”

“There is word that there was another Red Priestess advising Stannis Baratheon. She claimed that he was the Lord’s Chosen One, and Stannis burned septs and godwoods everywhere he went on her advice. In the end, he was defeated at the Battle of Blackwater, and the forces he has left can barely claim to be an army.”

This man obviously wasn’t well disposed towards her. Kinvara was used to this. Trystane Martell didn’t seem to like what was going on. He was probably afraid that would make her angry against them, but it didn’t. If she was angry at someone, it was against Melisandre, and that Stannis who followed her.

“You may be interested to know that Stannis Baratheon was recently defeated for good at Winterfell. He’s dead.” The two men were taken aback. They obviously didn’t know about this. News travelled slowly. “Men and women make mistakes. Even honest servants of the Lord of Light. Melisandre saw in Stannis Baratheon Azor Ahai reborn, but she was wrong. She confused her own beliefs and her wishes for our Lord’s will, and this led her to commit atrocities. She wasn’t one of us. She came from Asshai. She wasn’t attached to the Red Temple of Volantis and we never sent her to Dragonstone. My order doesn’t burn people, godwoods or septs.” Not as long as I lead our order. “We only try to show the way to the people. We don’t force them to take it. This is not what the Lord asks from us.”

“You reassure us, High Priestess,” said the prince quickly. The other man didn’t seem entirely convinced. “We thank you for the news concerning Stannis Baratheon.”

“You must be very happy about his death,” she said.

“Pardon me.” He was skeptical.

“Stannis Baratheon claimed the Iron Throne was his, just like Daenerys Stormborn. His death means there are less people between her and her family’s crown. And didn’t he want to kill someone you cared about, Prince Trystane?”

The young man was agape before her words. He didn’t expect her to know this. She resumed. “I have brought with me my most eloquent priests. They will spread the word in all cities. Daenerys has been sent to lead the people against the darkness in this war and in the great war still to come.”

“We thank you, High Priestess,” said the prince, trying to gain back his composure. “We appreciate your support to our queen. You don’t need to fear for your priests, they will be allowed to preach as long as they respect the freedom of religion.”

“My priests need not to fear you. What they need to fear are the men behind masks in the darkness. They rule over the city more than you do. Can you claim to rule beyond these walls?”

The man with a beard moved forward, a threatening look on his face. “Listen, my lady…”

“I am no lady, and you will be the one to listen, Malcolm Branfield. You want your queen to be worshipped and obeyed. And while she’s gone, you want her advisors to be worshipped and obeyed.”

“We would settle for obeyed,” said Prince Trystane.

“And yet you are not obeyed. Chaos and evil have taken hold on this city. You cannot rule it alone
and you know it. You don’t even know who your enemies are. I told you that Stannis Baratheon was
dead, but this is far from the only information I have. In Volantis, half the people follow the Lord of
Light. And there are many more following him all over Essos. In Braavos, in Lys, in Myr, in Pentos,
in New Ghis, even in Astapor and Yunkai. Don’t you want to know what’s going on outside the
walls of Meereen?” The two now looked at her with an intrigued expression. She smiled wickedly at
them. “The truth is not meant to be hidden. Not forever. But sometimes, it may be best to hide it from
some people who could use it unwisely.”

She shot a glance around her. There were Unsullied standing guard everywhere. She wouldn’t tell
the truth before all of them. Trystane Martell and Malcolm Branfield exchanged looks again, then
stared at her before going back to looking at each other.

“Go and bring Grey Worm,” ordered the prince. The other man bowed and left, eyeing Kinvara.
Trystane Martell addressed her again. “Please follow me, High Priestess. There is a place where we
will be more at ease to speak about these things.”

He walked through the passage and Kinvara followed his way. They climbed stairs that led to what
Kinvara supposed was the apex of the Great Pyramid of Meereen. She wasn’t surprised that Prince
Trystane Martell had chosen this place to live, or that the former Masters had built it to live at the top.
The powerful always wanted to be higher than the powerless. It made them feel powerful and made
them convinced that they had the right to do what they wanted to those below them. Kinvara wasn’t
impressed by these structures. Not anymore. She had seen taller things than these huge stones put
together in the shape of a pointy end. How many people died to build this heap of blocks?

Trystane Martell invited her to sit and offered her some wine. She raised her hand in refusal. “Thank
you, Prince Trystane, but I do not drink.”

“You too? Are the Red Priests forbidden to drink?” he asked.

“No. The Lord of Light doesn’t stop us from enjoying life. We are not septons and septas. Quite the
opposite, our Lord encourages it. But I don’t like wine.”

The Dornishman sat face to her. “Very well.” He took a sip. “You’re not the only one to dislike wine
here, I can tell you.”

“Truth be told, I hate wine. Wine brings out the darkness from men and women and blinds them,
making them do things they wouldn’t do otherwise.”

The young man looked uncertain. “It depends. If we do not exaggerate, there’s nothing wrong with
drinking.”

“No, indeed. Many people drink because they like wine, or they even believe it will make them feel
better. Some fools even believe it makes them stronger. They have the impression it will help them
forget everything that’s wrong with the world, or their regrets, or their weakness, or their sadness.”
She noticed a change of expression on the prince’s face, but she kept talking. “Some also drink wine
because it’s a way to show that they are richer and live better than their brothers and sisters.”

“What do you mean?” Trystane Martell had a questioning look.

“In the eyes of our Lord, there is no difference between the slave and the master, the child and the
adult, the man and the woman, the rich man and the poor man, the Westerosi and the Essosi, for we
all are people with sins who will have to face him one day. But there are people who don’t want to
accept this simple truth because it doesn’t suit them. They prefer to believe they are superior, and
they surround themselves with gold, servants, great houses, silks and the finest wines to feel they are
above the others. Yourself, Prince Trystane, do you feel superior to those who are dying in the streets while you stay between the walls of this pyramid, well fed and well protected? And did you feel any different back when you lived in Dorne, away from the common people and their misery inside the place you call the Water Gardens?"

Kinvara watched his reaction. It was probably the first time he was questioned about this. He didn’t seem able to answer for some time. Some anger was visible on his face. “I am a Prince of Dorne,” he finally said. “I was born to rule my people. Yes, I am above them, I live better than them, but I must also look after them. My father did so all his life. I’m trying to save this city, to save my family, and to save my people. I came here seeking the help of Queen Daenerys to save the people of Dorne, and I will not rest until I succeed.”

At least, this one considered he had duties towards the people, even if he thought himself superior to them. All the same, Kinvara gave him an advice she hoped he would remember. “Don’t forget that your power comes from the people, my prince. Without them, you are powerless. You will not defeat the enemies of our queen without their support.”

Malcolm Branfield came back at this moment with an Unsullied. This one didn’t wear his helmet or his armor. The Westerosi who accompanied him made the presentations.

“This is Grey Worm. He is the commander of the Unsullied.”

The commander of the Unsullied didn’t move or speak or do anything to show he acknowledged her presence. He could have been a statue. But he stared at her. Kinvara didn’t blame him. He was a slave. He had been taken away from his parents at the age of five and forced into a brutal training that stripped him of all individuality, empathy, self-worth and consciousness. He was fully castrated not long after, before he could even know what it was to feel desire, was forced to drink an elixir that made him immune to any pain for years. He was given a puppy after he was cut, only to be forced to kill him the next year, under the threat of being fed to the surviving dogs if he refused. The day he received his cap, he had to kill a newborn slave under the eyes of his mother, then to pay the owner of the slave a silver mark. She knew what it was to be a slave, and she didn’t blame any of them for the cruelties they had to perform under the orders of their masters. Without Daenerys Stormborn, the Unsullied would still be slaves forced to kill women, children and innocent men. Now, they were defenders of freedom.

“High Priestess Kinvara,” said the Prince of Dorne, “we understood that you had information to share with us, but that you didn’t want to tell us with so many people around. You can trust me, Malcolm and Grey Worm.”

“It’s alright. You understand I must be careful to who I divulge information. The servants of the darkness can be everywhere, and I know some Unsullied are visiting brothels. It wouldn’t do if one of them was to let escape some misplaced words while the men with golden masks are around.”

“Yes, we know,” said Malcolm Branfield, a little exasperated. “Now, can you tell us what is it that you couldn’t say in front of the Unsullied?”

This man didn’t like her. All the same, she smiled sweetly. “Have you ever wondered who is hiding behind the masks of the Harpies?”

“Of course, we have. We’ve been fighting them for months. Do you really think we never asked ourselves the question? We’re asking ourselves every day.”

“The Unsullied have found nothing about the Sons of the Harpy. We arrested one a long time ago, but he wouldn’t speak,” said the Unsullied.
“That’s no surprise. The Sons of the Harpy are a very heterogeneous group. There are former Masters and former slaves all alike among them. They fight for the return of slavery, for freeing Meereen from its foreign rulers, or for money.”

“Why would a former slave fight to bring back slavery?” asked the heir to Sunspear.

“Why some men prefer darkness to light? Evil to good? Some believe they were better off as slaves, or only see Daenerys Stormborn as a foreign master who replaced the local ones. And some men will always be ready to do everything for gold.”

“You mean the Sons of the Harpy are paid?”

“Some of them. And the people who are leading them make sure they never give away any information about their movement, and that if they ever try to leave their group, they won’t leave it alive.”

“That’s very good to say, but that won’t help us to stop them. We still don’t know which Masters of Meereen are commanding them,” commented the Branfield.

“You’re not asking yourself the right questions, Malcolm Branfield.”

“What does it mean? We’re looking for the people leading the Sons of the Harpy. If we ever want to stop them, then we must find their leaders.”

“True enough, but you’re not looking for their leaders in the right place.” They all had questioning looks now, even the former slave. “You stayed inside the walls of Meereen for too long. You don’t know well enough what’s going on outside. Did you really think the other cities would let Daenerys Stormborn proclaim herself Queen of Meereen and abolish slavery without a fight?”

“Wait a minute,” said Trystane Martell, a flash of understanding coming to his face. “Are you telling us that the Sons of the Harpy are supported by the other cities of Slavor’s Bay?”

“Maybe,” she answered, remaining cryptic. “But perhaps it would be better if I explained you everything that went on while you tried to hold the great city of Meereen. As I said, in Volantis, half the people follow the Lord of Light. Not only slaves, but also free men and women, and even some masters. Among the slaves who worship R’hillor, some are working for powerful and rich masters, and even for the triarchs. They hear and see things, and some come to tell us about it. They dare not lie, for we can see their lies before they come. I saw the sack of Astapor before it even happened in the flames. At the time, I was the Second Servant of the Lord of Light. Benerro was High Priest in Volantis. He began to preach that our savior was coming, that he would break the chains of the slaves. I did too, and all our order did as well. When Daenerys Stormborn freed the Unsullied, it was the proof that our Lord’s Chosen One had come. But at the time, the Masters of Volantis didn’t really notice the threat she was. Astapor was almost a city in ruins, the poorer of all Slavor’s Bay. Anyway, the Masters of Volantis don’t believe in war. Since the failure of the Volantenese Freehold after the Doom of Valyria, they turned to trade to impose the hegemony of Volantis over the Free Cities. They couldn’t care less about the fate of Astapor, and after Cleon the Butcher took power and enslaved the former Good Masters, they had even less cause to worry.”

“But then, Daenerys Stormborn marched on Yunkai and forced them to abolish slavery as well. Yunkai was much richer than Astapor. The Masters of Volantis began to think our queen could be dangerous, but before they could do anything, Meereen fell as well. Then they realized the danger the Mother of Dragons was. Slave trade was disrupted, and it is one of the main sources of riches for the Masters of Volantis. They helped the Wise Masters of Yunkai to seize back power and encouraged chaos in Astapor, and here as well.”
“You mean they created the Sons of the Harpy,” said Branfield.

“No. At the beginning, the Sons of the Harpy were formed and led by the Great Masters who wanted to get rid of Daenerys Stormborn. They were helped by the Masters of Yunkai and Volantis, but they were the ones leading the golden masks. But then Hizdahr zo Loraq convinced the Wise Masters to share the power with the former slaves, and afterwards Daenerys Stormborn chose to marry him. Hizdahr zo Loraq convinced the Masters of Meereen to stop their uprising. Soon, the son of a Great Master would be King of Meereen, and he would bear the name of his father, or so they thought. He could even bring back slavery one day. The Great Masters were not idiots. They knew Daenerys Stormborn was ready to kill them all. She proved it when she crucified so many of them, and when she had the leader of a great family fed to her dragons. They were afraid. It wasn’t difficult for Hizdahr zo Loraq to bring them to his side. So they abandoned their rebellion.”

“However, the Masters of Yunkai and Volantis were not of that opinion. They were not threatened directly by Daenerys Stormborn. They didn’t fear her as much as their fellows from Meereen. For them, she mostly disrupted a trade that made them rich. So they secretly had the Sons of the Harpy turned to their cause. They had agents in Meereen who paid them handsomely. And they organized the attack in the Great Pit of Daznak.”

“The Masters of Yunkai and Volantis were behind the events at Daznak’s Pit?” asked Grey Worm, saying something for the first time.

“They were. It was the perfect opportunity. Daenerys Stormborn, her closest advisors and all the Great Masters of Meereen would be there, together in the same place. They were planning to kill them all.”

“Even the Masters of Meereen? All of them?” asked Malcolm Branfield, incredulous.

“All of them,” she confirmed.

“But why would they do that?” wondered the young prince. “I may understand they wanted to kill Hizdahr zo Loraq and those who supported the queen, but why slaughter all the Great Masters? Surely some would enjoy slavery to come back. They were not their enemies.”

“Really? In Westeros, all the lords and landed knights support serfdom. Does that make them friends?” It was clear from the expression on all their faces that they didn’t think so. “Meereen was the most powerful of all the cities in Slavor’s Bay before Daenerys Stormborn came. Yunkai was the second, and it wasn’t sacked by Daenerys’ army like Astapor. These cities are no friends. At best, they are allies when it serves their interests. Volantis wants to spread its influence, and what better way to do that than to take Meereen and make both Astapor and Yunkai some sort of protectorate. They helped the Wise Masters and the Good Masters to take back power in their respectful cities after the attack on the Great Pit of Daznak, and now the three groups of Masters are working together to keep the Sons of the Harpy spreading chaos into Meereen.”

“So this is not a local rebellion,” said the Martell prince. “This is a seditious movement funded by the other cities.”

“I can’t believe the Great Masters have no longer any hand in it,” said Malcolm Branfield.

“Some may still be part of the movement,” conceded Kinvara, “but very few. After all, many Meereenese Masters died at Daznak’s Pit, and many Masters who once supported the Sons of the Harpy know that they killed Masters who created them. Those who survived probably suspect the movement is no longer into their hands, or that some of their friends turned against them.”
“We know who are our enemies,” said Grey Worm. “We must march on Astapor and Yunkai now.”

“We will discuss about it later, Grey Worm.” The Prince of Dorne shut the Commander of the Unsullied. Trystane Martell didn’t trust her to discuss these matters in her presence.

Kinvara rose from her seat. “You must also know that before I left Volantis, the triarchs were arming a fleet. Officially, it is meant to intervene in a conflict between Myr and Lys, but it is likely that its true purpose is to attack you. Beware of the Good Masters of Astapor, the Wise Masters of Yunkai and the benevolent enslavers of Volantis. They will do everything to bring Meereen down. That is all I had to tell you.” For the time being.

Trystane Martell nodded and stood up. “Thank you, High Priestess. We won’t forget your help.”

“I hope you won’t. Remember. Daenerys Stormborn almost has no allies here in Slavor’s Bay. Only the common people supported her. If you want Meereen to survive and prevent slavery from returning, you will need the people, sooner or later.”

She left on these words. In the Hall, she found Zanrush waiting for her and they walked outside the Pyramid together. Her fellow priest said nothing. No one ever asked anything to the High Priest, or the High Priestess in this case, among their order, except for the Second Servant. They all had to wait for Kinvara to speak first.

“They may be able to help us,” she said once they were far enough.

“For now, they haven’t been able to do much. The people will have to defend their freedom against the servants of the Great Other by themselves,” he replied. Zanrush didn’t believe in politics. His father had been a triarch of Volantis, but the son had decided to give up everything to join the Faith in R’hllor. He had seen too many slaves being mutilated, beaten or killed for nothing worse than saying a wrong word, and was disgusted by all the corruption and lick-spitting among the noble men and noble women of Volantis. It was the idea that all men were equals before the Lord of Light that brought him to them at first, and now he was a leal servant of R’hllor.

“People need leaders, Zanrush. These men speak for the queen in her absence. We need them, whether we like it or not.”

“They’re hiding in their Pyramid while the people suffer in the streets.”

“We cannot help that. They are highborn people.”

“Like I was.” That was no excuse in his eyes.

“Daenerys Targaryen chose them. Do you doubt the decisions of the Lord’s Chosen One?”

“No. But this prince… He wasn’t chosen by her, and he does nothing.”

“He will have a part to play in the great war to come. I saw it in the flames.”

“If you say so,” said Zanrush, resigned.

“Our duty is to spread the word that Daenerys Stormborn is Azor Ahai reborn. We must convince everyone of that, and bring them to fight for her. This is more important than slavery. The Great Other. I can see him better every day. Daenerys Stormborn will come back, but she won’t stay here for long.”

“Then we must convince the people to fight in her stead.”
“And that’s what we’re going to do. Daenerys Stormborn brought the freedom to all these men and women, and our duty is to make them see they must fight to keep it.”

They walked in silence afterwards. There were few people in the streets. Zanrush said the situation was even worse weeks ago. No one dared to leave their homes, day or night. There were graffiti on walls. “KILL THE MASTERS”. “MHYSA IS A MASTER”. “DEATH TO FOREIGN INVADERS”. “ONLY MASTERS AND COWARDS HIDE BEHIND MASKS”. The people whose path they crossed were all whispering. Some of them pointed her to their friends. They had seen Red Priests before, but never someone like Kinvara. If only they knew what they were really looking at. Farther on the street, a woman sat against a wall, a feeding bowl in her left hand while she held a baby feeding at her breast with her right arm.

Kinvara got near the woman. She had ragged clothes, brown eyes, black hair and a tanned skin. The baby was a girl. Kinvara knelt to be at the level of that poor woman.

“What’s her name?” she asked kindly.

“Laraza,” the poor mother answered weakly.

“You have nothing to fear from me. May I hold her a second? I won’t do her any harm.”

Uncertain, the woman let Kinvara hold the baby. This little girl was beautiful, like all babies were. She smiled sadly at her, and the little girl smiled in return. Kinvara put a hand on her forehead, saying a prayer. Lord of Light, protect this child. She gave her back to her mother and put a silver mark in her hand.

“She is strong. Take care of her. May the Lord of Light watch over you.”

The woman bowed her head in recognition. As she walked away with Zanrush to a reunion of the followers of R’hillor, Kinvara remembered another girl who once had a daughter of the same age. A mother who abandoned her daughter. Her baby. At the assembly, she spoke to the people, about how it was their duty to fight for their freedom and for Daenerys Stormborn, telling the Sons of the Harpy were servants of the Great Other who hid in the darkness like all his servants until the right time came, convincing them they could choose between fighting for freedom or slavery, life or death. The people assembled agreed with her. Her words had much more power than those of Zanrush. But at the same time, she couldn’t stop thinking about the mother who abandoned her child.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
Ser Jocelyn Waterfell was a tall man with freckles all over his face. His arms were a green waterfall with blue birds flying over. Tyrion remembered that House Waterfell was among those who claimed to have left the Reach along with the Manderlys when they were exiled by the Gardeners, though some maesters were unsure if they were truly exiled. Still, they were among the most loyal bannermen of House Manderly. He had come this morning by boat, escorted by Howland Reed’s men through the swamps of the Neck.

In the command tent, Tyrion and Sansa were there along with Daven, Bronn and Lyle Crakehall for the Westerlands, Lady Mira and her husband for the Hightowers, Ser Brynden Tully, Karyl Vance, Perwyn Frey and Clement Piper for the Riverlands, Howland Reed and Wylis Manderly for the North. They were all there to speak with the envoy of the Manderly forces.

Ser Wylis Manderly, Lord Wyman’s firstborn son and heir to White Harbor, had been held prisoner at Harrenhal for years now, ever since the Battle of the Green Fork where he was captured. With his fat belly, there was no doubt about him being a Manderly. His captivity in Harrenhal had broken him, especially with the horrible treatments he suffered at the hands of the Mountain, but his condition had improved considerably after Tyrion had him brought from Harrenhal by Bronn. Lord Wyman Manderly had accepted to help Tyrion against the Boltons in exchange for his eldest son’s freedom, but Tyrion would send him to White Harbor once Moat Cailin was taken and their army joined with the forces of House Manderly. Tyrion didn’t want to take any chance with the Northerners after what happened at the Red Wedding. If Wyman Manderly wanted his son back, he would need to get the Lannisters inside the North first.

“It is a pleasure to see you alive, Ser Wylis,” said Ser Jocelyn. “Your lord father will be more than pleased by your return.”

“I’m sure he will be,” said Tyrion, “but to come back he will need to get through Moat Cailin, and to get through Moat Cailin, we must take it from the Dustins and the Cerwyns. Are your men in position, Ser Jocelyn?”

“They are only two days of march from here. I was sent ahead after Ser Forley Prester came to us.”

“May we know why it took you so much time to come here? We’ve been sitting on our arses in
swamps for months,” said the Blackfish. Most of the lords obviously agreed with him, and Tyrion was among them.

“We were securing Barrow Hall and Hornwood, and we wanted to be sure we had enough men to take Moat Cailin before we attacked,” tried to explain the knight.

“You lost months to take fortresses while we could all have died here? Do you know how dangerous it is to remain in the Neck for so long? We lost many men to sickness and cold. We’re lucky to be in the autumn, or else bugs would have spread diseases to all our men.”

“We will deal with this later,” interrupted Tyrion. It wasn’t time to put the Manderlys against them when they needed their army to take Moat Cailin. “How many men are coming, Ser Jocelyn?”

“Two thousand,” Ser Jocelyn replied.

“That’s more than those you brought when Robb Stark rode in the south,” commented the Blackfish.

“We had to make the levies very quickly back then,” explained Ser Wylis. “We couldn’t muster more on such short notice. My father probably had more time to assemble men this time.”

“And we have the support of the Hornwoods,” added the knight of House Waterfell. “They are marching with us. We left garrisons at Hornwood and Barrow Hall, so we have control over the southern part of the North. Our army can now give all its attention to conquering Moat Cailin.”

“Very well. We will need to attack from both sides at the same time,” said Tyrion.

“Lord Tyrion is right,” said Daven. “As soon as you reach Moat Cailin, build rams and ladders as quickly as possible. It should be done within a few days. After that, we may launch a coordinated assault from both sides and take the fortress once and for all.”

“The best time would probably be at dawn,” said the Blackfish. “We may place some of our men in front of their battlements from both sides the day before, and keep them on guard at night while the others get rest. It will force the defenders of Moat Cailin to stay awake all night, and at dawn they will be tired while our men will be rested. We will send those who could sleep during the night against the walls.”

“We already made three attempts against the place, and each time we lost hundreds of men,” opposed Ser Gerold Hightower. “What if the fourth was the same?”

“It won’t be the same. Not with the Manderlys attacking from the other side,” answered Daven.

“Shouldn’t we at least use siege towers along with the rams and the ladders we built? The assault might go better.”

“For any other castle, maybe, but not for Moat Cailin. Siege towers will be almost impossible to move in the marshes. We will have to do with rams and ladders.”

“I will lead the first wave,” roared Ser Lyle Crakehall. “I want to be the first one on the battlements. It’s been too long since I had a proper fight.”

It was at this time Lady Mira Forrester… Hightower, stepped into the conversation. “Ser Lyle, the intent of the southern attack is not to take the walls of Moat Cailin. It is a diversion. The Westermen, the Rivermen, the Hightowers and the crannogmen are supposed to attack the southern part of the castle to bring as many defenders as possible on this side, while the Manderlys will take the walls on the northern part.”
The Strongboar looked at the northern girl with a strange look, but an exchange of glares with Tyrion made him understand that the young lady was right. Lyle Crakehall was of those who believed the place of a woman was the birthing bed, not war councils.

"Then in this case, my lord," resumed the knight, "let me go north. I want to be with the Manderlys when they take those damn ruins. I’m sick of staying here doing nothing."

"As you wish, Ser Lyle," answered Tyrion. "You will leave with Ser Jocelyn when he goes back to the Manderlys. I will give you two hundred more men. I suppose the crannogmen will be able to make them go around Moat Cailin."

"We will," replied shortly the Lord of Greywater Watch. He worked with the Lannisters to bring Roose Bolton down, but that didn’t make him a friend of Tyrion. His nephew had killed his best friend.

"Very well. Ser Brynden and Ser Daven will lead the assault on the southern side while the Manderlys attack on the northern side. When your men are ready, Ser Jocelyn, send us someone to decide when to attack. Lord Reed’s men will make sure they reach us. In the meantime, I want all of you to prepare your men for the fight. Make sure the rams and the trebuchets are ready. Lord Reed, can we count on your men to keep harassing the garrison of Moat Cailin?"

"Of course."

"Then I suppose we have nothing else to talk about." Tyrion thought to conclude the council on this. He wanted to spend some time with Sansa. These last days, after her sister had been found back, Sansa spent a lot of time with her, and with Lady Mira too. It diminished the time she and Tyrion could spend together. Before they could start to leave, Ser Waterfell said something else that caught their attention.

"My lords, before we all leave, I think you ought to know something. We received the news not long before I came here. Roose Bolton is dead."

The pavilion went totally silent within a second. Everyone was looking at the knight with rounded eyes and an open mouth, incapable of saying anything. The silence lingered for a very long time, and finally Bronn broke it.

"Well, it seems the kings are not the only ones dying like flies these days. Wardens of the North too." He drank from a cup of wine before him as he said that, which earned a few angry glares from the river lords and the Northerners.

"What happened? How did he die? How do you know it?" asked Sansa.

"A raven was sent to Barrow Hall from Winterfell. We believe the same message was sent all over the North. According to it, Roose Bolton was poisoned by his enemies," summarized the bannerman.

"Poisoned by his enemies?"

"That’s what the message said. It gave no other detail about Lord Bolton’s death."

How strange. Roose Bolton died all of a sudden, poisoned by his enemies. Which enemies?

"You have men inside Winterfell, Lord Tyrion," said the Blackfish. "Is it their work?"

"I doubt it," Tyrion answered. "I sent them to collect information, not to commit murders. And I sent them no order about killing anyone. I doubt this is their doing. If I had to bet on the identity of Roose
Bolton’s murderer, I would choose his son.”

“His son?”

“Do you really believe that a mad dog who uses his spare time to skin people alive and hunt young women in the woods would hesitate to kill his own father? There are rumors that he murdered his own brother, Domerice Bolton, Roose Bolton’s legitimate son. And the mention of enemies is quite vague if you want my opinion.”

All the lords and knights were obviously disgusted, except Bronn maybe. Ser Jocelyn wasn’t done with news. “There was something else that was told in the message. Ramsay Bolton took the place of his father. He declared himself Lord of Winterfell, but also King in the North.” That brought a lot of reaction in the tent. “He ordered all lords of the North to come to Winterfell, to pledge their banners and to bend the knee to him. He swore to defend the North against its enemies and the foreign invaders. He proclaimed that all those who would collaborate with them would be considered traitors to the North, but that those who already supported the invaders could get a pardon if they abandoned them immediately and came to Winterfell.”

“An interesting offer,” commented Tyrion. “What do you make of it?” He was asking this question to Howland Reed and Ser Wylis.

“My father will never support a Bolton. Not after the Twins. Not after what happened to Wendel,” said the Manderly.

“I would rather die than serve a bastard of the man who murdered Ned’s son,” replied the Lord of Greywater Watch. Tyrion wondered if Lord Reed was so angry because a bastard had proclaimed himself King in the North, or because it was Roose Bolton’s son. After all, Ned Stark had brought a bastard at Winterfell after he and Howland Reed went to the Tower of Joy at the end of Robert’s Rebellion.

“What about Arya Stark? Do we have any news about her?” asked Lord Vance. The army still ignored they had the real Arya Stark with them. For everyone but a few, she was Lord Aran Fenn’s daughter.

“Nothing was said about her in the message,” answered Ser Jocelyn.

“Well, nothing has changed,” said Tyrion. “Arya Stark is still at Winterfell, being tortured by a mad man who now styles himself King in the North, the castle is still between the hands of the Boltons, and considering what we know of Ramsay, I’m afraid things will get even worse for the Northerners from now on with such a king.”

“He’s not our king,” almost shouted Howland Reed. “He is a mad dog, a murderer, a bastard from some poor woman Roose Bolton raped during a hunt. His father murdered Robb Stark. No true Northerner will side with him.”

“I’m afraid some already pledged themselves to him,” Ser Jocelyn said. “The message said that Harald Karstark, Lord of Karhold, was supporting Ramsay Bolton’s claim. His seal was next to the flayed man on the paper.”

“Traitors,” said Brynden Tully, looking as if he wanted to spat on the floor. “Who would side with a mad man like this?”

“The same kind of men who sided with the Mad King, I suppose. Men like my father who ally themselves with the worst type of people as long as it serves their interests. He would have fought for
the Mad King in the time if the Battle of the Trident had turned differently, make no mistake. Furthermore, Ramsay Bolton is not the one who beheaded Lord Karstark’s father,” Tyrion exposed.

Ser Brynden Tully tightened his lips. He knew Tyrion was right, but he wouldn’t admit it. The other river lords looked with disdain at him while Daven and the Strongboar looked uncomfortable to hear their lord speak so poorly of his own father, but Tyrion saw no need of defending the memory of Tywin Lannister, especially when Sansa was present and that her family was slaughtered on his orders.

“Ser Jocelyn, was anything said about Roose Bolton’s wife in the raven?” the question came from Ser Perwyn Frey.

“Not that I know,” answered the northern knight.

“Then we must march north as soon as we can. My cousin Walda was married to Roose Bolton. Olyvar told me that not long before we left the Twins, our father received a message from her. She was pregnant. Who knows what the bastard might have done to her? And there’s our brother Elmar too. He served Roose Bolton as his squire.”

Fear was plain in the Frey’s voice. Karyl Vance was next to speak. “Ser Perwyn is right. Let’s go to Winterfell as soon as we can. The father may be dead, but the son still lives. Let’s deal with the son and send him to the Seven Hells with his father. I’m sure the kingslayer and the kinslayer will be happy to meet there.”

“Is there any other house who pledged themselves to Ramsay Bolton besides the Karstarks? What about Stannis Baratheon?” asked the Blackfish.

“Stannis Baratheon is dead. He attacked Winterfell, but was defeated. Roose Bolton had him executed not long before he died, if we are to believe his words.”

“My nephew seems to have no competition left,” commented Tyrion. “What about Stannis’s army? Was it all destroyed?”

“Yes. It’s all gone, apparently. But there’s been another development in the meantime. The wildlings got through the Wall.”

New reactions of surprise followed. For the first time during the council, Sansa spoke. “How is that possible? How could they get through it? The Wall cannot have fallen.”

Unless the wildlings regrouped after Stannis left the Wall and led another assault. The Night’s Watch wasn’t enough to stop an army of wildlings. But according to Jon Snow, their leader, Mance Rayder, was dead, and he was the only one who could unite dozens of tribes. How could they get through the Wall then?

“The Wall didn’t fall, my lady,” answered Ser Jocelyn. “It’s the Lord Commander, your brother Jon Snow, who let them pass.”

Daze was complete upon Sansa’s face. “That’s impossible. Jon would never have done this.”

“He sent ravens to all the houses in the North. He said he allowed them to settle on the lands of the Gift. They belong to the Watch, he says. They are not allowed to go any further in the south. I don’t know why he led them through, but he did.”

Tyrion thought he had a good idea why Jon Snow allowed that. The White Walkers were coming. Everything who lived north of the Wall was going to be killed by them. He probably did the
honorable thing and tried to save the wildlings, but Tyrion couldn’t explain this here. These lords would all laugh at him.

“Well, this could help us,” Tyrion stated instead, lords looking queerly at him. “Ramsay will have to deal with us from the south as soon as we get through Moat Cailin, and at the same time he will have the wildlings to worry about at the north. He will have to divide his forces to face two threats.”

“You seem to forget that we may have to deal with the wildlings once Winterfell is ours,” said the Blackfish.

“Maybe. Maybe not. If they remain quiet on the Gift, I see no reason to fight them. Especially if they made a pact with Jon Snow.”

“You would let wildlings live on our lands?” said Ser Jocelyn with vehemence.

“First, they are on the lands of the Gift, and the lands of the Gift belong to the Night’s Watch. These lands are out of the jurisdiction of all lords of Westeros, even out of the jurisdiction of the king. If they remain on these lands, there’s nothing we can do without starting a war against the Night’s Watch. Would you start to fight the Night’s Watch, Ser Jocelyn? Anyway, for now, we have more pressing problems. We must deal with the Boltons. We’ll see for the wildlings later. The wildlings are not the ones who murdered your brother, Ser Wylis, or who took your son captive Lord Piper, or who murdered your king and your niece, Ser Brynden.”

“We must focus on taking Moat Cailin and Winterfell,” added Daven. “Once we’ve gotten through the Neck, we will only have Castle Cerwyn on our way north, then Winterfell will be at reach.”

“The Cerwyns may resist,” pointed out Lady Mira.

“Maybe, Lady Mira, but I doubt it,” replied Tyrion. “If Harald Karstark joined with Ramsay Bolton because his father was rightly executed by Robb Stark while he was thousands of miles away, I think the current Lord Cerwyn will not complain too much about joining us since Ramsay Bolton skinned his father, his mother and his uncle alive right before him. I’m sure he would like to see Ramsay Bolton die.”

“We could send him the bastard’s head,” said Bronn. “Skinned, preferably.”

The joke wasn’t very welcomed. The war council didn’t last long after that. Ser Lyle left with Ser Jocelyn to go north of Moat Cailin with the help of the crannogmen. The others went to prepare for the attack that would take place very soon. Before Tyrion could leave with Sansa, her granduncle stopped him, asking for a few words in private. Sansa left, saying she would wait for him in their pavilion.

The Blackfish sat heavily in a chair. “Finally, we’re about to leave this damn place. If we stayed there any longer, I was going to join my men in a mutiny.”

“I was about to do the same,” replied Tyrion, sitting as well. For more than three months they remained in the Neck, and finally they would leave it and march on Winterfell.

“Can we really trust the Manderlys?”

“We don’t have much choice. Without them, we will never take Moat Cailin. Besides, we hold Lord Wyman’s son. He wants him back, and I think Lord Wyman would rather have Sansa as his Wardeness than Roose or Ramsay Bolton.”

“Still, your father organized the Red Wedding. I find it strange they sent you information about the
“As I said, we had his son and heir. And the maester at White Harbor, Theomore, is a Lannister of Lannisport. It made communication between us much easier.”

“How is Sansa doing?” the Blackfish asked.

“She’s alright. It begins to show off, but so far it’s not so bad.”

The Blackfish nodded. “She cannot follow us in the North.”

“What do you mean, she cannot? Sansa is the Wardeness of the North. She must come with us at Winterfell.”

“An army on march is not the place for a woman. These men who follow us left their wives, their children, their families, their homes behind them. How do you think they feel when they see you going around with Sansa? What do you believe they’re thinking when they must spend nights alone while you have your wife to warm you?”

“I didn’t bring her to warm me in the middle of the night!” He hated to hear Sansa being talked about as if she was only there to satisfy his personal desires. “Sansa is the Lady of Winterfell, and the Wardeness of the North. If we want the northern lords to come to us, we need her.”

“What about your child? Do you think it’s safe to bring her with us at Winterfell, when we could get stuck in a storm or in a battle, and that she could enter labor anytime?”

Of course, it wasn’t safe. Tyrion had wondered about this lately. Sansa’s state would get worse as her pregnancy went on. The journey to Winterfell could be very hard on her. And he feared for her, if they were to fail in taking Winterfell. They couldn’t be sure they would win against the Boltons. After all, winter was coming. If it came while they marched on Winterfell, they were doomed. Stannis was just defeated, and he had twice as many men as Roose Bolton. Still, he didn’t want to be parted from Sansa. They hadn’t left each other since the trial. And he wanted to be there when his child would be born.

“I will speak about it with her,” Tyrion finally said. He left after exchanging a nod of acknowledgement with the Blackfish. The old knight had come to trust him when it concerned Sansa, at least, or so Tyrion thought.

Tyrion went back to his tent. On the way, he wondered how he should tell her, or if he should even tell her. He didn’t want her to leave. On the other side, he had taken a vow to protect her when they married. He couldn’t put her life into danger. It would be better if he told her everything right now. When he learned that her sister was in Winterfell (though this proved to be untrue in the end), he had delayed the revelation by working late in his solar. It hadn’t helped. He wouldn’t repeat it now. Sansa was waiting for him. Her belly had begun to grow, though not much. When she wore a gown, it was almost invisible, but at night, when she wore only her underdress or nothing at all, her pregnancy was plain.

“So, what did my granduncle want from you? Did he threaten again to kill you if you mistreated me?” she asked with a smile after she kissed him.

“ Mostly, he told me to send you away. No, that’s not what you think,” he added quickly when he saw her bewildered face. “He says it could be dangerous for you and the baby to follow the army to Winterfell while you’re pregnant.”

Sansa had gotten on her knees to kiss him, but now she stood again and turned her back to him,
walking away. Then she turned again to face him. “Winterfell is my home. You know I have to be there when we take it back.”

“Your sister is safe now, Sansa. She is not at Winterfell, mistreated by Ramsay. You don’t have to risk everything for her any longer.”

“But this monster is still living there, eating in our hall, sleeping in our beds, torturing people in our yards. What would you do if the Boltons had taken Casterly Rock?”

He didn’t need to give an answer. Sansa already knew it. He tried to explain. “Sansa, I don’t want you to go, but think about it. You are five months within your pregnancy. It’s beginning to show off now, but it’s only the beginning. Things will get harder for you. Your belly will grow bigger. You will need more rest every day. It will become difficult for you to walk, let alone to ride. We still have at least two months before we reach Winterfell, and after that we have a battle to do. And we don’t know what could happen. What if we lose the battle? Or that the snows surprise us? You won’t be able to follow the army. Not without putting the life of our child in danger.”

Sansa seemed to consider what he said. When she spoke again, her voice was hard. “When do I leave? Where do I go?”

“You’re not leaving right now. In fact, I think I’ll send you to White Harbor once Moat Cailin has fallen. You’ll be far enough in case things turn bad, and close enough to come to Winterfell once we’ve taken it. And the Manderlys will treat you well. They are loyal to your family. You’ll be safe for the birth there, and once our child has come, you’ll be able to travel to join us.”

“This means… You won’t be there for the birth?”

Tyrion looked down. “I must lead the army. What do you think the northern lords would have thought of your brother if he had stayed behind at Winterfell when they went in the south?”

Sansa sat, her eyes cast on the floor. “Do you think we’ll win?” She was looking at him. She was afraid. Tyrion approached and took her hand in his.

“I’m sure we’ll win,” he tried to convince her. “But I can be wrong.”

Sansa looked aside. They stayed in that position, Sansa looking away. In the end, Tyrion couldn’t keep looking at her. He told her he had something to do, and left. Bronn followed him after he went out of the pavilion. He had to do it. He couldn’t take the risk of Sansa or their child dying. He wished they were back at Casterly Rock, where she was safe. Sansa had been happy there. They had saved her sister. Arya Stark was with them now. Tyrion didn’t lack the will to put Ramsay Bolton’s head on a spike, and he knew there was another threat, even more dangerous than Ramsay Bolton, but he wished all of this hadn’t happened.

Tyrion arrived before a tent that was kept by a dozen of his personal guards and went into it. Arya Stark was there, eating, garbed in the clothes of the crannogmen, all dirty and unwashed. He was sure that Sansa liked it. His sister-in-law lifted her eyes from her plate and looked at him. Her eyes turned hard and angry. Like every time they saw each other, she looked as if she wanted to kill him, and Tyrion was sure she didn’t only look like she wanted it. She actually wanted to kill him. He was a Lannister, and his family slaughtered hers. They tried to avoid each other as much as they could. Tyrion didn’t want her very close to him after she tried to kill him and that she almost killed Sansa in the process.

“What are you doing here?” she asked.
“I came to have little talk with my sister-in-law.” She didn’t like the allusion to the fact they were family now. Tyrion didn’t come to sit close to her. Arya Stark had a knife in her hand and she glared at Bronn.

“And him? Why is he here?”

“I protect the little shit,” answered Bronn before Tyrion could. What could have been a mocking smile came to the girl’s face, only to disappear as quickly as it appeared.

“I’m sending you to White Harbor with Sansa,” said Tyrion, a little irritated.

“White Harbor?” Arya Stark asked, surprise on her face.

“Yes, White Harbor. In two weeks, Moat Cailin will have fallen. Then we will march on Winterfell, but you and Sansa and a few men will go to White Harbor.”

“You cannot tell me where to go,” the she-wolf said.

Tyrion shrugged. “I can. I’m only telling you where to go, not ordering you.”

She made a strange face that showed she didn’t understand. “What do you mean?”

Tyrion sighed deeply. “This is quite simple, Arya. Your sister is pregnant, and quite advanced in her pregnancy now. She can’t follow us far in the North. It would be too dangerous for her in her state. She must be somewhere safe for the birthing. White Harbor is the safest one. She will come to Winterfell once our child is born and that we’ve taken it.”

“I would have nothing to do in White Harbor. Nothing. I won’t let you approach my home alone. I’m following you to Winterfell. I’m not pregnant like Sansa.” Her voice was full of scorn as she said it.

“Yes, you can. But you could also follow your sister.”

“Why would I follow her?”

“Because she’s your sister,” replied Tyrion firmly this time. Confusion was obvious on the girl’s face. “Tell me, do you love Sansa? Do you love your sister?”

“Of course, I do.”

“Then why would you rather follow the little monster who married her instead of her? What is there in Winterfell for you that is more important than Sansa? I know Winterfell is your home, this is Sansa’s home too. But if you were to choose between your family and the place where you grew up, what would be your choice?” Arya Stark seemed taken aback by his words. “Or is it that you don’t consider Sansa like your sister anymore?”

A moment went on. “No.”

“Then why do you want so much to come to Winterfell?”

“Because I want to kill Ramsay. And Roose Bolton too.”

“Ramsay will die as soon as Winterfell is released. As for Roose Bolton, it seems he’s already dead.”

“What?”
“A knight sworn to the Manderlys informed us this morning. He’s dead. Ramsay declared himself Lord of Winterfell and King in the North.”

Fury filled the eyes and the face of the Stark girl. “King in the North?! Robb was King in the North. Ramsay has no right to be.”

“Of course, he has no right. You can be sure he won’t be able to boast that title for long.”

“I want to kill him myself.”

“Why?”

“Because I know what he does. I heard about it. Brienne told me.” Sansa’s sworn shield was giving lessons in sword fighting to Arya along with Podrick. The Maid of Tarth told him once that Arya Stark was very skilled, even before she started to spar with her. “I could have been married with him. It could have happened to me. I want to kill him myself. I need to.”

“Is that worth it?”

“It is. It’s fair. It’s justice.”

Tyrion looked down for a moment before he stared back at the girl. “Your father did what he thought was right and fair when he tried to arrest Joffrey. As a consequence, your family was scattered through the Seven Kingdoms. Do you think it was worth it in he end?”

If she had doubts, she didn’t show them. Tyrion resumed. “Look, I have a sister. She hates me, and I hate her. She hated me from the moment I was born, and wanted me dead for all my life. She tried to have me killed more than once, but she’s still my sister. You don’t know how often I wished for things to have been different between us. I know this is a vain hope today, my sister will have no peace until I’m dead. She’s mad. She is lost to me. Sansa is not yet lost to you, but you may lose her one day. You almost killed her not long ago.”

“That was an accident,” she shouted.

“Yes, it was. Still, you were not far from killing her. I know you and Sansa never got along very well. She told me. But except your brother Jon, and he is thousands of miles away, you only have each other. I try to be there for Sansa as much as I can, but I’m not her family. You are. If I were you, I would try to mend the fences between you two before it’s too late. That’s why I want you to go to White Harbor with her. Anyway, Lady Brienne is going there too, so if you want to keep training with her, you have no choice but to follow them. It’s too late for me and Cersei, maybe it’s been too late since the day my mother died, but it’s not too late for you and Sansa. Not yet. Go to White Harbor and spend time with her.” A silence followed where Arya Stark seemed thoughtful. “Unless you already see her only as a Lannister and no longer like your sister.”

“I don’t.”

“Then tell her. She needs to hear it from someone else than me.”

Tyrion turned on his heels to walk away, but as he reached the flap, Arya Stark called for him. “Why do you care about me and Sansa?”

“Because I don’t want Sansa to lose her sister. I brought an army this far to save her sister, I don’t want to have done that for nothing. I want her to be happy with her brothers and sisters again, with her family. And I’m not her family.”
“Do you love her? Do you really love Sansa? Do you really care for her?” Tyrion hadn’t turned to face his sister-in-law, and he didn’t turn either to these questions.

“I do. More than you can imagine.” He walked away.

This night, Tyrion was lying on his chest, caressing the belly of his wife who lied on her back in their bed. Sansa’s belly barely began to grow, and only this was strange for Tyrion. Sansa was so slender that to imagine her with a big belly was almost impossible for him. She was so beautiful. There were times Tyrion wondered if the gods brought her in the world only for him. If so, it only confirmed his conviction that if gods existed, they were not fair. Who could send the Maiden made flesh to an ugly and twisted dwarf like him and be just at the same time?

“Are you sure there’s no way I could follow you north? I could at least come with you to Castle Cerwyn,” she said.

“No, we can’t take the risk, Sansa. We could find ourselves stuck in the snows if a storm begins, and we may have to besiege Castle Cerwyn. And if we fail to take Winterfell, then you might not be able to ride away. You’ll be safer in White Harbor.”

She sighed. Tyrion could see she wasn’t happy about this, and he wasn’t either, but she simply couldn’t follow the troops. Talisa Stark had followed the Stark troops to the Twins, and there she and her child found the same end than her husband and her mother-in-law.

“So, I’ll have to sit down and do nothing while you’re in danger, fighting to take back my home,” she said gloomily.

“And to make sure our child comes in the world safe and healthy,” Tyrion added.

Sansa turned her head to look at him. Her eyes were looking at him with fondness. “I’ll go to White Harbor. Just promise me one thing.”

“Anything.”

“Don’t die out there.”

Tyrion smiled. “I promise. I won’t die. And once our child is born, Ramsay dead and Winterfell freed, you’ll be able to travel to join us. And you’ll be Lady of Winterfell for real, not only in name.”

Tyrion could see his wife smiling sadly even in the darkness. He leaned and kissed her tenderly. She wrapped her arms around his neck and deepened the kiss. For a long time, they stayed like that, kissing each other. He didn’t want this to end. This time, no one trying to kill him interrupted them. There was only him and Sansa, his beloved wife.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: a bastard
Jon IV

Chapter Notes

A little Jon chapter. It isn't very long, but I thought it might be good for you to discover that Jon hadn't gone yet in this fic for Christmas. There was nothing that changed that could have stopped Melisandre from bringing him back to life.

A very merry Christmas to you all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

JON IV

“Are your people well settled?” asked Jon.

“They are. As much as they can be. The crows won’t bother us after what you did to the guys who killed you.” retorted Tormund.

It was still all so strange to talk about it. Jon had died. He had actually died, and yet here he was, alive, brought back from the dead by the Red Woman. He didn’t know why he was here, and Melisandre didn’t seem to know it either, but he was. After he was killed, Ser Davos, Ghost and a few of his sworn brothers had protected his body until Tormund and the Free Folk came to their rescue. Then the Red Woman had brought him back to life to everyone’s surprise, including hers, and he had resumed his duties of Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch.

The officers of the Night’s Watch murdered him. He was their Lord Commander, their sworn brother, and they killed him. They hadn’t agreed with his decisions, and Jon knew it from the beginning, but they were loyal members of the Night’s Watch, or so he thought. They had all given their lives to the Watch, made the same vows, and they murdered him. Because he did what was right. Jon had had no choice to execute them. He had only executed the men who stabbed him, and only them, not the ones who stayed behind while others killed him. This meant Ser Alliser Thorne, Othell Yarwyck, Bowen Marsh, Ser Meryn Trant, three other men… and Olly. Killing all of them had been difficult, even Ser Alliser. They were all his brothers, no matter what they did, but they betrayed the Watch, and the only possible punishment was death. Jon had to do it. Olly said nothing when he died. Nothing at all. Jon should hate Olly. He killed Ygritte, and he murdered him. But he couldn’t. He was only a boy, no older than Bran.

Jon had died. He had given his life to the Watch. His watch was ended. It would end at his death, and it had come. He was no longer a member of the Night’s Watch. He had stayed two weeks at Castleblack to bring back order, but after that he had left, leaving the Wall to Edd. Now here he was, in one of the many wildling camps on the Gift. They had come to save him. How ironic. The Free Folk who saved the Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch. Ygritte may have been proud of it. Sometimes he wished the Red Woman hadn’t brought him back to life. He could be with her now, and with his father and Robb. Though, when he died, he had seen nothing. Was it the end? Was death the end to everything? Was there nothing beyond it?

“What are you going to do now?” asked Tormund, eating a stag with appetite.
“I’m going south. I have a sister at Winterfell, and she’s in the hands of a mad man. My other sister and her husband have an army at Moat Cailin. I’m going to join them, and I’ll help them to free Arya.”

“What if the dead come while you’re away?”

Jon sighed. “Let’s hope the Boltons are all dead when they arrive. My bother-in-law is bringing thousands, maybe tens of thousand men. You’ll have more than enough to defend the Wall when he comes.”

Tormund nodded, not quite convinced. “I hope he’s not going to kill us all with his men.”

“I’ll speak with him. You’ll be left in peace as long as you stay in the Gift.”

His friend scoffed. “Don’t know why you all kneel because someone is someone’s son you knelt before. Don’t understand why you marry someone you don’t want to.”

“That’s how things are done south of the Wall,” said Jon, tired.

Tormund laughed. “Well, you do things quite strangely. You should simply take a woman when you want her, and if you can keep her, then you keep her. Like you did with Ygritte.”

“I never took Ygritte.”

He laughed again while chewing a piece of meat. “You did, boy, whether you like it or not. Or else you would never have fucked her. She wouldn’t have allowed you to do so.”

Jon didn’t argue. He didn’t want to talk about Ygritte. It only brought painful memories. He had to focus on saving Arya. His sister was being held at Winterfell. He should have gone to save her as soon as he was back, but he had to deal with the mutiny first. Now, he had nothing left linking him to the Night’s Watch. He was free to save his sister. Before he left, he was able to obtain more information about the situation in the North. Tyron Lannister had led a great army through he Neck, but for now they were kept south of Moat Cailin by a garrison of Northerners defending the fortress. Jon was angry at his father’s bannermen who stopped the Lannister army in the Neck. Sansa had been declared Lady of Winterfell and Wardeness of the North by King Tommen, the Boltons were stripped of all their rights, Roose Bolton had killed Robb, and despite this some houses were fighting for them against Sansa. She was their real lady, the daughter of Eddard Stark, the true Lady of Winterfell, and they fought against her for the men who murdered their king and Lady Stark. Jon was deceived by the North. He thought his father’s bannermen were better than that. The same thoughts he had about his sworn brothers.

He had first wanted to head directly to Winterfell to save Arya, but after thinking, it didn’t seem like the best option. The Boltons would kill him at first sight, and legitimate it by saying he broke his vows to the Night’s Watch. He would be called a deserter. He couldn’t save Arya on his own. His only chance was Sansa and Lord Tyron. The dwarf had been his friend back when he arrived at the Wall. He treated Sansa well. Surely Jon could trust him. Anyway, Jon was no threat for him. He was a bastard. A Snow. He was no danger for Sansa’s rights. If the Northerners sided with the Boltons, the Lannisters were Jon’s only chance to save Arya.

He still didn’t understand why Sansa didn’t warn him about Arya. He had gone through all the messages he received, and none of those Sansa sent to him referred to or mentioned Arya’s captivity. Sansa had to know if her husband brought an army in the North. Did she only forget? Jon would have to ask her when they would meet, but right now the priority was to save Arya. He would leave Tormund’s camp at the first light in the morning and head for Moat Cailin. The Lannisters would
need help in the North, and if they could help Jon to free Arya, he was willing to give them everything they wanted, even if that meant fighting the entire North. It was strange for Jon to think that he would help the Lannisters to take Winterfell after they killed his father and his brother, but he would rather see Sansa Lady of Winterfell with Lord Tyrion ruling the North at her side than to let Roose Bolton and his son hold his family’s home and rape his little sister. Jon gripped the bone he held between his hands. He would kill Ramsay for what he did, and he would avenge his brother and his father’s wife, and his Arya too. Finally, he only left the bone down on the ground.

“I’m going to sleep,” he simply said, and left the tent, Tormund still eating greedily his stag.

Jon walked through the wildling camp. It wasn’t an organized camp like the one Jeor Mormont had set at the Fist of the First Men, or like any army would build. Huts were everywhere, placed where everyone had wanted to put them, without any order or logic. If they were attacked, they wouldn’t stand a chance, just like against Stannis. Stannis had defeated them with no more than ten thousand men, and back then Mance had an army of a hundred thousand. Today the Free Folk were only a few thousands, and this was only one of their many camps. Since it was Tormund’s camp, they might be a thousand here, but no more. Any army from the south would defeat them if they attacked them now. Jon hoped this wouldn’t happen and that the northern lords would leave the wildlings alone.

On his way to the hut Tormund had offered him for the night, he saw Ser Davos Seaworth discussing with the Red Woman. They had both left Castleblack with him when he rode south. Jon still didn’t know what to make of it. The two of them said they had nowhere else to go. Jon wasn’t displeased with the presence of the Onion Knight. He was a good man, had been loyal to Stannis until his death, and convinced Melisandre to save him. He seemed to understand in some way what Jon was going through, as much as someone could understand it. On the other side, he wasn’t sure he liked the fact the Red Woman followed him. She had brought him back from the dead, and without blue eyes, but she said she would follow him wherever he went, calling him the prince that was promised, the same way she called Stannis before. At least she didn’t disrobe in his presence again, and she didn’t seem in the mood to do so. Jon wasn’t either.

Melisandre had completely changed since he was back. The fire burning in her eyes had faded, her assurance had disappeared, and she no longer tried to seduce him, something Jon was grateful. She only seemed to follow him because she saw nothing else to do. All her faith seemed to have disappeared. He arrived as Ser Davos asked her something with insistence.

“What happened down there? What happened to our king?”

“There was a battle. Stannis was defeated,” she answered without life.

“And Shireen? What happened to the princess?” She looked aside and Ser Davos noticed Jon’s arrival. “Lord Commander,” he said with a small bow of his head.

“I am no longer Lord Commander, Ser Davos,” he replied.

“Please forgive me, Jon Snow. Long habits are hard to break.”

“Ser Davos, you don’t have to follow me. I’m going to the Lannisters. I can’t assure you they won’t sentence you to die.”

“Well, that won’t be any different from my time with Stannis. I don’t look forward to meeting the Imp, Jon Snow, truth be told. We faced each other at the Battle of Blackwater, and I got almost killed. My son Matthos died because of his trick with the wildfire. He burned thousands of sailors and soldiers, good men, on this day.”
“He’s not the only one who burned people alive, Ser Davos,” said Melisandre. “All three of us here, we helped or served a king who burned people alive, and not for good reasons.”

Davos tightened his lips, looking furiously at Melisandre. “That’s in the past now, Ser Davos,” Jon intervened. “Lord Tyrion and you were both serving a king. He only did his duty, like you did yours.”

The knight sighed. “I know. Still… If he wants to help us to fight the dead, then I suppose we have no choice, because no one else will want to help us. I only hope you are right.”

“I’ll put a good word for you before him. My sister is his wife, so I may convince him to spare you. Anyway, Stannis is defeated, his armies scattered, there’s nothing left of his power. Dragonstone and Storm’s End both fell. But you can expect them to demand that you bend the knee to Tommen Baratheon.”

Ser Davos didn’t seem to enjoy the prospect, but he nodded all the same. Then he turned to the Red Woman. “We’ll talk about this later.”

The Onion Knight walked away and Jon found himself alone with Melisandre. He thought the air was a little warmer around her, though not much. That was nothing compared to before. Ygritte had been kissed by fire, but the red priestess was fire, and her hair was blood and flame.

“You shouldn’t come, my lady. You burned people alive. I’m afraid you won’t escape execution, no matter what I say for you.”

“I’m not afraid of death. The Lord is not yet done with me, or else I would already be dead.” She said it without fear, but also without the assurance and conviction she once had.

“Why follow me?”

“You are the prince that was promised.” She said it like it was an evidence.

“You once said it was Stannis.”

“I was wrong.” Her eyes dropped on the ground again.

“Don’t you think you could be wrong again?”

“The Lord of Light brought you back to life. I have no power. Everything I have comes from him. If you’re alive, if I could bring you back to life, it’s because he wanted you to come back. I don’t know why. Perhaps I’m wrong again. The Lord send me signs and I try to interpret them the best I can. I can misinterpret them, but I don’t see another explanation to your revival. Maybe he led me to Stannis only to have me realize that I was wrong about him, and because Stannis would lead me to you. I can’t know. The only thing I know is, he gave you to me. Maybe it was only to lead you to this Lord Tyrion so you could have the necessary help against the Great Other. In this case, my purpose is accomplished, and there would be no reason left for me to live. Maybe I have already lived far too long. If that must be my fate, then I’ll face it.”

Strange as it was, Jon thought she wasn’t much different from the good men in the Night’s Watch, living to defend a Realm that would never remember them, accepting to die when the hour would come, all that so hundreds of thousand people could be safe south of the Wall. Qhorin Halfhand had given his life for the Night’s Watch, without a single hesitation. He had accepted his fate, just like this woman was ready to do. Just like Grenn did when Jon sent him below the Wall to die. Even like Ser Alliser, right before Jon executed him. Jon didn’t doubt her words.
“We leave tomorrow at first light. You should get some rest,” he told her.

“I will.” She walked away and Jon found himself alone again. He went to his hut. He saw a girl with red hair on his way, reminding him of Ygritte again, which only made him regret even more the fact he was alive while she was dead. He didn’t sleep much tonight. He could never sleep long since he came back.

Not long before dawn, a wildling boy no more than twelve came to tell him Tormund wanted to see him. Jon went to Tormund’s hut to find someone he didn’t expect.

“Edd!”

“Glad to see you, Jon.” He didn’t smile. He had a scroll in his hands. “We received this a few days ago. The man said it was for the Lord Commander, but I’m quite sure it was for you.”

Tormund was next to Edd, a grim look on his face. Jon took the scroll Edd was handing him. It was a long one, sealed with pink wax in the shape of the flayed man. The sigil of House Bolton.

“Did you read it?” he asked to Edd.

“No. But I don’t think there’s anything good in it.”

Jon removed the wax and unrolled the parchment, beginning to read aloud.

To the traitor and bastard Jon Snow.

You allowed thousands of wildlings past the Wall. You have betrayed your own kind. You have betrayed the North. Winterfell is mine, bastard. Come and see.

Your brother Rickon is in my dungeon. His direwolf’s skin is on my floor. Your sister Arya is in my bed. She is sweet. Very sweet. Especially when she cries and screams. She does it every night when I visit her. I have great plans for her parts once she has given me a son. Come and see.

Come and see, bastard, and I will not trouble you or your wildling lovers. Bring me your other sister. I hear she’s far prettier than the young one. Bring her to me along with the Imp’s head. Keep them from me and I will ride north and slaughter every wildling man, woman and babe living under your protection. You will watch as I skin them living. You will watch as my soldiers take turns raping your sisters. You will watch as my dogs devour your wild little brother. Then I will spoon your eyes from their sockets and let my dogs do the rest. Come and see.

Ramsay Bolton, Lord of Winterfell and King in the North.

Jon stopped a few times as he read the message aloud. Tormund and Edd were looking at him gravely. Rickon was at Winterfell, just like Arya. I have great plans for her parts once she has given me a son. Come and see. Jon crumpled the letter within his hand. It was the right one, the one that was burned when he saved Mormont, and despite the pain he kept crumpling it.

“Is that possible?” asked Edd. “I thought your brothers were dead.”

“It is possible. Sam met my brother Bran when he came back from the north of the Wall,” Jon replied.

Nothing was said for a very long time. Tormund’s face was grave, and Edd’s was too. Jon could barely control his breathing.

A few minutes later, Davos Seaworth and Melisandre were with them in Tormund’s hut, aware of the letter they just received. The knight was horrified. The Red Woman didn’t show much reaction, but had her eyes cast down.

“This is a lie,” said Ser Davos. “Rickon Stark is dead. He was burned by the Ironmen when they took Winterfell.”

“He wasn’t.” Jon explained them what Sam told him. “I learnt it last year. Rickon may be still alive as well.”

“It could still be a lie,” said Melisandre. “A way to attract you to Winterfell alone, so he could kill you. That’s not something we can allow.”

“The Red Woman is right. It could be a trap,” conceded Davos.

Jon nodded. They couldn’t know if Rickon was alive or not. He looked at Melisandre. “Do you think you could find him, in your visions?” he asked.

“I could ask the Lord of Light, but many of his visions are unclear, and there would be no way for me to know if these visions are happening right now, or in the past or the future. And I don’t even know how your brother looks like. I never saw him. I can’t even guarantee the Lord will give me a vision.”

Her answer denied them any way they could have to know if Rickon was really at Winterfell. Jon took another look at the letter. “Lord of Winterfell and King in the North.”

“We received ravens after you left. Roose Bolton is dead. Apparently, he was poisoned. We don’t know who did it. Ramsay proclaimed himself King in the North,” Edd informed them.

“How many men does that shit have in his army,” Tormund asked.

“I would say a few thousands,” said Davos. “Though I don’t know for sure. But if he defeated Stannis, he surely doesn’t have a small army.”

“How many men do you have, Tormund?” Jon asked.

“That can march and fight? Two thousand. The rest are children and old people.”

Tormund’s answer didn’t reassure. Jon read a part of the letter again. Your brother Rickon is in my dungeon. His direwolf’s skin is on my floor. Your sister Arya is in my bed. She is sweet. Very sweet. Especially when she cries and screams. She does it every night when I visit her. I have great plans for her parts once she has given me a son. Come and see. Come and see.

“Ramsay wants me to come to Winterfell,” Jon began. He folded the letter the bastard wrote and put into his doublet. “Very well. I will go to Winterfell, but not alone. Tormund, assemble the elders. I need to talk with them.”

Tormund nodded and went away. Davos looked uncomfortable. “Jon Snow, if you allow me, Stannis was the best military commander in the Seven Kingdoms, and he was defeated with five times the number of soldiers the wildlings have. Even if they accept to follow you, you won’t take Winterfell.”

“I said I wouldn’t go alone to Winterfell. I never said I would only go there with the Free Folk. Edd,
what are the last news concerning Moat Cailin?"

“Not good. The Lannisters and their allies are still stuck south of it,” Jon’s friend answered.

Jon sighed. “We can’t wait for them. They may need months to get through it.”

“Without the Lannisters, we won’t take Winterfell,” stated Davos.

“You’re wrong. The Lannisters are not the only ones to hate the Boltons. And the Boltons are not the only people in the North. Many houses have lost kin at the Twins. They want to avenge them as much as I want, and some are still loyal to my family. The Manderlys, the Karstarks, the Glovers, the Cerwyns, the Hornwoods, the Blackwoods, the Lockes, the Ryswells, the Tallharts, the Umbers, the northern clans… I’m not going alone. I’m going with an army. With the North.”

He wouldn’t abandon Rickon and Arya. He wouldn’t abandon his family. He was a Stark. He remembered his father’s words. The last time they ever spoke. You are a Stark. You might not have my name, but you have my blood.

Chapter End Notes

Please review.

Next chapter: Kevan

Happy Christmas again.
“I still believe this is a mistake to allow Cersei back in the capital. She will only cause trouble.”

The queen was wearing a black gown, just like Kevan wore a black doublet. Everyone wore the black today. Joffrey may not have been loved, but few hated his sister. Kevan didn’t have the chance to know her very much, but he knew she had always been a kind and lovely girl. The news of her death had arrived from Dorne two months ago, a day or two after Nymeria Sand sent another raven to ask news about the princess. The king had taken it very bad. He hadn’t been angry, but he had cried. He almost always cried since they told him, and he needed all the attention of the queen to keep eating and doing something of his days. The only good side in this was that Tommen was so deeply thrust into his grief that he never thought a single time to declare war upon Dorne.

“Our Grace, her daughter died. I believe she has the right to be there for the funeral. She will go as soon as Princess Myrcella’s body will be buried. Cersei has no more power here. She won’t be able to cause any trouble,” explained Kevan.

“Still, she could try to put ideas in Tommen’s head. We cannot allow her anywhere near him.”

“That’s impossible. They will be together for the exposure of the body, and anyway Tommen will certainly want to see his mother while she’s here, and it would be cruel to deprive Cersei of the right to see her son for what short time she will be here.”

“You’re making a terrible mistake, Ser Kevan. Cersei is vengeful. She will want to start a war against Dorne, and she will do everything to cause it and to persuade Tommen to start it.”

“I agree, but not when someone else is present. She would only try this in private, but she won’t be allowed alone with Tommen in any circumstance. We will make sure she has no access to his apartments and that one of us is always there when she wants to see her son. Her guards have been given the instructions to not let her see or speak to Tommen if we’re not present. This way Tommen will be safe from Cersei’s influence.”

That seemed to calm the queen. “Very well. I will go to Tommen. I fear the king will need me only to make it to the Great Sept.”

She began to walk away, but Kevan stopped her. “Your Grace, you’ll have to be there for Tommen. He will need to be strong this time. You’re needed at his side more than ever, and not only to keep Cersei away from him.”

“I know.” She left, her last glance being one of understanding. Kevan had no illusion about the true
feelings of the queen for the king. He knew that Tommen loved Margaery Tyrell much more than Margaery Tyrell loved Tommen, but Kevan was sure that the queen had no hatred for the king. Who could hate Tommen? He was such a sweet boy.

Kevan went to look outside the city. These were dark days for House Lannister and the Seven Kingdoms. The Princess Myrcella Baratheon, heir to the Iron Throne, was dead, killed by some servant in the Water Gardens who poisoned her wine. Many people hated the Lannisters and the Baratheons in Dorne. Prince Doran had immediately sent a large retinue to bring the body of the princess back to King’s Landing for her last journey. He sent a long letter in which he apologized in deep terms for the princess’ death, and with the head of the assassin as well.

Kevan found it all suspicious, and he wasn’t the only one. Jaime had come to the conclusion immediately that the Martells murdered Myrcella, and while Kevan hadn’t spoken with Cersei yet since her arrival yesterday, he was quite sure the Queen Mother would think the same. The worse was they might not be wrong.

Doran Martell swore he never received any raven asking news of Myrcella. Kevan found it very strange that four ravens never reached Sunspear. He had inspected the rookery himself, to find that five ravens bound for Sunspear (including the fifth that was sent right before they received the news of Myrcella’s death) were missing. The ravens really flew. Could it be possible they flew without message? The five of them? Kevan highly doubted it. And if they had, then surely Doran Martell would say they received the ravens, but without any scroll attached to them.

Kevan had a hard time to imagine that Doran Martell had commanded the death of Myrcella. The Prince of Dorne was a very cautious man. He knew that killing the princess would start a war between his people and the Crown. Thinking about it, Kevan didn’t think the Lord of Sunspear was behind this. Maybe someone else was, and he may have tried to hide it. There was no way to tell for how long Myrcella had been dead. Her body had travelled for two months. Pycelle said she could have died anytime between one or five months ago, and the other maester who helped him agreed with the diagnostic. They had no proof that Doran Martell hid Myrcella’s murder in any way. Varys said his little birds in Dorne didn’t report him anything suspicious. Furthermore, Prince Doran told the truth when he said Myrcella was poisoned. Pycelle had identified the poison that killed her to be the Long Farewell, a very rare poison from Asshai that killed slowly. That wasn’t a poison that a simple servant could buy. He received help from someone who had the means to get it.

If the assassin was still alive, they could have interrogated him, but he was dead. How convenient. As if that wasn’t enough, Myrcella’s betrothed, Prince Trystane, wasn’t here. He hadn’t come to King’s Landing, remaining at Sunspear. Doran Martell said his son was too heartbroken to come, and the gout stopped his father from travelling as well.

Overall, satisfying explanations had been given for everything, except for the lost ravens, and if the explanations were satisfying, there were still some doubtful details about the murder. Prince Trystane’s absence to the funerals, Myrcella’s death in strange circumstances, the execution of the so-called assassin, since they couldn’t be sure he was the assassin, the poison that was used… the context of Myrcella’s death and the behaviour of the Martells were unsettling. What would you have done in my stead, Tywin? They couldn’t risk a war against Dorne. Not now. The Realm barely went out of war, winter was closing on them, and most of the Lannister forces were engaged in the Neck, with what was left of the might of the Riverlands. The Tyrells alone wouldn’t be able to invade Dorne when they had to take care of the Iron Islands, and they couldn’t rely on the Vale of Arryn. That was no easy decision, but they couldn’t deal with House Martell. Not now.

Kevan left his rooms and travelled through the Red Keep. A litter was waiting for him outside. It was a sunny day of autumn. Temperature was decreasing, but it was still warm enough. He thought about
Dorna and their daughter Janei at Casterly Rock, and about Lancel at Quite Isle. Was the sun up where they were? Or was it raining? Was the weather colder than here in the capital? In the streets, everything went as it always went. Myrcella might not have been hated by the people of King’s Landing, but she wasn’t much known all the same. Unlike Queen Margaery, she never visited markets with her cousins and handmaidsen, she never went to orphanages, and she never gave money to people in the streets. She was a sweet girl, but surely the people thought sweet girls died all day. Furthermore, Myrcella was in some way the physical image of her mother, who now was known as the Whore Queen among the people. Again, no one had any love for the Lannisters. If Margaery Tyrell was the one who died, half the city would be lamenting her loss, but not for Myrcella. Kevan thought with sadness that his grandniece deserved better.

In a square, a Sparrow was haranguing the people. “The gods have made their will known. The Warrior punishes those who believe themselves beyond the reach of justice. He punished the Whore Queen for her depravity and her incest, by taking away the horror of this incest. Justice is coming for us all. We cannot sin without facing the justice of the gods. Sooner or later, we must face the punishment they reserve to those who believe they are above them. Justice is coming for nonbelievers and sinners. Repent yourselves before it’s too late.”

The voice disappeared as they headed towards the Great Sept. The Sparrows were still a problem. Their support was dwindling now with the election of the new High Septon, but they still had support, and more than enough to cause trouble. The caritative works of the queen, Randyll Tarly’s recent arrival and the new High Septon were giving results, but they would need more time to neutralize the threat of the Sparrows for good. Kevan saw some men with the arms of Horn Hill walking in the opposite direction to his own. Their lord had brought five hundred of them with him. They reinforced the City Watch and didn’t need to be paid, like Kevan’s father-in-law loved to repeat over and over again.

The litter lowered before the steps of the Great Sept of Baelor. Kevan left it and stood before the steps. Three years ago, Eddard Stark was executed in this very place, starting a chain of events that changed all of Westeros, and how much it had changed since that day where Joffrey ordered Robert’s friend to be beheaded. Kevan hadn’t been present, but he knew who had been there. Joffrey, who commanded the execution, was now dead, poisoned during his wedding night. Pycelle and Varys now served their fourth king. Baelish had gone to the Eyrie to marry the sister-in-law of the man who died on this day, and who he helped to arrest. As for Cersei, she was humiliated and disgraced by the young girl who fainted when she saw her father killed.

Kevan thought about the Lady Sansa. He remembered what he saw one day at Tyrion’s trial, when he witnessed his nephew and his wife discussing. Back then, he had the impression to see ghosts of the past. He had the impression to see Tywin and Joanna alive again. Kevan couldn’t deny he had a deep respect for the Stark girl. In desperate circumstances, she had managed to prove the innocence of her husband, in a city full of liars, before hundreds of people who saw her like the daughter of a traitor. From the king’s betrothed, she had become a hostage to the Crown, then had been forced to marry a man whose family was in war against hers, and managed to become one of the most powerful women in the Seven Kingdoms.

Kevan remembered Joanna, Tywin’s wife. She had been a lady in waiting for Queen Rhaella Targaryen, even before she was queen. No many people knew the whole story, but Kevan was one of the few to know it. Joanna had come to King’s Landing when she was very young, and soon became friends with the future queen and the Lady of Sunspear, Prince Doran’s mother. There she also met the future king, Aerys Targaryen, the Second of His Name, later known as the Mad King. At the time though, madness hadn’t taken hold on him, and he was a young and comely man with good manners, very charming. Aerys had noticed Joanna very early, and the young Lannister woman had almost fallen in love with him immediately. There had been gossips that she had given
her maidenhead to the prince at the time. For most of the people, these were only rumors, and many, including Pycelle and Tywin, energetically denied them. However, it didn’t change the truth. The rumors were more than rumors. Joanna had been Aerys’s lover.

The affair had lasted for almost two years. Joanna had hoped that she would marry Aerys for some time. She was young and dreamed like little girls dreamed, but as she grew older, she realized it could never happen and that the prince would marry his own sister, Joanna’s very friend Rhaella. Hence, a short time after Aerys was crowned, Joanna ended their relationship, and when Tywin asked for her hand, she accepted. They married in a lavish ceremony a year after Aerys ascended the Iron Throne, but the ceremony was ruined by the comments the drunk Mad King made about the bride.

Kevan didn’t know if Tywin had known of the affair between Aerys and Joanna. He never talked of this with his brother. Kevan feared it might destroy Tywin if he ignored this, and it would make no difference to speak of it if Tywin already knew about it. Maybe Tywin closed his eyes on it and denied the truth before everyone to protect Joanna’s honor. Tywin loved Joanna so much, and Joanna had loved Tywin as well. She gave him three children. Kevan feared that Tywin just didn’t want to know the truth, just like he ignored all signs concerning the infatuation between his two golden children. Anyway, it hadn’t mattered so much. Aerys kept following Joanna even after she married Tywin, and in the end, she was dismissed by the queen and sent away from court. Her marriage with Tywin was a success that ended the day she died. Tywin was never the same afterwards.

When he thought about the wife of his nephew, Kevan could see many similarities between them. Joanna had been the lover of the future king, and of the king for a certain time. Lady Sansa had been betrothed to the future king, then to the king. Both these kings ended mad. Joanna was humiliated by Aerys, and the Lady Sansa was humiliated by Joffrey. Both these kings were assassinated, and the two young women married the man who would become later the Lord of Casterly Rock. They both left King’s Landing married to a Lannister, but they were also changed by King’s Landing. Both were innocent young girls in love when they arrived, but left as strong and powerful women. And both fell in love with the man they married. Genna had written to Kevan to tell her about what happened at the Rock while the Lady Sansa was there. The girl who witnessed the execution of her father on these steps had come a long way, and now she was pregnant and leading an army in the North with Kevan’s nephew. He hoped her fate wouldn’t be the same than a mother-in-law she never knew, and Kevan hoped Tyrion wouldn’t lose his wife like his father lost Joanna when his second son was born. Tyrion didn’t deserve it. Kevan himself didn’t know what he would do if Dorna was to die. What would happen to Tyrion if his wife was to die?

The head heavy with these thoughts, he climbed the steps to pay his last respects to the princess. They were all already there. Tommen stood next to his sister, his face empty, looking at her dead body. His queen was next to him, holding his hand, a mourning expression on her face. Her brother Ser Loras wasn’t far away, but in retreat. Cersei stood next to her daughter, on the opposite side from the one Tommen and his wife were, with her brother by her side. Princess Myrcella lied there on the stone, her eyes covered by stones on which eyes were painted, her golden hair shining like her gown. She had grown since Kevan last saw her, and he could see many similarities with her mother, dressed like she was in her golden gown.

Kevan looked at his niece. He had allowed Cersei to come back for the funerals, but she would leave in two days as soon as it was over and Myrcella’s body was buried under the Red Keep. He knew this could be dangerous, but he wouldn’t keep a mother away when her daughter just died. Cersei was devastated, and it wasn’t hard for anyone to see it. She couldn’t support the death of her daughter anymore than she could support the death of her son. Jaime was a little better than her, but not much. He had never been close to Cersei’s children… but they were his children all the same.
Kevan took place in front of Myrcella’s feet. Queen Margaery held Tommen’s hand. Of all the people standing around the body, she was the one who was the less affected, but she showed sympathy if not sadness. Kevan supposed he couldn’t expect her to weep for Myrcella. They never knew each other.

“She grew up.” Tommen’s voice echoed on the walls, the floor and the roof. His voice was weak, but with the total silence it echoed all the same.

“I wish I had known her,” softly said Margaery.

“Of course, you do.” Cersei’s voice was low but full of scorn. “You wish you had known her so you could use her.”

Jaime closed the distance between him and Cersei and took her arm with his hand, but she threw it away. Cersei got closer to her daughter’s body, tears running on her cheeks. She passed her hand through her daughter’s hair, letting it slip between her fingers. “I will avenge you, my baby. Those who killed you will pay.”

Jaime approached her and put his left hand on her shoulder. “The man who killed her is dead. He already paid,” he tried to say on an appeasing tone.

“We all know who did this. It’s these snakes. The Martells!” She shouted the last two words.

Kevan heard footsteps behind him. The new High Septon, Sorold, came to him. He had been elected last week during a vote that had been disturbed by an attempt of the Sparrows to burst into the Great Sept while the members of the Most Devout voted to choose the new High Septon. However, Randyll Tarly had already arrived back then and stationed dozens of his men to protect the election. Only ten of them protected the entrance to the sept, the others were hiding, so about thirty Sparrows had come with clubs to disturb the election. When the Captain of Lord Tarly’s guard ordered them to disband, they refused and tried to force their way in. The other guards had left their hideouts and slaughtered the Sparrows. None escaped. They only had cubs and no armor, while Lord Randyll’s men were heavily armed with swords, helmets and breastplates. Lord Tarly only lost one man in that skirmish, and ever since the Sparrows were quiet.

“My Lord Hand,” said the High Septon as he bowed. He had been named thanks to the support of the queen. Sorold came from Appleton in the Reach, and he was never far away when the queen visited an orphanage, a poorhouse, or when she distributed food to the people. He was almost as popular as the queen herself.

“Your Holiness,” Kevan replied respectfully.

“May I have a word?”

“This is hardly the best time, your Holiness.”

Cersei was beginning an argument in the presence of her daughter’s body. The queen was trying to calm her down. “Your Grace, this is hardly the time or the place for it.”

“What do you know of this? She’s not your family. You shouldn’t even be there!” Kevan’s niece yelled.

Sorold spoke at low voice very quickly. He was probably eager to leave this place before the argument went farther. “My lord, Septon Ollidor was found by the Sparrows in a brothel and forced to make a walk of shame. I sent for Lord Tarly’s men, but I thought you’d want to know.”
Septon Ollidor was a member of the Most Devout. This was no good. However, Kevan’s attention was brought elsewhere by the argument developing between the queen and her mother-in-law.

“Your Grace, I am married to the king. I feel his loss as if it was my own. I feel the death of Myrcella as if my own sister was dead…” tried to say Margaery Tyrell.

“Don’t ever dare to say that Myrcella was your sister.” Cersei’s voice remained venomous. Jaime didn’t seem to know what to do.

“My lord,” hissed the High Septon.

“Thank you, your High Holiness,” replied Kevan. He would talk about the matter with the High Septon later.

His Holiness didn’t ask twice to leave. Cersei had entered an uncontrollable rage. “They killed my daughter. The Martells have always loathed us. They killed her. I WANT THEM ALL DEAD!”

Her outcry reverberated all over the Great Sept. Tears were still visible on the Queen Mother’s cheeks, but sadness had given way to fury. To everyone’s surprise, Tommen was the first one to reply to his mother’s yelling.

“Mother, I want you to leave.”

The words weighed heavily in the sept. Cersei looked at her son now, anger gone. Tommen kept looking at his sister’s face, not daring to face his mother.

“What did you say?” Cersei looked stunned.

“I wish to mourn my sister in peace. I want you to leave. I order you to leave.”

Cersei remained there, looking desperately at her son who didn’t look back. Finally, Kevan decided to intervene. “The king spoke. Cersei, please leave.”

Cersei looked at him, anger plain on her face. Jaime encouraged her to leave with his arm and accompanied her to the exit. He didn’t come back. Kevan was all alone with the king, the queen and her brother.

“I’m sorry, my love,” said Margaery to Tommen. The king kept staring at his sister and Margaery looked at Ser Kevan. He nodded in her direction. In the previous days, they had both made Tommen understand that no one could behave improperly in the presence of Myrcella’s body, making him understand that even if he or she was a member of his family, the person couldn’t be allowed near Myrcella if it wasn’t to mourn her in silence.

Again, they remained silent. Ser Loras looked uncomfortable, and somewhat he seemed to wish he was somewhere else, but at least he tried to hide it. Kevan could at least appreciate the effort for Tommen.

“You don’t have a sister?” asked Tommen to his wife.

“No. I wish I had one.” The regret in her voice seemed sincere.

“One day, one of my cats got lost in the gardens. I couldn’t find him. Myrcella came to help me. She hid from Mother and skipped her embroidery lessons to help me search him. When we found him, it was almost dark. She was always so kind with me.”

“She loved you very much.”
“Yes, she did. Unlike Joffrey. We didn’t ask for his help. He would have refused, or said we were stupid and foolish. And if he had accepted, he might have done the same that he did to the cat with kittens. He killed her and opened her belly to see the kittens inside.”

Kevan closed his eyes at the mention of this story. Cersei had spoiled Joffrey and ruined him, turning him into a second Mad King. Tywin’s golden daughter had grown into a vain, foolish, greedy woman, and she made her eldest son no better. It was a good thing that Lady Sansa exposed her crimes at the trial. If Tyrion had been sentenced to death, she would have become Lady of Casterly Rock. Left to rule House Lannister, she would have ruined Tommen as she had Joffrey, and would probably have ruined House Lannister as well.

Kevan remained with his grandniece for two hours, but he had to leave after that. He couldn’t leave the Crown to itself when it needed a firm hand more than ever. He left the Great Sept of Baelor alone, the queen and Tommen staying behind. Ser Loras had already left.

Back in the Tower of the Hand, Kevan read reports on the Iron Islands. The Ironborn had lost all their positions in the North, and now Balon Greyjoy was dead, having fallen from a bridge. He left no son. The last, Theon Greyjoy, had died when the Northerners took back Winterfell. He only had a daughter, Yara Greyjoy, but his brother had come back recently from exile. This gave chills to Kevan. Euron Greyjoy had been the mind behind the attack on Lannisport the last time the Iron Islands rebelled. If he was back… Kevan hoped Balon’s daughter would fight for her birthright, but she was a woman, and never a woman had been named Queen of the Iron Islands. The Redwyne fleet was close to the Arbor. They could start the invasion on the Iron Islands soon, before the Greyjoys could organize their forces, and hopefully before they solved their internal quarrels.

His squire came in. “My lord, Ser Jaime wishes to speak with you.”

“Let him in,” Kevan said. His nephew entered, but did not sit. “I’m sorry for your loss, Jaime.”

Jaime looked at him. “You know the Martells killed her.”

Kevan tightened his lips. “We cannot know for sure. Varys says his little birds have found nothing in Dorne in that sense.”

“Come on, Kevan. I know Cersei jumps quickly to conclusions, but this time she’s right. Myrcella was murdered, and you can’t pretend this isn’t strange we received no news of her despite all the ravens we sent.”

“Varys is telling us Myrcella died not long before Prince Doran informed us.”

“Do you really trust Varys?”

“Do you know someone better to inform us on this kind of things?” Jaime had no answer. “Then for now, we have no proof that the Martells are behind this. I haven’t forgotten the strange circumstances of her death, and I will inquire on this. I will inform you as I receive updates. But for now, I have more pressing matters to attend.”

“Wouldn’t you say that the murder of your own blood is a pressing matter? What could matter more?”

Kevan raised from his chair. “I have a king, and seven kingdoms to look after. The Boltons are in rebellion, so are the Greyjoys. The Riverlands were only pacified recently, most of our forces are in the North, and what’s left is required to invade the Iron Islands. Winter is at our door, and we are unprepared for it. What do you want me to do? Declare war upon Dorne? Without proof that they
killed Myrcella? Uncertain that they did it? While House Lannister has no men to spare for this war? Aegon Targaryen couldn’t conquer Dorne with his dragons, and his successors all failed. Daeron the First lost his life in it. They needed a marriage to bring Dorne into the fold. You want me to start a campaign on the brink of winter that we couldn’t win?”

Jaime looked straight into his uncle’s eyes. “Myrcella was murdered. Father started a war when Tyrion was arrested.”

“Yes, but we knew for sure who arrested him. We don’t know for sure who killed Myrcella. We will find out about this, and then we will act, but not before. I will not start a war we are unlikely to win without solid proof. Doran Martell is a cautious man. He will not start a war on his own. Better for us to use this time to deal with our other enemies. For the time being, I will send Nymeria Sand back to Sunspear. She is under guard in her rooms and leaves tomorrow. Our alliance included a seat for House Martell on the small council, but since Myrcella is dead, then it doesn’t hold anymore. The Martells will have to prove their loyalty if they ever want one of their own back on the small council.”

The squire came back into the room again. “My lord, my lord, I am sorry to intrude, but there is a boy below. Grand Maester Pycelle begs the Lord Hand to see him at once. It’s about Lord Tyrion.”

Kevan turned to Jaime. “Go and perform your duty, Lord Commander. I must perform mine.”

He left to see Pycelle. Hopefully, these were news that Tyrion had breached Moat Cailin and was now really marching on Winterfell. Kevan would rather not have another type of news.

Chapter End Notes

Exceptionally, I will publish three chapters this week, including one on New Year's Day. These will be the last I upload until February. I need to take a pause from "A Shadow and a Wolf" to refresh my ideas and keep it going on well. I also want to start writing a novel in the meantime.

Don't worry, I will be back as soon as February comes with two chapters each week as usual. I just need a rest. I won't make you wait as long as the showrunners do for Season 7. I will keep updating "A Rose and a Lion" during January.

Please review

Next chapter: someone we haven't seen as a POV for a very very long time
Jaime IV

Chapter Notes

Jaime Lannister is back as a POV after a very very long absence.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

JAIME IV

Jaime stood alone in the Tower of the Hand. Kevan had left to see Pycelle, and he just plainly refused to declare war against Dorne. Myrcella just died, assassinated by the Dornish, and all Kevan found to say was that they had no proof. The Iron Islands could wait. They never posed a threat during the whole war. Anyway, they didn’t need the fleets of Lannisport and the Arbor to take Dorne. All they needed was a powerful army on the land, and the Tyrells could provide one. Also, they could call Tyrion back.

Tyrion’s army was still stuck on the Kingsroad in the Neck. He couldn’t stay there forever with winter coming. Jaime thought that Tyrion was stupid to invade the North at this time of the year. Stannis himself was defeated in the North. Even with his big mind and the Blackfish, Jaime doubted Tyrion could take back Winterfell, or at least take it back with reasonable losses.

Tyrion would be better to come back before winter and to wait for spring to launch a full-scale invasion on the North. Then he would succeed. The North would be weakened and tired enough of the Boltons. They would welcome Tyrion and Sansa with open arms, especially if they came with their child.

Jaime couldn’t believe that his little brother would be a father very soon. He was still surprised that Sansa Stark allowed him to share her bed. Catelyn Stark’s daughter really seemed to love Tyrion. Jaime still wondered how his brother managed to make two women fall in love with him. Soon Jaime would have a nephew. A real nephew. That is, if it was a boy.

He should have followed Kevan to see Pycelle. There he could have tried to convince them to call Tyrion back with his army so they could invade Dorne and avenge Myrcella. Tyrion had always been fond of Myrcella and Tommen, much more than Jaime had ever been. Cersei never allowed him to take an important place in the lives of their children, and truth be told Jaime never asked for it. What he always wanted was to be with the woman he loved and to serve the king. Tyrion had occupied a bigger place in Tommen’s and Myrcella’s lives than Jaime, and perhaps even Cersei. Their sister always focused entirely on Joffrey and didn’t really take care of their other children. During the breakfasts, Tyrion was the one to always make his younger nephew and his niece laugh and smile, while Cersei always disapproved what he did or centered all her attention on Joffrey. Tyrion would come back for Myrcella, Jaime was sure of that. Though…

I don’t care anymore what will happen to House Lannister in the future. I am done with my loyalty to a family that never showed me any. My loyalty is to you now. And to my wife. I swore to protect her when I put that cloak on her shoulders, and she showed more loyalty to me than the average Lannister. These were words Tyrion used one day, during his trial. Of course, things had changed since. He was cleared of his charges, became Lord of Casterly Rock, and with the distance
separating him from Cersei, Tyrion was again in good terms with their family. Still, he said these things, and Tyrion led an army a few months ago in the North to save his wife’s sister and give her back her home. Jaime was afraid. Who would Tyrion place first? His family or his wife? If he were to choose between Cersei and House Lannister, what would Jaime choose? And if he were to choose between Tyrion and Cersei? He didn’t know. The last letter Tyrion wrote to him talked about his wife for almost half the space. Now she was pregnant. Jaime was afraid that Tyrion may choose his wife over the family. No, certainly not. He said it at a moment where he was close to being executed for a false crime. Jaime left everything behind when Tyrion was in danger. Tyrion would be ready to do the same for him, but he wouldn’t act foolishly like Jaime did. They needed Tyrion’s mind to defeat the Martells.

They had to call back Tyrion from the Neck. That’s what they had to do. He would talk about this with Kevan tomorrow. For now, he needed rest. After he saw Cersei. Jaime left the Tower of the Hand, keeping his golden hand at his belt. It wouldn’t do to scratch it on the walls or anything. He walked in the silent corridors of the Red Keep. People mourned Myrcella, and unlike when Joffrey died, their mourning looked sincere enough. Jaime hoped this would make Cersei feel better to see that people cared about her daughter’s death.

He arrived before Cersei’s chambers. Two guards stood before, but they let him go in without question. Cersei may not be free of her movements, but people were free to see her, and Jaime made sure he spent as much time he could with his sister. Her chambers were comfortable, though maybe not as much as those she had before, but Cersei didn’t complain about it. She complained about nothing but Myrcella’s death. She sat in a chair, her face hollow, grief making her more beautiful than ever. She said nothing when Jaime entered. She didn’t seem to realize he was there.

“I couldn’t talk Kevan into it. We were interrupted. I’ll see him again tomorrow,” he said awkwardly. Cersei didn’t react, so after a moment Jaime came to the hard part. “I think we should call back Tyrion.” This time she looked at him. “He has most of our forces. If we tell him what the Martells did to Myrcella, he will fight for her. Tyrion cared for her…”

“Cared for her?” Her voice was trembling, but furious. “He sent her to Dorne!”

“He couldn’t know she was going to get killed…”

“Then he’s stupid! The Martells have always hated us, blamed us for the death of Elia Martell and her children. Any fool would know that Myrcella was going to be killed. He’s responsible.”

“No, he’s not. I am responsible. I knew she was in danger. I should have gone to Dorne and brought her back. She was my daughter and I failed her.”

Jaime said these words, and he believed them. They received a warning, and he did nothing. He let Kevan do nothing, and Myrcella was killed because of him. He didn’t try to save her, and she was killed because Elia Martell and her children were butchered long ago. Nothing would have happened if he had protected them this day.

Fury remained on her face for some time, but faded away. His sister seemed tired of being angry. It was easier for Jaime to feel angry since he hadn’t been close to Myrcella like her mother. Grief wasn’t strong enough to drown his anger.

“Do you remember the first time you saw a dead body?” Cersei asked after a moment.

Yes, Jaime remembered it damn well. “Mother.” He remembered seeing her body after Tyrion was born, though he couldn’t remember precisely how she looked like, alive or dead. He was only four when she died.
“All I could think about when she died was what would happen to her now. Every day, every night, what does Mama look like now? Has she started to bloat? Has her skin turned black? Have her lips peeled back from her teeth? I think about locking Myrcella in a crypt. I think about her beautiful little face starting to collapse.”

Jaime approached her and came on his knees before her. “Shh, Shh. Don’t think about it.”

“I have to. I have to. It’s not right she has to suffer alone.”

“She’s not suffering. She’s gone. No one can hurt her anymore.” He didn’t like to see Cersei like this. She was always strong.

“She was good.” A tear came rolling down on her left cheek. “From her first breath, she was so sweet. I don’t know where she came from. She was nothing like me. No meanness, no jealousy, just good.”

“I know.” Jaime cast his eyes on the floor. Joffrey had been horrible, but Myrcella was everything Joffrey hadn’t been.

“I thought if I could make something so good, so pure… maybe I’m not a monster.”

“Listen. Listen to me. She was my daughter and I failed her.”

“No, I knew this would happen. The witch told me years ago.” What was Cersei talking about? “She promised me three children and she promised me they’d die. And gold their shrouds. Everything she said came true. You couldn’t have stopped it. It’s prophecy. It’s fate.”

That wasn’t the Cersei he knew. Myrcella’s death affected much more deeply than Joffrey’s. “You don’t believe that.”

“Of course I do.” She looked at him. “It’s like what Kevan told me the day before the trial. He told me to beware of Sansa Stark. I didn’t listen to him and everything came true.”

“Fuck prophecy. Fuck fate.” Jaime didn’t want to hear about it anymore. He didn’t want to see his sister like that. “Fuck everyone who isn’t us. We’re the only ones who matter, the only ones in this world. And everything they’ve taken from us, we’re going to take back and more. We’re going to take everything there is.”

He wrapped his arms around his sister’s shoulders and let her cry silently for their daughter. The sun was setting on the horizon. A few hours later, Jaime was sleeping in his rooms, alone. He couldn’t stay with Cersei for the night, not with the guards at her door, and anyway she probably didn’t want of him right now. He wasn’t sure he wanted her either, not since she had tried to kill Tyrion. Still, he loved her. He didn’t choose who he loved.

In some way, Jaime envied Tyrion. Unlike him, his little brother hadn’t loved a single woman through his life. First there had been Tysha, then the whore Shae, and now Sansa Stark. When a woman left Tyrion’s life, he found another one. Jaime didn’t think he could find another one if Cersei died. They had come into the world together, and they would probably leave it together. Jaime didn’t know what he would do if Cersei was to die while he lived. Serve as a dignified bodyguard, probably. Protect his son. Jaime thought about Tommen. He didn’t feel indifferent towards Tommen like he had for Joffrey, but he hadn’t really seen him like his son either. He had never tried to know him better. What did he really know of Tommen, or Myrcella, or Joffrey? He knew nothing. They were his children, and he almost knew nothing of them.

He was standing in the Great Sept of Baelor, standing vigil for Myrcella. He stared at the daughter he
never knew. It was the first time he was alone with her, and it would also be the last. He wanted to
tell her something, but nothing could come out of his mouth. So he just stood there, standing vigil for
the princess. The sept was still and dark.

A woman emerged from the shadows, her gown slipping on the floor making soft sounds that
echoed everywhere. She walked slowly to the bier, and as she came close Jaime thought he
recognized Cersei.

“Sister?” But it was not Cersei. She was a silent sister, all dressed in grey. A hood and veil concealed
her features, but he could see the candles burning in the green pools of her eyes. “Sister, what would
you have of me?” His last word echoed up and down the sept, memememememememememe.

“I am not your sister, Jaime:” She raised a pale soft hand and pushed her hood back. “Have you
forgotten me?”

*Can I forget someone I never knew?* The words caught in his throat. He did know her, but it had
been so long…

“Will you forget your own lord father too? I wonder if you ever knew him, truly.”

Her eyes were green, her hair spun gold. He could not tell how old she was. *Fifteen*, he thought, *or
fifty*. She climbed the steps to stand above the bier, looking at the body. Jaime realized Myrcella’s
body had turned into his father’s.

“He could never abide being laughed at. That was the thing he hated the most,” she resumed, hey
eyes locked on Lord Tywin.

“Who are you?” He had to hear her say it.

“The question is, who are you?”

“This is a dream.”

“Is it?” she smiled sadly. “Count your hands, child.”

*One*. One hand, clasped tight around the sword hilt. Only one. “In my dreams, I always have two
hands.” He raised his right arm and stared uncomprehending at the ugliness of his stump.

“We all dream of things we cannot have. Tywin dreamed that his son would be a great knight, that
his daughter would be a queen. He dreamed they would be so strong and brave and beautiful that no
one would ever laugh at them.”

“I am a knight,” he told her, “and Cersei is a queen.”

A tear rolled down on her cheek. “And you? What did you dream of?”

*To stay with my sister, forever, and live happily with her.* He couldn’t tell her that. That was all he
ever wanted, and he could never have it. There had always been something separating them. When
they were children, their mother had kept them apart. Then later, their father did the same when he
brought Cersei to court. When Jaime was named in the Kingsguard, he thought they could be
together again, but then his father resigned from his position of Hand of the King. Cersei left King’s
Landing for Casterly Rock as Jaime left Casterly Rock for King’s Landing. When she married
Robert, they were again in the same place, but never really together. They always had to hide from
the world, and there was Robert between them all the time. Cersei had put an end to their relationship
when she married Robert, but then she came back to him when she realized Robert would never love
her. When Tyrion was captured by Catelyn Stark, Jaime rode to his rescue, and again he was separated from her. When he finally came back, it was only to be turned down by her, and to see her accuse Tyrion of their father’s murder. Then he learned she tried to kill Tyrion, that she fucked their cousin Lancel and maybe Osmund Kettleblack, and tried again to murder their brother. She was sent away from court afterwards, and they were separated away. Everything seemed to set them apart, even when they were close. The woman was right. *We all dream of things we cannot have.*

“What did you dream of?” Jaime asked her.

“The same than your father. Though there was a time when my dreams were different. The first didn’t come true. Your father’s and mine came true, but is that really what we wanted? Is that really what you wanted?”

“I always saw myself as a knight. More than a lord.”

“That’s not what you dreamed of though.”

She looked at him with sorry eyes. Jaime remembered she found them, he and Cersei, together, doing inappropriate things in a bath. He didn’t remember what they were doing, but it was enough for her to place them in chambers in opposite extremities of the castle. She died not long after, giving birth to Tyrion.

“Did he know?” Jaime asked her.

“I hope not. I don’t know what would have happened to him if…” Tears were threatening again to leave her eyes. “You were his son, Jaime. His golden son. And Cersei was his golden daughter. He loved you. He loved you both. He never said it, but he loved you. You were his children.” Jaime looked down on the floor. “Was she your daughter?”

The woman looked at the bier, and when Jaime followed her gaze, he found Myrcella’s body there again. His father had vanished. He looked at her, the girl he and Cersei made one night, or one morning, or one afternoon. He couldn’t tell. But there was one thing he could tell. He could answer to the question. “No.”

She never was his daughter. He never knew her. He never tried to know her. He never tried to know any of the children he sired, nor tried to take any part in their lives.

Jaime remembered their time at Winterfell. He wasn’t there, but he heard from the Hound later that Tyrion had slapped Joffrey in the face when he refused pettishly to offer his sympathies to Bran Stark’s parents. And at the breakfast this morning, Tyrion lifted Tommen from his seat, earning giggles from both Myrcella and her brother. He exchanged smiles and laughs with his nephew and his niece. They liked him. Jaime never really tried to make Tommen or Myrcella laugh or smile, nor did he try to act as if he plotted with them against their mother. He never tried to correct Joffrey’s flaws either. Tyrion had never tried to be a father to Tommen and Myrcella, and even less to Joffrey, but he had been more a father to them than Jaime or Robert ever were. Perhaps this explained why Tommen and Myrcella were good children. Cersei had never really cared about them, focusing all her attention on Joffrey. Tyrion had more influence on them. He made them decent and kind where Cersei made Joffrey horrible, and where Jaime did nothing. Like when Elia Martell and his children were butchered. Like when Rickard Stark and his son were murdered. He did nothing.

“Is that really what you wanted?” the woman asked.

“I don’t know.” He never asked himself if he wanted children. All he had ever wanted was Cersei, and he never had her. Not really.
“How is your brother?”

“Happy, I suppose.”

“Do you know what were his dreams?”

Jaime took time to answer. “To drink. To read. To travel. Be Lord of Casterly Rock. Have a wife who would love him.” He thought about the wheelwright’s daughter.

She smiled fondly at him, and tears ran again on her cheeks. “Maybe dreams can become true.”

The woman raised her hood again and turned her back on him. Jaime called after her, but already she was moving away, her skirt whispering lullabies as it brushed across the floor. Don’t leave me, he wanted to call, but of course she’d left them long ago.

He woke up in darkness, shivering. He raised his right arm and saw the same stump than in his dreams. Was it a dream? He looked at the little table aside his bed and saw his golden hand. He didn’t keep it on him for the night.

Jaime rose and went to pour himself a cup of wine. He wished Tyrion was there, but he was far away in the North, fighting for his wife’s home. The things we do for love. He awkwardly filled the goblet. After a year with his golden hand, it still felt odd to do the simplest things with his left hand. He took a sip, holding the cup carefully.

He wondered if he shouldn’t go back to the Great Sept and stand guard for his daughter. He was never a father to her while she was alive. Would it change something if he tried to be one after she was dead? He thought about Tommen. A sweet boy, playing with cats, round and red cheeked. Nothing like Joffrey. Joffrey was only my seed. Could Tommen be more? Was it too late? Could he still be a father for the last of his children, when he was king and already married? He wondered if the queen… both queens, would allow it? Margaery Tyrell wasn’t going to let someone speak anything to her king. Though lately Jaime found she and Kevan got along quite better than before. Too much better. They didn’t seem to fight for Tommen’s attention anymore. Jaime didn’t like it. Cersei neither. He wondered what Kevan was doing.

Jaime returned to his bed once the cup was empty. He sat there for a moment, thinking about his little brother. Jaime and Cersei had come together into the world. They had loved each other since they were children. They grew up together, and were so alike. Yet, things weren’t going well for them, and they never seemed to have really been together for long. Tyrion’s wife came from another family, who was in war with theirs. Her mother had tried to execute Tyrion, she was about twenty years younger than him and she didn’t want to marry him in the first place. She was tall and beautiful (Jaime couldn’t deny she was, though her beauty was nothing when compared to Cersei’s) while Tyrion was small and ugly. And yet, she had come to Tyrion’s rescue when Cersei imprisoned him, refused to abandon him when she had a chance to escape the capital, and now she had a baby with him. And according to Tyrion’s letters, she loved him. How could that be?

The thought of Tyrion and his wife brought someone else to Jaime’s mind. Someone else he hadn’t seen for a long time. She was with his brother right now, serving his wife. Jaime laid down in his bed, trying to fall asleep without success.

Probably after more than an hour, someone drummed at his door. Jaime had almost begun to doze. The drumming was repeated. “SER JAIME!” cried someone in the outside.

The Kingslayer groaned and got on his feet. He put on some night clothes and walked heavily to the door, opening it with eyes half open. A young boy with arms of a red archer on a green field was
standing there.

“Lord Commander. Lord Tarly summons you. He says it’s urgent.”

“Can’t it wait for the morning?” Jaime complained.

“No, it can’t. He’s very insistent, Lord Commander.”

“All right. I’m coming.” Jaime sighed and closed the door. He put on some appropriate clothes and armor along with his right hand and followed the young boy. As they travelled through the Red Keep, Jaime realized they weren’t going to the small council room, nor to the Tower of the Hand, nor to Lord Randyll’s private apartments. They were heading for the rookery. Why? Did they receive a message from Tyrion? Had something happened to him? Jaime walked more quickly. They climbed many stairs to reach the rookery. As they approached the Grand Maester’s chambers, Jaime noticed a great number of Tarly guards. The door was closed. When Jaime tried to open it, two guards with the same arms than the boy stopped him. The young boy knocked on the door. A rough voice asked who it was, and the boy gave his name, saying the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard was there. The door opened and Jaime made his way inside.

He had expected many things, but not this. The scene before him was one of devastation, chaos…and death. Broken bottles, ink dropped everywhere. The smell in the room was horrible, but it wasn’t the most horrible of all. Grand Maester Pycelle was seated at his table. He would have seemed to sleep, his head pillowed on the great leather-bound tome before him, if it wasn’t for the deep red gash in the old man’s spotted skull, the blood pooled beneath his head staining the pages of the book, and the bits of bone and brain, islands in a lake of melted wax, all around his candle. Jaime stared in horror at this. Until the door closed brutally behind him.

Jaime turned to find himself nose to nose with the hard face of Lord Randyll Tarly. “Not a pretty sight, I admit, but I’ve seen worse at war.”

He stood aside and looked at the wall his high stature hid before. Jaime’s gaze fell on the other half of the scene before him. Another dead body was lying on the floor, a bolt in his heart, several stabs all over the corpse from head to toe. Jaime didn’t recognize him until he noticed the badge, all tainted with blood. He moved slowly and knelt by his side.

“Kevan.” He thought he could recognize what had been the face of his uncle through the wounds the knives had left. The eyes had been burst, bits of brains were on the floor just like for the Grand Maester, and dried blood was coming out from everywhere. Jaime stared in horror. He had seen many horrible things during the war, but here, inside the Red Keep? Not since Aerys’s time.

“They were found an hour ago by a serving girl. One of my men stopped her while she was running all over the Red Keep and brought her to me. She told me everything, and that’s how I found all of it,” Randyll Tarly explained. “No one knows except you and me for now.”

Jaime stood up, his eyes not leaving what was left of his uncle. “Who did this?”

“We don’t know.”

Jaime faced the Lord of Horn Hill. “Surely someone saw something. You can’t assassinate the Hand of the King and the Grand Maester without anyone noticing it.”

“My men are searching right now. One of them is awakening the king and the queen as we speak. But if the assassins are still inside the Red Keep, we must keep this new from spreading all over the castle. Or else it will make our task much more difficult.”
Lord Randyll’s words left no place to discussion. Jaime had the strange impression to be listening to his father. “There’s something else.” Lord Randyll handed him a piece of paper with spots of blood on it. “It was found next to the Grand Maester. As Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, I thought you should know.”

Jaime took the paper and unrolled it uneasily with his golden hand. Despite the blood that splattered all over it, the message was clear and very easy to read. Even before his father forced him to sit four hours each day until he learnt to read, Jaime may have been able to read these five simple words.

_The queen sends her regards._

Chapter End Notes

Kevan is dead. We shall never see his like again. Those who are very perceptive may have noticed the similarities in the previous chapter with the epilogue of "A Dance with Dragons" when Kevan was called to see Pycelle. Now, things are really going to move in King's Landing. For everyone who found the plot dull in the capital after Tyrion and Sansa left it, this is the end of it.

Please review

Next chapter: Mira
This is the last chapter I write before February. The former chapter was to end the intrigue in King's Landing for 2016 and prepare for the one in 2017, and now this chapter does the same with the North. The original plan was to have Sansa as a POV for this chapter, but I chose Mira instead since it's been a while she didn't have a chapter. I hope you'll enjoy it.

Happy New Year everyone.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They rode in silence to the cliff in the decreasing darkness of the night. Dawn was coming, but not yet here. They had fifteen men with them, four before and eleven behind. Well, fourteen men and one woman considering Brienne of Tarth was with them. Five of them were sworn to House Hightower and were given the task to protect Mira. The nine others were sworn to House Lannister. Their duty was to protect Sansa. The two ladies were leading their horses slowly, side by side, to the viewpoint. The dew of the grass crunched under the hooves of the beasts. Everything was still and silent. The calm before the storm.

They reached their destination and unhorsed. Sansa ordered the people following them to stay behind. She and Mira walked to the extremity of the cliff where they had a good view of everything that would happen. The fortress in ruins stood tall in the dim light of the ending night. Mist surrounded it. It was good. It would be more difficult for the defenders to see the enemy approaching.

The standards of the houses Lannister, Hightower, Frey, Tully, Crakehall, Vance, Mallister and all the other houses from the Westerlands and the Riverlands could be seen from afar south of Moat Cailin. On the northern side, Mira could distinguish men far away, but not the banners. She knew those of House Hornwood, House Manderly and House Lannister would be there, but she couldn’t see them from where they stood. The attack would begin soon.

After months in the Neck, the men were eager to fight, take the fortress and leave the marshes. The spirits were up. Mira hoped they would succeed, or else they might begin to have real problems with desertions. Some men had been kept before the southern side of the battlements since the end of the afternoon yesterday, and the crannogmen reported them that the garrison of Moat Cailin had kept a heavy guard all night. The men Lord Tyrion and Ser Brynden had positioned during the night would be relieved by others who had slept. The garrison would be tired while the attackers would be fresh and well rested. The men on the southern side would assault the walls first, blowing their horns as loudly as they could, to attract as many men as they could. The men on the northern side would know by the sounds of the horns that the assault had begun and would start their own not long after. The northern battlements of Moat Cailin would be less manned and easier to take.

“Soon it will be over,” said Mira. Soon, Moat Cailin would fall.
“It won’t be over,” said Sansa. “It’s only the beginning. Once Moat Cailin has fallen, we must take back Winterfell. Then we must take every castle that will oppose us. Every house that will refuse to bend the knee. Karhold, the Dreadfort, Ironrath, Castle Cerwyn, Highpoint… They must all be taken.”

Sansa shivered. “Are you cold, Sansa?”

“No, I’m all right.” Sansa had several furs on her, but her pregnancy was beginning to show off and Mira could perceive it if she looked well at her friend’s belly. She had to be careful. She could only agree with Lord Tyrion when he decided to send her to White Harbor. It would be too dangerous for her on campaign.

Mira looked again at Moat Cailin. The sun was beginning to appear far away. It wouldn’t be long before the assault started. She took a great inspiration, trying to calm herself.

“Are you afraid, Mira?” Sansa asked her.

“I am. Gerold will be fighting there.”

“But surely he won’t be in the vanguard.”

“No. I convinced him to not place our men in the first ranks. We will need them to take Ironrath. But he will take part to the battle all the same.”

Sansa nodded. “I know. I’m afraid too.”

“Lord Tyrion will not fight, Sansa. You don’t need to worry about him.”

“I’m not worried about him. I’m worried about Arya.”

Mira hadn’t thought about it. The two armies were going to attack Moat Cailin following the Kingsroad, but the crannogmen were going to attack the battlements from the swamps, making the defense harder for the Boltons and their allies, releasing poisoned arrows on them. Sansa’s little sister would fight with them. She had tried to convince Arya to not fight, but failed. Lord Reed said they wouldn’t be able to stop her, almost smiling.

“I’m sure she will be all right,” said Mira, trying to reassure Sansa. She knew she would be afraid as well if Talia was to fight in a battle.

“I hope so. Arya never listened to what we told her. She never obeyed. She wouldn’t attend the embroidery lessons, would fight with stable boys and ride, arrive at dinner late, play in the mud with a new dress Mother had prepared for her… But I always did as I was told, and things didn’t really go better for me.” Sansa laughed nervously. “You know, Tyrion asked her to follow me at White Harbor.”

“He did?”

“Yes, but she refused. She wants to go to Winterfell, and help to free it. I wish I could go with her.”

“You must look after yourself, Sansa. And after the baby.”

“I know,” Sansa said, resigned. “I’m afraid Arya is following the army only to be there when Winterfell is freed. I believe she might try something on Tyrion, again. I fear for him. She still hates him, just like all the Lannisters.”
Mira had noticed it. There was no love between Sansa’s sister and Lord Tyrion. “I will keep an eye on her. I promise.”

“Thank you, Mira.” A moment passed. “I think she doesn’t want to be near me either. We never had anything in common, and now I’m a Lannister.”

They remained silent for a moment, Sansa’s words hanging in the air. Then she said something else. “When we’ve dealt with the Boltons, I hope we will destroy the Dreadfort. It should never be seen again. They made my family suffer so much.”

Anger was plain on Sansa’s face and in her voice. “Maybe it would be better to give it to someone else, Sansa. Not long ago, you asked me if Arya wouldn’t make a better Lady of Winterfell than you. Maybe you could give her the Dreadfort? Create a new branch of House Stark?”

Sansa seemed to think about it for a moment. “Arya would have to marry.”

They both looked at each other, and they finally burst into small nervous laughs. “Will she accept to marry?” From what Mira had seen and what Sansa told her, Arya Stark was very unlikely to ever wed.

“I don’t think so. Arya never wanted to be a lady. She wanted to ride on a horse, shoot arrows, fight with swords, play in the mud with butcher’s boys…” At the last words, Sansa seemed ashamed. “I don’t see her ever marrying, and I won’t be able to force her to marry. I wish I had been a little like her when my first betrothal was arranged.”

“You couldn’t know Joffrey was a monster when he arrived at Winterfell.”

“I know, but later I should have realized it. It was so evident, who he was. Instead, when my father said I would never marry him, I begged him to stay in King’s Landing to marry him, saying he would be the most marvellous king that would ever exist. And when my father told me that he would organize me a marriage later, with someone worthy of me, someone brave and gentle and strong, I only told him that I didn’t want someone like that, and that I wanted Joffrey.”

Sansa was almost scoffing about herself. Mira had to admit her behaviour had been quite stupid, but after all, how old was she at the time? Thirteen? “Well, in the end, you got married to someone brave and gentle and strong.”

Sansa smiled. “Just like you.”

Mira felt some red climbing to her cheeks. “Yes, just like me.”

“I don’t think my father was thinking about Tyrion when he told me that. What would he think of me now? Married to the Imp?”

“I think he would be proud of you, and very happy to see that you married a good man.”

Sansa didn’t seem entirely convinced. Silence settled between them and Mira thought about her own husband. Someone brave and gentle and strong. Gerold had his flaws, and he wasn’t the ideal husband, but no one could accuse him of cowardice, wickedness or weakness. Well, some did, like his brother Altos, but they were wrong. Mira looked down, distinguishing what she thought were the banners of House Hightower. Her husband was among them. She prayed to the Old Gods and the Seven to spare him. She didn’t think he would die. He wasn’t in the first ranks, nor were his men, but everything could happen in battle.

A horn blew. A second, a third, a fourth, a fifth followed. The trebuchets Ser Daven built threw huge...
stones. They threw three series. Then men in red, black and blue advanced towards the southern entrance of Moat Cailin. The vanguard ran to the gates as quickly as they could as the last blocks were thrown. Mira saw many fall, receiving arrows and bolts. The fortress was reputed impregnable, and she could see why. A rain of projectiles fell on the men advancing on the walls and the gates. The first men who reached them pressed their bodies on the walls, making it more difficult for the defenders to reach them without exposing themselves. For any fortress, it might have given a very good protection, but it was Moat Cailin, and the castle was precisely designed to allow its defenders to strike the enemy no matter where he was. Men died. Stones, rocks, arrows flew. Mira thought she heard their cries from where she stood.

Some men from the Westerlands and the Riverlands had arrows. The archers were protected by other men holding a shield and they started to shoot back arrows at the defenders. Mira thought she noticed a few coming from the swamps. These were from Howland Reed and his men. Arya Stark was among them. They hid in the swamps before the fortress and Mira knew they were almost impossible to see for the defenders. Two waves came crashing on the walls of Moat Cailin, and death kept raining on their men. Mira thought she saw a banner of House Hightower in the second wave.

Then came ladders and the ram. The men carrying them advanced more slowly, especially those with the ram. The ladders were there first. Many men carrying them died as well, but the ladders came to place one after one. The ram was brought forth, heavily protected. They began to smash the door. The losses seemed to be heavy. From the moment the attack began, horns kept blowing. It was as if the men who blew them competed to know which was the loudest one. Then they all stopped to blow, except one. It made three powerful blows, each of the same length.

Mira looked north of Moat Cailin. She feared they wouldn’t come, that they wouldn’t hear the horn or would even betray them. After all, these were Northerners inside Moat Cailin. Would the Manderlys and the Hornwoods fight against the Dustins and the Cerwyns? They couldn’t be sure. After seconds that looked like hours, she finally saw a column of men running to the northern entrance of the fortress. She distinguished orange, red and blue-green standards from afar. She saw a few arrows coming for them, but much less fell than on the southern side. A ram was on its way as well. She couldn’t see the men attacking the battlements on the north. Her position didn’t allow it. Many were hidden by Moat Cailin itself once they were close enough.

On the southern side, men kept dying, but both sides refused to abandon. Men kept climbing the ladders, the ram was still ramming on the gate, but it didn’t break. The gates of Moat Cailin were too strong. Mira saw the ram on the north disappear behind the walls of the fortress. On both sides now, they were trying to breach through the gate. The fight kept going on for some time, and then everything seemed to change. No stone and arrow was released anymore from the battlements and men climbed the ladders much more easily. Then the gate gave way and men hurried inside. Within a few minutes the golden lion was flying over Moat Cailin, and it was followed by the silver trout. And then, when Mira thought it was finally over, another banner raised higher than these two. A grey direwolf on an ice-white field. A banner Mira feared to never see again. The banner her ancestors always followed.

She turned to Sansa. They both smiled. “It has begun,” Mira said.

“Yes. It has. It’s only the beginning.”

They looked again at the first Stark banner they saw in years. Sansa walked away to her horse and Mira followed her. Moat Cailin was taken. Moat Cailin had fallen. The way to Winterfell was open… and the way to Ironrath too.

As they rode through the road to the fortress, they witnessed dead men lying on the road and in the
marshes nearby. They had to skirt a few bodies. Men with all sigils from the Riverlands, the Westerlands, the Reach and the North were helping to carry the bodies and the wounded. Most of them had arrows stuck somewhere on their body, but as they got close to the castle, they saw a few with heavy injuries to the head or with hooked members. They had received rocks on the head or had fallen from the ladders, if not from the battlements. Most of the bodies wore the black of House Frey or were from the Westerlands. There were less from the Riverlands, since the river lords brought less men, and Mira noticed one man floating on the waters of the swamps, his head turned towards the depth of the marshes, unmoving, blood surfacing all around him, an arrow through his throat. Crannogmen lifted him as she was close and she recognized him. It was Mattas, one of the men who came from the Reach with them. Mira remembered speaking with him no later than yesterday. Now he was dead. She looked at him as her horse kept moving forward, until she went through the gate.

Inside, many men laid on the ground, wounded or dead as well. There were bodies that hadn’t been cleared off the way yet. She noticed the longaxes of House Dustin, the battle-axe of House Cerwyn, and of course the flayed man of House Bolton among the bodies and the men wearing chains. Mira dismounted near the entrance of the Hall as Sansa did. Her friend needed more time to dismount. Bearing a child began to burden her. Podrick Payne, Lord Tyrion’s squire, was waiting for them.

“My lady. My lady. My lady.” He said it for the three of them who were there. “Lord Tyrion, Ser Brynden and the other commanders are in the commander’s solar.”

“Is my lord husband with them?” Mira asked.

“Yes, my lady. Of course. Ser Gerald is with them.”

Mira could have corrected his misspelling, but she chose to not. They simply followed the squire, all the three women. She ordered her guards to help with the wounded. The solar was quite small for all the commanders to sit there, and some stood tall. Howland Reed was on his feet while Ser Wylis Manderly sat with his heavy weigh. Lord Tyrion, Ser Forley and Ser Daven all stood tall, though for Lord Tyrion it didn’t make much difference whether he sat or not. Ser Brynden had his fingers crossed on the table, and most of the river lords sat as well. The Freys, Ser Perwyn and Olyvar, were on their feet. Gerold was leaning on the wall, but as soon as he saw Mira enter, he went to her and kissed her.

“Glad to see you,” he said.

“Me too.”

She walked to the table. She would like to spend more time with her husband, but it would be later. For now, they had a war council. Gerold came to stand by her side. One of the river lords stood up to let Sansa sit while Lady Brienne remained at the door, guarding it.

“It’s good you’re both here, my ladies,” said the Blackfish. “Because we have something to tell to all of you, my lords. Something… quite unpleasant, I’m afraid.”

Lord Tyrion and Ser Brynden didn’t look very happy for men who just took a fortress they tried to seize for months. Sansa’s granduncle turned to the Lord of Casterly Rock who didn’t seem eager to share the unpleasant new.

“It seems that House Umber has decided to side with Ramsay Bolton.”

A huge silence followed. “But… The Greatjon was the staunchest supporter of Robb Stark,” said Ser Wylis the first.
“Jon Umber is dead,” replied Ser Brynden. “His son doesn’t seem to take much after his father.”

“Traitor!” this came from Lord Reed. “Nothing of this would have happened while Ned was alive. What has become of the North?”

Mira couldn’t agree more. She may understand the northern lords could be reluctant to fight for Sansa since she was a Lannister in name, but to fight for the Boltons, and furthermore for Ramsay! What had become of the North where high lords and minor lords believed to have duties towards their smallfolk and their bannermen? What had become of the North where kinslaying, kingslaying and breaking the guest rights were unforgivable? What became of the North she remembered from her childhood? Where was the honorable North?

“Perhaps the North was never honorable like you believed, Lord Reed,” said Lord Tyrion at this moment, right when she wondered about it. “But it seems the new Lord of the Last Hearth decided to join his forces to Ramsay’s after Jon Snow allowed wildlings in the Gift. It seems they are ready to cooperate with a mad dog if it means he will fight with them against wildlings. I wonder what’s the worst. Wildlings or mad dogs?”

The Lord of Greywater Watch didn’t take this comment very well. “Don’t do as if you had lessons to give us. Your lord father was behind the Red Wedding.”

“And Roose Bolton is the one who killed Robb Stark. He was a Northerner. Rickard Karstark murdered two children in cold blood. He was a Northerner. I don’t have lessons to give it’s true, but you ought to see something, Lord Reed. My father committed horrible crimes. That doesn’t mean all men from the Westerlands are monsters. Ned Stark was an honorable man. That doesn’t mean all the Northerners are honorable. Open your eyes. Three of the four major families in the North have turned against the Starks. Only the Manderlys have remained loyal. Not all men display the same honor than your friend, you know that very well. How many Northerners would be ready to put their own life and their family’s life in danger for a baby? Robert Baratheon, Ned Stark’s own friend, would have slaughtered every Targaryen he would have found, just like my father. He didn’t care more than my father if they were babies still in the cradle.”

Lord Reed was speechless. Lord Tyrion raised an eyebrow, as if interrogating him.

“This is not the time for this,” declared Ser Brynden. Wylis Manderly seemed about to join the argument as well. “The Umbers have betrayed House Stark and the Crown, as have the Boltons and the Karstarks. We’ll have to deal with them. All of you, prepare your men. We leave at first light tomorrow for Winterfell.”

The lords agreed and most of them slowly left, though Howland Reed mysteriously stayed behind, looking intently at Lord Tyrion. Gerold left as well. Mira remained with Sansa to accompany her to her room and give her support if need be. Her friend wasn’t in a good shape with her pregnancy and this new of a new family of the North siding with the Boltons wouldn’t make thing better. Mira was quite sure Sansa would believe again she might not be the appropriate Lady of Winterfell, seeing another great part of the North fighting her. Truth be told, if the Umbers preferred the Boltons to Sansa, then Mira thought it may be time for Sansa to be proud about feeling like a Lannister. They had now more honor than half of the North.

There were now only Lord Tyrion, Sansa, Mira, Lady Brienne, Lord Reed and Ser Brynden in the solar. Mira approached her friend.

“Sansa, maybe you should go to your rooms. You need rest.” With her pregnancy, she needed more than rest. She was almost six months gone.
“Not yet,” intervened Ser Brynden. “Lord Reed, bring Arya here. There’s something you should all know, and Arya has a right to know it before the others.”

“Yes, Ser Brynden,” the crannogman said. He left, glancing one last time at Lord Tyrion. He had to be very affected by the lord’s words about the doubtful honor of Northerners to stare at him this way.

“Sansa, you’ll head for White Harbor tomorrow, as soon as we get out of the Neck. You’ll be accompanied by a guard of fifty men. Your husband and I have already chosen them. They will be men from House Tully and House Lannister only. They will accompany Ser Wylis back to his father as well.”

“Yes, Ser Brynden. Thank you.” Sansa looked at her husband after she answered to her granduncle. Mira saw the regret they both had from being separated. She felt a little out of place all of a sudden and looked away. Mira wondered how she would feel if she and Gerold had to go different ways. She loved her husband, but she didn’t feel like she would be missing someone she needed if they were to be parted. Despite being good friend with Sera, Margaery and many others, she always felt alone in some way since she left Ironrath, even after her marriage.

“My lords, if you allow me, I believe Arya Stark should go to White Harbor as well,” said Brienne.

“I fear my sister-in-law doesn’t need your protection, Lady Brienne. The others are the ones who need to be protected from her,” said Tyrion bitterly, while looking at Sansa with concern.

“We could be taking a huge risk by bringing her along with the army. She knows how to fight and to defend herself, but still. She could be killed during an ambush or a battle,” the lady knight argued.

“I thought that Arya Stark should go to White Harbor me too before, but she may be useful when we reach Winterfell. For now, the North ignores her real fate, but if we bring her with us and show to the lords who sided with Ramsay Bolton that Arya Stark was never between his hands, some may be tempted to abandon him all of a sudden.”

“Tyrion is right,” said Sansa. “There must always be a Stark in Winterfell, and Arya is a Stark. She survived King’s Landing, Harrenhal, the Brotherhood without Banners, the war in the Riverlands, the Red Wedding, the Eyrie, Littlefinger and the Neck. I’m afraid we couldn’t keep her for long in White Harbor anyway. She doesn’t want to come.”

To say that Sansa said it without enthusiasm would be optimistic. Things didn’t go so well between Sansa and her sister since they reunited. Their reunion hadn’t begun quite well with Sansa taking a spear through her shoulder after all, and Arya Stark felt disdain at best for her sister’s husband and his men. Sansa didn’t take it very well since she loved her lord husband. Mira had always gotten along quite well with Talia, but the same couldn’t be said about Sansa and Arya. Sansa said they spent their childhood quarreling and squabbling, and even though they were both happy to see their sister alive, it was obvious they had a hard time together. So much kept the apart.

Lord Reed came back with the supposed daughter of Lord Fenn and closed the door behind him. “So, what is it?” he asked.

Ser Brynden looked at Lord Tyrion who hesitated to speak. Finally, he did.

“The news of House Umber’s defection came from a man I sent to the Last Hearth a year ago. He turned down north of Moat Cailin into the army of the Manderlys yesterday, but he waited for us to take the fortress to inform me. He told Ser Brynden and I about the betrayal of the Umbers, but that wasn’t the only information he brought. We should have told the other lords when they were present, but we felt you should all know first.”
“What is it?” asked Arya suspiciously.

“Rickon Stark is alive. Or at least, he may be alive.”

They were all stunned for a moment. Mira recovered first. “But he died. Wasn’t he burned by Theon Greyjoy?”

“That’s what we thought,” said Ser Brynden Tully, “but if he only displayed burned bodies before the people of Winterfell, he could make them believe they were Bran and Rickon while in fact, they could be any children.”

“Rickon is alive?” asked Arya Stark, unbelieving, hope piercing her voice.

“I hope he’s not,” said Lord Tyrion in a low voice.

“Why?” Sansa’s sister looked outraged now.

“Because this would mean Rickon stands before Sansa as Lord of Winterfell, and that would mean his children would no longer be the future Wardens of the North,” said Howland Reed with disdain.

“Yes, and this would mean that Rickon Stark is most likely at Winterfell right now,” retorted the Lord of Casterly Rock.

“What? At Winterfell?” said Sansa, horrified.

“My spy near the Last Hearth said that Jon Umber left the Last Hearth for Winterfell. He spotted a boy with a bag on his head among the people riding with him. He heard men saying that this boy was your brother, and Jon Umber was heading for Winterfell. Considering what we know of Ramsay Bolton, I wouldn’t want a Stark to end up in his hands, and I hope this is not Rickon Stark that the Umbers are bringing to Winterfell.”

Another long silence followed as they understood the implications of this. The Umbers had sided with the Boltons. If Rickon Stark was alive and they brought him with them, it was to give him to the Boltons.

“We have to save Rickon. We must stop the Umbers!” shouted Arya.

“The spy rode all the way from the Last Hearth to Moat Cailin without resting. If the Umbers haven’t reached Winterfell already, they will be there anytime soon. We cannot intercept them,” explained Lord Tyrion.

“Rickon…” said Sansa weakly.

“We don’t know for sure if that’s him.” The Blackfish tried to reassure them. “The man didn’t see the boy’s face, and he never saw Rickon before. Maybe the Umbers are only pretending to have him. That wouldn’t be the first time the Boltons and their allies make us believe they have a Stark in captivity.”

He looked at Arya as he said the last words. “Was Shaggydog with them?” she asked. “If that was really Rickon, then Shaggydog should have been there.”

“Shaggydog?” asked the Blackfish.

“That’s the name of his direwolf,” explained Tyrion Lannister. “He wasn’t seen, but that proves nothing. If Rickon was captive, they would probably have killed his direwolf. He wouldn’t follow
the Umbers willingly. For now, we have no way to be sure this was Rickon.”

“But if that was Rickon, then Bran could be alive as well,” said Arya. “We have to find him. We must search for him. He must be somewhere…”

“Arya, they’re dead.” Sansa cut her sister. “Bran and Rickon are dead. Jon is our only brother who’s still alive, and he’s at the Wall. We know he is alive, but Bran and Rickon are gone. We won’t see them again.”

Arya looked at her sister, agape. “Don’t you want them to be alive?”

“Not if they are to be in Ramsay’s hands. You heard the stories about him. We all know what’s going to happen to Rickon if he’s alive. I’ve been Joffrey’s toy for months when I was in King’s Landing, and all this time I’ve wished I was dead. Ramsay is even worse. Do you want Rickon to cut, or torture, or…?”

The words lacked for the Lady of Casterly Rock. Mira put a hand on Sansa’s shoulder to calm her.

“If Rickon is alive,” resumed Arya, “then Bran is somewhere safe, and we have to find him.”

“But where? Where could he be? Tyrion has spies everywhere in the North, and none said anything about Bran being alive. They found nothing.”

“Perhaps he’s lying.” Arya looked at her brother-in-law with fury.

Ser Brynden stepped in at this moment. “Enough. We cannot be sure that this boy was Rickon Stark. If that was him, then our only chance to help him is to take Winterfell as quickly as possible. We march north tomorrow. That’s the best thing we can do to save your brother if he’s alive, and anyway we must get rid of Ramsay. When we take Winterfell, we will see if Rickon is really alive.”

“But Bran…”

“We will not start to spread rumors about Brandon Stark being alive. Or else people will start to claim any child who’s a cripple in the North to be Brandon Stark, and we will have new rebellions,” Lord Tyrion said.

“The Northerners wouldn’t do that,” declared Lord Reed.

“Really? The Boltons didn’t hesitate to claim they had Arya Stark, the Umbers may be faking to have Rickon Stark, so why some northern lords wouldn’t decide to pick the first young boy they find who can’t walk and proclaim him King in the North.”

“You don’t want us to find Bran, or Rickon. You want Winterfell for yourself!” Arya accused him.

“Arya!” shouted Sansa, scandalized.

“That’s enough!” Ser Brynden stood up. “We leave tomorrow, the time we need to take care of the wounded and question the men who guarded this place. I will inform my family’s bannermen about the possibility that Rickon Stark may be alive. Lord Tyrion, I leave you your own commanders and the Freys. Lord Reed, could you inform the Manderlys and the Hornwoods along with your men?”

“Yes, ser. I will tell them, but know this. If Rickon Stark is alive, then he is my lord.” Howland Reed looked at Lord Tyrion with defiance.

“Yes, he is your lord is he is alive.” Lord Tyrion seemed tired as he said so. “But in the meantime,
you pledged your banners to Sansa, and we must take back Winterfell, with or without Rickon Stark. Can we still count on your help?"

“Yes,” the crannogman replied defiantly.

He left after this short reply. Arya remained behind, staring angrily at Lord Tyrion, and at Sansa as well, but she left in the end.

Tyrian Lannister turned his attention to Mira. “Lady Mira, could you accompany Sansa to our rooms. Pod knows where they are. After that, you could tell your husband about Rickon Stark.”

“Yes, my lord,” she replied.

Mira left with Sansa. Her friend exchanged a look with her husband. He seemed sorry. Even with Podrick Payne to guide them, they lost their way twice in the ruins. Finally, they arrived to what was probably the most well provided room of the place, though it wasn’t much since they were in Moat Cailin. Sansa sat heavily, looking tired. Mira wasn’t sure if that was her pregnancy or the discussion they just witnessed that exhausted her. Her face was decomposed.

“Do you think Rickon may be alive?” Sansa asked her.

“I don’t know,” Mira replied carefully. “If we were before the war, I would say just like my father that the Umbers would never lie about something like that, but since they allied themselves with the Boltons… I don’t know. For a time, I’ve been wondering if someone had survived the Battle of Ironrath, but I don’t think it’s very likely. They’re probably all dead, and if I hope that some are still alive, I will certainly only meet deception when I find out the truth.”

Sansa nodded. “We started this war, we marched on the North because we believed Arya was prisoner at Winterfell. Now, just when we discover that it wasn’t true, Rickon may be there. I don’t want him to suffer in Ramsay’s hands, but he could be alive? But how? Why would Theon lie about killing Bran and Rickon? And if he did, then where is Bran? And was Rickon really at the Last Hearth?”

Sansa took her forehead between her hands. “You should rest, Sansa. Ser Brynden is right. We cannot know for sure if your brother is at Winterfell. I suppose we’ll discover the truth when we take it.”

“I’m not only worried about Rickon.” Mira frowned. “Tyrion brought all these men from the Westerlands here, telling them they were to free Arya and give Winterfell to me. But once they learn that Rickon is… may be alive… Maybe they’ll want to desert. My family fought against the Lannisters not long ago. Robb invaded the Westerlands. Many lords here have lost family members in the battles against him. We could convince them to take Winterfell for me, and to free Arya. She’s my little sister. I have proper rights on Winterfell over her, but if Rickon lives…”

“He is the Lord of Winterfell,” finished Mira. Indeed, this was a serious complication.

“The lords of the Westerlands won’t want to fight for Winterfell if it means to give it to my brother. Even less with winter coming. I’m afraid what could happen to Tyrion. And Arya always seems eager to kill him.”

A long silence followed. Mira realized what problems Sansa would face if her brother was alive. Mira had never seen Theon Greyjoy, and Sansa seldom spoke about him. She never knew him very well. Could he fake burning the Stark boys? The Ironmen were known for their violence and their sordid ways in war, but still. To murder two boys you saw grow? Two children you grew up with?
Was it possible he only made everyone believe he burned the children? Then, where were Brandon and Rickon Stark now? For now, the questions were impossible to answer.

Mira left the seat she had taken near Sansa. “I must bring the news to Gerold. Just rest, Sansa. We’ll find out the truth about Rickon, sooner or later.”

She couldn’t find her husband during the day. According to his men, he was helping with the move of the camp. The whole army would march on Winterfell tomorrow, but they were already making it travel through Moat Cailin during the day to set up an new encampment north of the fortress. Only a small garrison would be left behind to keep the castle. Gerold was supervising the movement of his own men. Mira could only meet him right before dinner that night. He was stunned by the new that Rickon Stark was still alive, but Mira found his reaction lacked enough surprise.

During the dinner in the Great Hall of Moat Cailin, Ser Brynden informed everyone that the youngest son of Eddard Stark might be alive at Winterfell, though they couldn’t confirm it. That didn’t change anything since they still had to take back Winterfell. Among the Lannister commanders, the humor looked quite sour, while there were strong discussions among the Northerners. Gerold didn’t seem quite there. Of course, it didn’t change much for him or Mira. Sansa’s brother would most certainly acknowledge Mira as Lady of Ironrath like his sister did. Still, Gerold didn’t seem to be fully aware of what was going on around him.

Later that night, when they had changed, Mira tried to discover what was going on with him. They had a private room for themselves in Moat Cailin since they were husband and wife and that Gerold was among the commanders of the army. They were both sitting on their bed.

“What’s going on with you?” she asked, taking his hand. He was shaking, not much, but he shook.

“You know, when we spar in the training grounds, we get dirty, we receive bruises and cuts. Sometimes, we even bleed a little, or a lot, but no one is killed. We know that at most we will be badly injured, but no more. I never saw a proper battle before. Garlan told me about what it was, I knew people would die, but it’s different to hear the tales and to see them.”

Mira understood. He had been shaken by the battle. He resumed to talk after a moment. “I saw Mattas die. When we made the first assault months ago, some of my men died, but I didn’t actually see any of them die. But now… Now I saw it.”

His breathe was steady, but a little quicker than usual. “That won’t be your last battle. It’s not the last time you’ll see people dying, and it’s not the last time I’ll see that either. But you must be strong,” she told him.

“I know.” He seemed to calm. He looked at her. “I won’t abandon you. I swore to give you back your home, and I will. I love you.”

Mira was touched. She smiled fondly at her husband. “I love you too.”

He closed the distance that separated them and kissed her. His eyes were shining. Mira sighed in their kiss, contentment filling her body. Soon she was lying on her back, Gerold over her. His lips left her mouth and trailed on her cheek, then her neck. His hand came to remove the clothe from her shoulder.

“Gerold, we talked about this,” she said, breathing heavily. They had agreed, on her insistence, that they shouldn’t take the risk of making a child before Winterfell was freed after they learnt that Sansa was pregnant.
“Only this night. It’s been so long. I want you.” His voice was barely a whisper as he uncovered her other shoulder. Mira sighed. He was right. It had been long. She wanted to do it as well.

“All right. This night,” still breathing deeply.

They left Moat Cailin early in the morning. All men from the Hightower followed the army in the North. They were needed to take Ironrath. The garrison consisted in a mix of men from the North, the Riverlands and the Westerlands. Once they had left the Neck and were properly in the North, Sansa had to leave the column for White Harbor. Mira left it temporarily to make her farewells. Sansa made her repeat her promise to look after Arya, along with a new promise to keep an eye on Lord Tyrion as well. Sansa then hugged her sister. She was about to cry, and Mira thought Arya wasn’t far from crying. Despite all their disagreements, they were still sisters. Arya told her sister to be careful, and Sansa told her to not do anything crazy. Then came the moment when Sansa said farewell to her husband. They kissed at length, to Arya’s great disgust. Mira heard her friend saying something from afar.

“Don’t die. You’ll be a father the next time we see each other.”

Then Sansa left with Brienne, Ser Wylis Manderly and their respective retinues. Mira joined back the column where the Hightower soldiers were. They were heading north. Winterfell wasn’t far, and not much farther was Ironrath. Mira Forrester was going home.

Chapter End Notes

So, this is over for "A Shadow and a Wolf" in 2016. It will come back February 1st, even better I hope. In the meantime, I will upload one chapter each week in "A Rose and a Lion", and also start a project of an original book I had in head for a very long time. We meet again next month.

Please review
Trystane III

Chapter Notes

After a month of pause, here I am, back into service. The good news for you is that you'll get again two chapters per week. The bad news for me is that I'll have no life again.

To start again, we go back to Meereen with Trystane, Grey Worm and Kinvara. I hope you'll enjoy this first chapter after four weeks of absence.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

TRYSTANE III

The sun came from the openings in the structure of the Pyramid. It cast its light on half the room and warmed Trystane’s back. The temperature inside the Great Pyramid was quite similar to the one in the Water Gardens, but without the flowers, the fountains, and of course the sun. Without the woman he loved. He wished he could be back in Dorne, back with Myrcella. But she was dead, and now he had to save a city his new betrothed abandoned.

Grey Worm stood outside the reach of sunlight. On his own side, Trystane sat. He was trying to calm himself before the meeting, but so far he failed. So much depended of it. He saw his father negotiate several times with his bannermen, even with representatives of the Free Cities, but he never took an active part in these negotiations. Every time, he was only there to watch. This time, however, he would have to negotiate himself, and almost without help. The meeting was his decision, and only his decision. If it was a failure, it would be his failure, and only his failure, but he had no other choice. He saw no other option.

The angry stares Grey Worm sent him didn’t help to soothe his nerves. The Commander of the Unsullied had disapproved at the second Trystane explained his plan. He couldn’t really blame the eunuch. Not since he knew what the masters of Astapor did to him in his youth, but the survival of Meereen was at stake. They had to do it. He only hoped Grey Worm wouldn’t do something irreparable. After all, he commanded the Unsullied. If he was to order them to kill the emissaries, there would be nothing Trystane could do about it.

They heard footsteps approaching. Trystane tensed. He took a gulp of wine and stood up. They came into the room, all three of them. A young and comely girl, small of frame, with brown hair, certainly a slave they brought with them considering the collar she wore, came forth to introduce them.

“Now come the noble Yezzan zo Qaggaz, representative of the Good Masters, emissary of the great city of Astapor, master of men and speaker to savages, and the noble Razdal mo Eraz of that ancient and honorable house, representative of the Wise Masters, emissary of the great city of Yunkai, master of men and speaker to savages, and the noble Belicho Paenymion of that ancient and honorable house, descendant of Paenymio the Warrior, triarch and emissary of the great city of Volantis and its masters, master of men and speaker to savages.”
So here they were, the representatives of the three powerful cities in war with Meereen. The fact that one of them represented the city of Astapor when Grey Worm was present didn’t make him feel any better about the outcome of this reunion. They looked at Trystane with disdain. They were all older than him. Trystane tried to look sure of himself and in self-control of the situation, though he didn’t quite feel this was the case. How to deal with slavers?

“Welcome to Meereen,” he said as a welcoming. They kept looking at him with disgust. “I am…”

“You stand before Trystane of the House Martell, son of Doran Martell and Mellario of Norvos, heir to Sunspear and Prince of Dorne, ruler of Meereen.” A young woman with green eyes, long brown hair falling before her shoulders and wearing a heavy red gown came out of darkness behind the three masters who almost jumped at her voice. They turned their back to Trystane to look at Lady Kinvara. “And you also stand before Torgu Nudho, Commander of the Unsullied and loyal servant to Daenerys Stormborn, the First of Her Name, the Unburnt, Queen of Meereen, Queen of the Andals and the First Men and the Rhoynar, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, the Breaker of Chains, the Mother of Dragons.”

She had an easy and satisfied smile on her lips. “Good to see you again, Belicho Paenymion,” she added to the triarch of Volantis.

“What are you doing here?”

Trystane couldn’t see the face of the Volantenese master, but he could perceive anger, and also fear, in his voice. The High Priestess of the Red Temple of Volantis surely knew him. They came from the same city after all. Lady Kinvara kept smiling.

“What I always do,” she replied. “Serving my lord, and thus, serving the one who was promised by our lord.”

She walked past them and came to sit next to Trystane. No one else dared to do anything. Trystane hadn’t been sure if it was a good idea to ask the High Priestess to attend these negotiations, but right now he was glad she was here. The masters were confused, especially the one from Volantis.

“This the Lady Kinvara, High Priestess of the Red Temple of Volantis, the Flame of Truth, the Light of Wisdom, the First Servant of the Lord of Light. Would you take place, my lords?” Trystane suggested them. After some hesitation, the three men sat on two cushioned benches to his right. Lady Kinvara was between him and them. Grey Worm was the only one to remain standing. The slave had already left.

“We came here to meet the queen,” said the emissary of Yunkai, “and instead we’re greeted by a priestess and a foreigner.”

“My mother was of the city of Norvos, and my ancestors came from the Rhoyne. And I have many other noble people from Essos among my ancestors. I believe we can say that I am Essossi enough to not be considered a stranger.”

“You pretend to be one of us?” Yezzan mocked. “You must be more foolish than we thought.”

“Less than Kraznys mo Nakloz when he thought he could own a dragon,” replied Lady Kinvara. “I suppose he realized the fool he was when the dragon he bought burned him. I wonder how much time you will need to realize you can’t own people more than you can own dragons.”

The three emissaries didn’t like the comment. Trystane decided to intervene. “Let’s make this simple. We are at war, but we cannot afford war. Astapor lies in ruins, Yunkai’s forces were destroyed or
turned against her when it was taken, and those you have now are unreliable. As for Volantis, you
don’t have the means to keep control over Slaver’s Bay, and your own slaves are not far from
rebellion. I asked you to come here so we may make peace, because war will only result in the ruin
of Slaver’s Bay. So, tell me. What do you want against peace?”

“We want you to leave Slaver’s Bay. Take your dragons and your mercenaries and go,” said the
triarch. He was eyeing Lady Kinvara who looked at the masters with hard eyes.

“That’s all? Very well, we will.” That took the emissaries by surprise. They looked at each other,
then to him. Grey Worm looked at him with surprise, but also hatred. “Queen Daenerys never had
the intention to stay in Meereen forever. Her path takes her westward.”

“When we last met, I offered her ships so she could return to Westeros where she belongs. She
refused them,” said the representative of Yunkai.

“She refused them because hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children still lived in chains,”
replied Lady Kinvara on a hard tone.

“As they have since the dawn of time,” retorted the master.

“Not anymore.” That was the first time Grey Worm said a word since the envoys arrived.

“You think you’re a free man now? You still follow orders,” said Yezzan with disdain. “Just because
your master has silver hair and tits doesn’t mean she’s not a master.”

“Torgo Nudho chose to follow Daenerys Stormborn,” countered the High Priestess. “Just like all the
Unsullied, he was given a choice when they were freed. Follow Daenerys Stormborn, or go away
where they wanted. They all chose to follow her. They weren’t bought. Daenerys Stormborn is their
queen, not their master, and they chose her to be their queen. That’s the great difference between a
slave and a free man. A slave is bought and doesn’t choose who he follows. A free man chooses
who he follows. Did you give the choice to your slaves to serve you when you bought them, or
when you inherited them?”

“She is a master nonetheless,” replied the Yunkaii envoy. “A foreign master.”

“Tell me, Yezzan zo Qaggaz, Razdal mo Eraz and Belicho Paenymion, do you have servants?”
asked Trystane.

“Of course, we have,” replied the triarch. “Who do you take us for? We are not savages. We are
noble people.”

“And I suppose they clean your house, prepare your food, make your bed, prepare your baths,
entertain you, serve you at table, pour your wine, buy whatever you need, plow your fields, and
almost make all physical work there is. And all of them are slaves?”

“They are. As you can see, slavery is necessary to the economy of Slaver’s Bay.”

“You also have several slaves who share your bed at night,” pointed out Kinvara, still looking at the
triarch. Fear was plain into his eyes.

“We have the same in Westeros,” said Trystane. “We have servants to clean our houses, prepare our
food, make our bed, prepare our baths, entertain us, serve us at table, pour our wine, buy whatever
we need, plow our fields, work in our mines and almost make all physical work there is. However,
none of them are slaves. Slavery has never existed in Westeros, for thousands of years. My family is
richer that the three of you combined and I live better than you. Has slavery really worked out in
your interest? When I compare Slaver’s Bay to Dorne, I would say no.”

“Slavery is the way of our world,” said Yezzan, not allowing place to any debate. Still, Trystane continued.

“You don’t need slaves to have servants, to be rich or to live well. There have always been people who were rich and powerful and others who were poor and without power. We’re not asking to give up your power and your riches. We’re only asking you to stop selling human beings like cattle. That’s the only thing the queen is asking from you. Just do it, and she will leave, just like you asked. And then you will be free to make money, to drink, and to enjoy life like before. The only difference is that the people serving you will no longer be slaves.”

Trystane allowed a silence to follow. The masters said nothing, but he wasn’t sure he persuaded them. He resumed. “However, our queen recognizes that she erred. Slavery was abolished without any system to replace it. That was a mistake, but there is no way to go back in time. The slaves want freedom, and our queen will do everything to give it to them. There is nothing you can do about it. She won’t leave Slaver’s Bay as long as slavery will exist. Still, she is ready to soften the blow with your help. Here is her proposal. Slavery will never return to Meereen. No man, woman or child living in Meereen or on its territory will ever be sold or bought, and there will be no activity linked to slavery in any way allowed here. As for the other cities of Slaver’s Bay, they will be given time to adjust to the new order.”

“What does that mean?” asked the representative of Astapor.

“Instead of abolishing slavery overnight, Astapor and Yunkai will have five years to end the practice.” A heavy silence followed. The Lady Kinvara was silent, but Trystane knew she didn’t approve entirely. He had spoken to her about his plan before, and she wasn’t very enthused by it. Still, she had accepted to help him with the masters. As for Grey Worm, he was obviously disapproving. The masters didn’t seem to know what to think about it. “Slaveholders can ask for compensation for their losses, of course. As soon as slavery will be ended, the queen will leave Slaver’s Bay, to never come back. In exchange, you will cut off your support to the Sons of the Harpy.”

“We do not support the Sons of the Harpy,” said Yezzan.

“You will cut it off,” retorted Trystane, trying to look decisive. “This term is not negotiable. Of course, you can choose to end slavery before the end of the five years. If you really want the queen to leave Slaver’s Bay as soon as possible, then you should consider this option. Unless you want to risk the ruin of all Slaver’s Bay by attacking Meereen. Such a war would kill countless slaves. It would be a shame if you preserved slavery, but that Slaver’s Bay lied in ruins, without any slave to rebuild it afterwards.” Trystane stood up. “I will let you discuss about it. I expect an answer before nightfall.”

Lady Kinvara stood up as well. “You would be better to accept. You will not receive a better offer. If you were to refuse, remember that slaves want their freedom now, and they will want it for the next hundreds of years to come. If you do not give them what they want now, they will take it with their own means. And they will take much more afterwards. You won’t remain rich if the slaves rebel against you and kill you in your beds. The Sons of the Harpy are not the only ones who can hide into darkness, waiting for the right moment to strike. Look at your sins, masters. The night is dark and full of terror.”

Trystane left with the High Priestess on her words, and Grey Worm followed them. Bhakaz was waiting for them not far away. “There are men asking for an audience with the rulers of Meereen,” he told them.
Trystane wondered what they wanted. He just came out of a delicate discussion with slavers, and he didn’t have a single moment to rest. Still, he had to receive these people. How would his authority hold if he didn’t receive petitioners? Resigned, he walked to the audience chamber.

The people waiting for him were about half a dozen, and they were in circle, discussing among themselves when he arrived. Some of them talked quite loudly for people who tried to whisper. They weren’t happy. Exactly what Trystane needed. Grey Worm and Kinvara both followed him. Even though she wasn’t a member of the government, Trystane couldn’t really send the High Priestess away after all the help she provided. He knew more than ever about the situation in the streets and the feelings of the people thanks to her and the other Red Priests, and she just helped him to negotiate with the slavers. Their fear of the Red Priests and their influence on the people could convince them to accept the terms. As for Grey Worm, he was Commander of the Unsullied, and he might be helpful if these petitioners proved difficult.

“Forgive me, my friends,” Trystane articulated with difficulty. He really needed to improve his Valyrian, but with all the problems of the city, he had no time to do so. “It wasn’t our intent to make you wait.”

Trystane spoke slowly, trying to choose the right words and to spell them well enough to be understood.

“We speak the Common Tongue,” said one of them.

“Thank you,” said Trystane. He almost sighed in relief, but he hid it. His father always told him to not let people you spoke with see your emotions and your weaknesses, except the ones you wanted them to see. It wouldn’t do to reinforce their beliefs that he couldn’t speak their language.

“You met with the slavers today,” added the elder of the group, an old man with wrinkles and a bald head.

“We did,” confirmed Trystane. He had tried to make the arrival and the presence of the ambassadors as discreet as possible, but he supposed it was a foolish hope to expect they could get entirely unnoticed.

“Our brothers and sisters died fighting this scum,” a younger one, who had said they spoke the language of Westeros, almost spat. “Now you invite them to our city and drink wine with them.”

Trystane could feel Grey Worm’s eyes on him, and he knew the Unsullied approved these men. “I invited them, it’s true. To negotiate.”

“Negotiate? Negotiate with the men who tore us from our mothers’ arms and sold us at auction like cattle?!”

“Yes, I did. We did. I, Torgu Nudho, and the High Priestess Kinvara, we discussed with them to make peace. Because the only alternative to peace is war, and if we were to lose this war, then the masters would put you back into chains, and you would have lost the freedom you fought so hard for.”

“You are a stranger here,” the young man said. He and the old one seemed to be the ones speaking for their group, and probably for many other citizens of Meereen. “So why do you represent Meereen in these talks with our enemies?”

“Because I was chosen by the closest advisors of the queen to rule in her stead until she returned…”

“When does she return?” asked the old speaker.
“Soon. You have my word.” For how worthy it was. Trystane had no idea when Daenerys Targaryen would come back, but he hoped, just like these men, that she would return soon. Very soon. If she didn’t, it would be the end for Meereen, and the end for Dorne as well.

“We don’t know you. We don’t trust you,” said vehemently the young speaker. “We know Torgo Nudho. We fight with him against the masters. We trust him.”

“This is why I made him participate to these negotiations. Because you trust him, because the queen trusts him, and because he chose me to rule Meereen while she is away.”

The young man looked queerly at Grey Worm. He spoke to him in Valyrian. “Is it true, Grey Worm? You want to drink wine with these men? The men who would put us back into chains the moment we gave them the chance? You chose this foreigner to make peace with them?”

Trystane turned to Grey Worm, wondering what he would answer. Maybe the Commander of the Unsullied would dismiss him. Well, there was nothing Trystane could do about it. Peace was the only way out he could find, and if Grey Worm didn’t agree with him, then it would make no more difference than if he hadn’t made peace. The Unsullied took his time to answer. He looked to Trystane, then to the former slaves. He fought with them. To him, Trystane was a stranger as well. He supposed his time as ruler of Meereen would be over soon. Finally, the answer came.

“I don’t want to drink wine with these men, and I didn’t. And I didn’t choose this man to make peace with the slavers.” The time had come. Maybe Trystane would be more at his rightful place in the dungeons of the Pyramid. At least, he wouldn’t see the ruin of Dorne, and maybe he would join Myrcella. “However, I am a soldier, not a politician. I chose this man to rule Meereen because he has family ties with our queen, and because he has more experience than everyone else at ruling. He negotiated with the masters because he thought we could get a just peace with them, and because he thought that was the best way for Meereen. If he thinks so, then I think we should take this peace.”

That wasn’t something Trystane expected. He looked surprised to Grey Worm, who only looked back with hard eyes. He didn’t seem to support Trystane with eagerness, and the men before them didn’t look better.

“High Priestess,” said another man behind with brown hair and beard, “you know these men. You know what they are capable of. You told us we had to choose between freedom or slavery, fighting or surrendering, life or death. How can we be free if we don’t fight the slavers?”

This one had the look of a believer of R’hllor. He would certainly only listen to a Red Priest. Trystane turned to look at Kinvara. She didn’t look back at him, and kept looking at these men with an expression of compassion. She walked down the steps, leaving Trystane and Grey Worm at the top, and came to the level of these men. Her voice was soft and melodious when she spoke.

“You are right. Our choice is between freedom and life on one side, and slavery and death on the other side. But the war for freedom has just begun. It will last for years, maybe more than years. In a war long like this one, there are truces, times when we stop to fight to mend our wounds so we can fight again later. Right now, we cannot hope to maintain slavery out of Meereen while taking its roots out of Astapor and Yunkai at the same time. For now, we must accept to lay down our weapons, but we must keep ready to take them back at any time. The slavers were offered terms that forced them to stop supporting the Sons of the Harpy and to end slavery within a few years. The Lord of Light sent Daenerys Stormborn to end slavery, not to kill all the slavers. If they don’t respect their engagements, then they will burn.” She put a hand on the shoulder of the man who asked her the question she just answered. “We’re not asking you to trust the masters. We’re asking you to trust our Lord and the one he sent to free you. Have faith. The Lord of Light watches over us.”
Her words seemed to have a magical effect. Trystane was happier than ever that she was here. He didn’t know what he would do without her.

Most of the men left in better spirit than when they arrived. Not that they were happy, but most of them were less angry than before, resigned if not joyful. Trystane sighed in relief for good this time. He didn’t try to hide it. He walked down the steps and arrived at Kinvara’s level.

“Thank you,” he told her. She dipped her head to acknowledge his thanks, though she didn’t smile. She wasn’t happy either. He turned to Grey Worm who had followed him down. His expression wasn’t better. “Thank you, Grey Worm. I know it wasn’t easy…”

“Do not use me for your lies,” he said with the hard, stern tone he always used.

“I didn’t lie, but these men respect you.”

“They respect me because they know who I am. They know I am loyal.”

“I know you are. I never doubted it.” To think Grey Worm wasn’t loyal seemed to Trystane to be as foolish as thinking that Hotah was a traitor.

“I am loyal to my queen, not you.” That was no surprise either. Hotah was loyal to his father, and no one else. He wouldn’t even allow Trystane to see his father alone unless Prince Doran gave him the order. “If you betray her work, you are my enemy.”

“I am trying to save her city. Is that betrayal to you?” Trystane was tired. He wished he didn’t have to face Grey Worm after facing both masters and former slaves.

“Daenerys Stormborn swore to end slavery in Slaver’s Bay, and you allowed the slavers to keep slavery,” pointed out the High Priestess. She didn’t say it with anger. Her voice sounded more sorry than furious.

“Only for some time.”

“Five years is a very long time for slaves.”

Trystane sighed again. “Look, twenty years ago, my father was Prince of Dorne when half the Seven Kingdoms rebelled against his father-in-law, our queen’s father. He fought for him, sent thousands of his people to war, and almost all of them died. Their widows fell into misery, thousands of children became orphans. His sister, my aunt, was butchered along with her children, our queen’s nephew and niece. He could have kept fighting against the usurper, but he would have lost, and many more people would have died. He couldn’t end war and Robert Baratheon at the same time. He had to choose between two evils. I did the same.”

“You are wrong to trust these men,” said Grey Worm with more life, anger piercing through his voice this time.

“I don’t trust the masters. I trust their self-interest. We can trust they will respect the deal if they’re convinced that working with us is in their self-interest.” The Lannisters, the Baratheons, the Starks, the Tullys and the Arryns had considered it was in their interest to work with his father when he made peace with them, so why not the masters? They were no worse than Tywin Lannister or Robert Baratheon.

“You don’t know them. You don’t understand them. We are not human in their eyes. They look at me and see a weapon. They look at these men we just saw and they see tools. They look at her and see a whore.” He said the last sentence while pointing the High Priestess.
“They look at me and see a foreigner. They underestimate us.” The Lannisters also underestimated his father. “This is their weakness, and I’m going to use it to our advantage.”

“You will not use them. They will use you. That is what they do.”

Grey Worm almost left in a storm, as much as his way to walk allowed it, fury visible from head to toe. Trystane remained there silent for a time. He wondered how this man managed to speak up for him a few minutes ago. Would he be that loyal the next time?

“He’s not wrong.” Trystane realized Lady Kinvara was still here, looking at him with an expression that looked like pity. “They will try to use you.”

Despite her sweet voice, Trystane only grew more exasperated. “I need some fresh air.”

He walked past her to the exit of the Great Pyramid. He wanted to curse it. He wanted to curse this city, its people, Grey Worm, this priestess, the masters, the queen he was supposed to marry, his father, Ellaria, Obara, Tyene, Nymeria… Why couldn’t he be in the Water Gardens, Myrcella still alive, preparing their wedding?

He walked for a long time, trying to go as far as he could from this Pyramid where he spent most of his days. The way he took was a private path taken only by the people living in the Great Pyramid, so he met no one. The sun wasn’t as burning as it was the day he arrived, and there even was some wind. He walked on the battlements now. Unsullied guarded it, but they paid no attention to him, or if they did, they didn’t show it. He stopped at a place where he was as far as he could from any man. He leaned on the bulwark, his arms pressed on it, and looked far into the horizon. There was only sand to be seen, but from where he stood, where he didn’t burn alive, it wasn’t ugly. The view had its charm. He remembered his uncle Oberyn had visited Meereen. He tried to remember what he told him of the city, but he couldn’t. He thought his uncle found the city without interest. Would Myrcella have liked it? If only she was there. She would find the right things to say to comfort him, and she may help him to solve all the problems he faced. But then, if she was alive, he would know all the same they couldn’t marry, because she was… No, that’s not true. She wasn’t.

“You must forgive Grey Worm,” a sweet voice said behind him. For a short time, he hoped this was Myrcella, but then he realized to who it belonged. She probably followed him. “For him, the war against slavery is personal.”

“I’m sure it is personal for many people,” said Trystane, peevish.

“Do you know Grey Worm loved someone?”

He turned to face the High Priestess. “What?”

“Have you ever heard of Missandei of Naath?”

That name didn’t ring a bell for Trystane at first, and then he remembered something Malcolm Branfield told him when he arrived. “Was she the queen’s scribe?”

“She was,” confirmed Kinvara. “Grey Worm was in love with her, and she loved him. She died when the Sons of the Harpy attacked in Daznak’s Pit. She was killed by the slavers.”

Trystane tried to understand. He had always seen Grey Worm so much like Hotah that the thought of him being in love, furthermore when he was castrated, looked foreign like Asshai to him. “I didn’t know.”

“You are not the only one to seek vengeance, Trystane of House Martell. You’re not the only one
who lost someone you loved."

Her voice wasn’t entirely without scorn, or at least there was reproach in it. Trystane turned away. “I
didn’t know it.” He looked at the desert. Lady Kinvara joined him at this side.

“There are hundreds of thousand people in this city, and they won’t give up their freedom.”

“I’m trying to save their freedom.”

“I know, but don’t expect the slavers to end slavery in five years like you asked them.”

“They have everything to lose from a war,” he argued.

“And everything to gain, as well. How long have you been in Meereen?” she asked.

“Three or four months.”

“Grey Worm is right when he says you don’t know the masters. They have a lot to lose if they end
slavery. Many of these men you spoke with made their fortunes in slave trading, and they don’t see
the slaves as humans. For them, we are objects, tools, weapons, garbage when we are old. They are
attached to slavery as much as your family is attached to its titles.”

“So you disagree with what I did?”

She took some time to answer. “I am no politician like you or your father, I am no soldier like Grey
Worm, but I know people, and I know what the people think. I know what they feel. They were
born as slaves, and they were told ever since their birth that they would die as slaves. The lucky ones
have good masters, but even then they are someone else’s property. Until recently, they thought they
would remain slaves for the rest of their lives, but now that they tasted freedom and saw their masters
thrown at their feet, they won’t return to their previous life. They will fight for this freedom they
earned. Before Daenerys Stormborn came, you were born a slave and you died a slave. You were
captured and reduced to slavery, and you were condemned to spend the rest of your life into slavery.
Your children were condemned to slavery before they were even born. Very few had the chance to
escape it. Some masters released their slaves when they died, especially if they loved these slaves or
when they made them do a lot of money. Very few managed to buy their freedom from their masters.
Some masters freed a man or a woman they were particularly fond of while they still lived, or a few
were bought by some good person who pitied them, but most of them never had this luck. They
remain slaves all their life.”

“They are fishermen, going into the sea by dawn and returning by dusk. They leave empty handed,
and when they return, their boat full of their catches, all they worked to get during the day is taken
away from them by the men owning them, and they are left with the remains of the most undesirable
fishes. They are builders, working day and night on sites, climbing ladders, lifting heavy charges
with their arms, skinning the flesh off their hands with ropes, covered by dust. Sometimes they fall
from the scaffolds, they die if they’re lucky enough, and when they’re not, they end crippled, unable
to walk. At this point, their master will kill them if he is merciful, but if the gods are not good to
them, the master just abandons them in the streets, and they end as beggars, ignored by everyone,
tossed away, hit, despised, useless to anybody. They are dung shovelers, spending all their days
cleaning the streets from all the trash that accumulates in the day, or washing latrines and waste sites,
smelling so much of the stench they lose all scent they could have, covered by shit all the time,
smelling it, living in it. Some work to make fabrics and dye them, and this poison their lungs. And if
they receive some of the substance in their eyes, then they remain blind forever, and become beggars
as well. The less fortunate become whores. Their masters might dress them in fine clothes and they
may look happy, but they only act to look happy for the customers. If they don’t, they get whipped.
They are forced to take so much moon tea that in the end they can’t hope to ever have any children. They are slapped, hit, beaten, raped, mistreated and degraded in the most horrible ways there are, and in the end, they are only an empty shell of who they were before, pleasing customers by habit because they don’t know what else to do. And once they’re too old to please anyone, their masters send them to perform some other work even worse than the one they did before. There is no way for them to escape this… unless some good soul comes to save them.”

Trystane listened to everything she said. Then she stayed silent. It remained like that for some time.

“Were you a slave, my lady?”

She had been looking at the horizon as she spoke of the fate of the slaves, but now she turned to him. “I am no lady, but you should know that most of the members of my order are former slaves. Before we served masters, but when the Red Temple buys us, we all become servants of R’hhlor. Some join the Fiery Hand, one thousand warriors, no more no less, sworn to defend the Temple, when they are men. Some women become whores working for the Red Temple, sworn to celebrate the joining of man and woman, two parts of a greater whole. My fate was to be called for priesthood. I trained in the Red Temple and became a priestess, and when the High Priest Benerro died two years ago, I was named to replace him. He saw the victory of Daenerys Stormborn in the flames. He saw her taking Astapor, Yunkai, Meereen, and more. He began to preach she was coming long before the world was aware of her existence, when the red comet appeared in the sky. I started preaching as well. He saw a young woman with silver hair on the back of a dragon, and I saw one too. The woman the Lord of Light told us to help. The woman he told me to help.”

Trystane wasn’t really sure about what she was all talking about. Sometimes she talked very clearly, and other times she was more mysterious than everyone else he ever met. She smiled sweetly in his direction. “You don’t understand. Don’t worry. Even the wisest of my order have difficulties to know what our Lord wants of us, but we all try to serve the best we can, and the Lord wants us to serve Daenerys Stormborn. So don’t worry if you don’t understand everything I say. We are allies. As long as you serve the queen, you have nothing to fear from me.”

She walked away, her red robes brushing the cobblestones, her hair half falling on her back. Trystane watched her go until she turned a corner and disappeared. He was all alone again. He looked again at the sandy plains below him, then at the sky. Daenerys Targaryen had left on the back of a dragon. Where was she now?

Chapter End Notes

Trystane is taking the same strategy that Tyrion took, mostly, but I believe it is likely that a son of Doran Martell would try to make peace with the slavers.

Kinvara only appeared in a single episode in Season 6, and we have no proof that she will ever appear again in the next seasons, but I decided to expand her character. For now, she is taking Varys’s place as Master of Whisperers in Meereen, and she may do more in the future.

Please review.

Next chapter: the aftermath of Kevan's death
We get to know the consequences of Kevan's assassination. Expect events to progress quickly in King's Landing from now on. Margaery can really only count on herself now. All those who found that things were going too slowly, tell yourself this is the end of it.

Margaery looked at the result in the Myrish glass. Sera had done combing her hair. After some musing, she decided she was satisfied with the outcome.

“You may leave, Sera,” Margaery told her.

Her friend left and Margaery found herself alone. She had her personal room for changing, apart from the common rooms she shared with Tommen. The queen looked at herself in the glass. She might be the queen, but right now her position was in danger.

Ser Kevan Lannister had been assassinated last week. Margaery couldn’t get the horror of the scene out of her head. The Hand of the King and the Grand Maester, both killed inside the Red Keep. Worse, the killer hadn’t been found yet. He, or they if there were more than one, managed to escape. They had left no trace behind them, nothing except a short message stating that the queen sends her regards. What could this mean? Margaery was the queen. She suspected a plot to accuse her, and she knew someone who could have done this. Cersei Lannister. She had tried to kill her brother on several occasions, and not in very discreet ways. If she could try to murder her own brother, what could stop her from doing the same with an uncle?

Still, if Cersei was behind this, it didn’t explain the mysterious disappearance of Nymeria Sand during that fateful night. It didn’t explain either how Lord Varys, the Master of Whisperers, vanished two days later. The Spider had been seen during the day that had followed the murder, obeying Lord Tarly’s and Tommen’s orders, but the next day, there had been no trace left of him. This couldn’t be a coincidence. Were they involved in the murders? Margaery could imagine a Sand Snake killing two people without problem. Oberyn Martell had the reputation of being bloodthirsty, and his daughters were rumored to be no different. They had a hand in this, there was no doubt about it. And with Myrcella’s death… Could Cersei have cooperated with Nymeria Sand and Varys? Margaery didn’t think it very likely. Varys had betrayed Cersei at Lord Tyrion’s trial, and she believed the Martells had killed her daughter. With the behaviour Cersei showed at the exposure of Myrcella’s body, no one could believe she would work with Oberyn Martell’s daughter. It was more likely that she would try to murder the Sand Snake instead, as retaliation for Princess Myrcella’s death. Still, the message looked as if it was made to accuse Margaery, and this was Cersei’s style. She couldn’t take any chance. Cersei had to leave King’s Landing, and the sooner the better.

She left her changing room and entered the large living room where Tommen sat alone, his head between his shoulders. He had lost a sister, and now a granduncle in a very horrible way. Margaery
was also disgusted, even revolted, by the way Ser Kevan had been killed. The knight wasn’t an evil man. Margaery had managed to learn a little from him about his wife and their children while they worked together. She had written herself to Lady Dorna, to tell her the news and give her sympathies. Margaery regretted that the young Janei would never know her father. She regretted even more the loss of her best ally in King’s Landing. Ser Kevan was the one who ruled the Seven Kingdoms, and by making an alliance with him, Margaery had managed to neutralize the Sparrows and have a better hold on Tommen. Now that he was dead, everything could be lost. Cersei was staying in the capital longer than she should have. Tommen didn’t have the force to order her to leave, and Margaery feared Cersei wouldn’t leave even if her son gave her the order. It was a chance that Lord Tarly was here.

She approached her husband and laid a hand on his shoulder. He didn’t raise his head to look at her. He kept staring at the badge of the Hand he held, playing with it. She remembered how covered in blood it was when they retrieved it from Ser Kevan’s body. The savagery of the way in which he was killed… Margaery was pitying the king, but he ought to try to get over it and act as the king he was supposed to be. Right now, they didn’t need the little boy who loved his cats and looked at them playing. They needed the king.

“The small council will begin soon, my love,” she said, trying to bring his attention to her.

He kept turning and returning the badge, then nodded lightly. “Yes, yes. The small council.” His voice sounded far away.

Joffrey had been cruel and stupid. Tommen wasn’t cruel, but he could compete with his brother’s stupidity. A kind fool could be as dangerous as a cruel fool. “You know what you have to do?”

He nodded again, absently. His mind wasn’t present. It was somewhere else.

“We should go now, my love,” she said.

She patted his shoulder, encouraging him. Since he hesitated, she put her arm under his own and almost lifted him. She had to be Tommen’s mother when she was his wife. They walked to the door, Tommen still looking at the golden pin.

“You know, Mother paid me a visit.” Margaery had her hand on the handle and was about to turn it, but she stopped at the words Tommen just said.

“When?” Cersei wasn’t supposed to see Tommen when he was alone, but with Ser Kevan dead and the castle in such disarray, she probably found a chance to see her son.

“Yesterday. She wanted to talk. She told me we had to stick together, all our family. That people would try to separate us.” He looked at her. “Do you think people will try to separate us? You and me?”

He looked at her, expecting an answer. She smiled sadly. “Maybe.” She laid a hand on his. “But I won’t let them do.” Not even Cersei. Tommen smiled in return. “Did your mother tell you anything else?”

“Well, yes. She said that Uncle Jaime is very good and that… he might make a good Hand of the King. What do you think of it?”

Cersei hadn’t lost time. Her uncle was dead, and she already tried to make her brother Hand of the King. “We discussed about it, Tommen. Lord Randyll Tarly is the best choice for being your Hand.”

“But he’s already Master of Laws. Wouldn’t it be too much work for him?”
“Ser Kevan acted as Hand and Master of Laws for some time. Lord Tarly can do the same until we find a replacement.” She looked into Tommen’s eyes. “My love, we’re going to be at war soon. It will come to us, if we don’t go to it. Randyll Tarly is the best military commander in all the Seven Kingdoms. Your father was the greatest warrior of all the Seven Kingdoms, and Lord Tarly is the only one who ever defeated him. When the time comes to fight Dorne, you will need a Hand with a strong experience of war and battle command. I don’t wish to insult Ser Jaime, but the last time he commanded an army, he was defeated and made prisoner. If it wasn’t for the secret pact Lord Tyrion made with Lady Catelyn Stark, he would be dead right now. Randyll Tarly is the best choice.”

Tommen nodded, then looked at the pin again, and nodded once more. “Yes, you’re right. Randyll Tarly is the best choice.” She would have to make sure that Cersei didn’t talk to him again before the meeting of the small council, or else he might change his mind again. “Are you sure we can’t call Tyrion back? He did well when he was Hand for Joffrey. I would be dead without him. He’s the one who defeated Stannis. He burned his fleet, and he got injured while fighting. We should ask him to come back. He dealt with the Martells to arrange Myrcella’s betrothal. He knows them better than many people, surely.”

Tommen may be less of a fool than Joffrey was. “Your uncle is in the North right now, Tommen. He must deal with the Boltons and the houses who rebelled against you and Sansa, and give her back her home. We cannot call him back. We must let him deal with the North. When it’s over, maybe you can ask him. Now, let’s go to the meeting. We cannot be late.”

As they travelled through the corridors, they met several guards from House Tarly, House Tyrell and House Lannister. Lord Tarly had handled things very well after Ser Kevan’s death, reorganizing the protection of the Red Keep without recruiting more men. Tommen and Margaery both had four guards to accompany them wherever they went, and since they were together, eight men encircled them as they walked to the small council meeting.

When they arrived, Ser Harys Swyft, the Master of Coin, Ser Jaime Lannister, the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, and Cersei, the Dowager Queen, were already there. Margaery wasn’t surprised that Cersei had managed to get there, though she wished she hadn’t. The Queen Mother wanted to take part in the politics of the Realm again, and Margaery couldn’t allow it.

“I’m surprised to see you here, your Grace,” she said to her mother-in-law.

“I’m even more surprised to see you here,” Cersei retorted, no kindness in her voice.

“I am the queen, your Grace. It is my duty to stand by my husband and to support him in his duties.” She sat to Tommen’s left, as she always did. Cersei sat on his right, face to face with her.

“Hi, Mother. I’m glad to see you,” Tommen said.

“Me too, my boy. I’ll always be there for you,” Cersei replied, a softer expression on her face. She had to go, and quickly.

“I was wondering when you would leave, your Grace,” Margaery said.

“Leave? What’s telling you that I’m going to leave?”

“You came for Myrcella’s funerals, your Grace, and now the funerals are over. I believe people would expect you to go back to Stokeworth very soon.”

“I’m not going back to Stokeworth.”

“You’re not?” asked Tommen, curious.
“No, I won’t. I will stay with you, my son. We won’t be separated as we were from Myrcella. I won’t let that happen again.”

“I’m afraid the decision is not yours to take, your Grace.” Lord Randyll Tarly had come in, walking decisively to the table. “And I’m afraid this small council meeting is no place for you.” He stood next to Cersei, which was very impressive since Randyll Tarly was quite a tall man, and his martial expression and standing made him look even taller.

“I am the queen,” Cersei said, as if that broke any argument.

“You are the Queen Mother, nothing more. Queen Margaery has her place here, since his Grace gave her a seat on the council, but you have none. The Hand of the King thought the same.”

“My uncle is dead, killed by a queen who sent her regards.” She stared at Margaery with fury, and Margaery decided to counter.

“I’m not the only one to call herself queen in this room, Cersei.”

The Queen Mother didn’t like to be called by her name instead of her title. “Will you please leave, your Grace?” said Lord Tarly. “Or do I have to call guards inside to escort you?”

“Tommen, she’s your mother,” intervened Ser Jaime. “Let her be there. We have very important matters to take care of, all together.”

“We could allow the Queen Mother to stay. After all, she ruled for some time under King Joffrey, in times of war. She has some experience that we could use,” suggested Ser Harys Swyft.

“Indeed,” confirmed Cersei. “I was member of the small council for more time than anyone else here.”

“With all respect, your Grace,” began Lord Tarly, speaking to Tommen, “I have no wish to insult the Queen Mother, but her experience at ruling is quite limited, and doesn’t speak well of her. During the time she ruled, the Warden of the North was beheaded despite being given the insurance he would live, four kingdoms and the Iron Islands rebelled against your brother’s rule, and the capital fell into chaos. The victories that were gained later in the war were in no way her doing. It was me, Lord Tyrell, Lord Tywin and Lord Tyrion who won the battles in the Stormlands, the Riverlands and here at King’s Landing. Queen Cersei’s decisions mostly put in danger the whole Realm, and if it wasn’t for her brother and her father, she would be dead by now, and King Joffrey would have ended dead on the execution block, not in his wedding bed.” The memories of Joffrey’s death came back to Margaery. She didn’t enjoy to see him die, no matter the monster he was. “If we are to believe the Lady of Casterly Rock, your mother’s ruling was limited to beating whores and trying to kill members of her own family. Her place is not here. She only proved that a woman’s place is not on a war council.”

Tommen was looking at the impressive shape of the Lord of Horn Hill while Cersei fumed. She was the next one to speak. “This is not your decision to take, Lord Tarly. This is the king’s decision.” She looked at her son. “Are you going to send your mother away, my son?” She almost looked pleading.

Tommen looked down, but after some time he looked straight into his mother’s eyes. “Is it true what people say? Did you really try to kill Uncle Tyrion?”

Cersei remained silent. “It doesn’t matter. It’s the past. Only the future matters. We have more important matters to take care of.”

“You told me yesterday that we had to stick together, all the family. Why did you try to kill Tyrion
then? I would name him Hand of the King if he was there. Isn’t he a member of our family?’’

Cersei’s face showed a neutral expression that betrayed her anger and her surprise of being questioned by her son. She hated her little brother, that was obvious. “All I did, I did it to protect you, my son. I always only tried to protect you, and your sister, and your brother.”

“Then why didn’t you protect us from Joffrey?”

Cersei was stunned. “What? What are you talking about?”

“He mistreated me. And Myrcella too. He pinched us, he slapped us, he even kicked us sometimes. He threatened to kill my cats and mix their entrails to my food, so I wouldn’t realize I would eat them. He killed one to see the kittens inside and showed them to Father, and Father hit him. Joffrey mistreated me and Myrcella all the time, and you never did anything to protect us.”

“This is ridiculous. Joffrey would never have done that.” If Cersei really believed what she said, then she was an utter fool and she knew nothing of her children.

“He did. Uncle Tyrion was the only one to protect us from him. All the times he slapped Joffrey, it was because he mistreated us, me and Myrcella. You never did anything. You let Joffrey do as he wished. You never stopped him from beating Sansa either. You let him do. Sansa was kind, and you let Joffrey mistreat her just like he mistreated me and Myrcella.” Tommen was close to tears. Cersei couldn’t divert her eyes from him. “I love you, Mother, but I want you to leave. I want you out.”

Tommen buried his face in arms. What a pitiful show he offered to the small council. He was only a boy. He was never meant to be king, no more than Joffrey. Without good advisors, he was lost, and with his mother near him, he was lost as well. Margaery looked at Cersei with hard eyes. “Your Grace, you should leave. The king wants you to leave.” She was angry at Cersei, for allowing her children to be mistreated by her eldest son, but she made herself look angrier than she really was, for the effect.

“Come on, Cersei. You should leave. This isn’t the good time for this.” Ser Jaime had left his seat and come to his sister’s side. He tried to encourage her to stand up with his arm under hers, but she refused.

“So, I am to be set aside? Sent away? When my daughter and my uncle have just been killed? When war is about to happen?” Cersei shouted.

“You have all our sympathies, your Grace, but your place isn’t here, and women have no part in wars. The gods made men to fight, and women to bear children. A woman’s war is in the birthing bed. Your wars are over,” declared Lord Tarly.

Fury flared in Cersei’s eyes again. She looked to Lord Tarly, then to Margaery, then to Ser Jaime, and finally to the Lord of Horn Hill again. “Very well.” She stood up. “You have my regards, Lord Tarly.” She turned to Margaery one last time. “You too, my dear.”

Her last words sent a chill along Margaery’s spine. The Queen Mother walked out, escorted by her brother, while Tommen kept crying in silence, his face still hidden by his arms. Margaery could sympathize with him, but that wasn’t the time for this. Lord Tarly had taken the seat Cersei left free, and he looked at Tommen, disapproving. Ser Harys Swyft looked as if he felt out of place. Margaery tried to revive Tommen, but finally it was Ser Jaime who helped the most when he came back. He approached Tommen and whispered in his ear.

“Be strong, Tommen. You are the king. Myrcella wouldn’t want you to be like this.”
Slowly, Tommen dried his tears and managed to regain some appearance of dignity. He tried to sit straight as much as he could. “Please forgive me, my lords. Shall we begin?”

“Yes, we have several matters to attend to,” said Lord Tarly, still judging Tommen with his voice.

“Yes, of course. First of all, I want you to know that I chose a new Hand, since Ser Kevan is dead.” Tommne looked at Lord Tarly, and handed him the badge. “Lord Randyll Tarly, I name you Hand of the King.”

The Lord of Horn Hill looked at it for a moment, then seized it and pinned it on his doublet without ceremony. “Thank you, your Grace.”

He didn’t look very honored by his new position. Still, he was a better choice than Ser Jaime, or Harys Swyft, or another of Cersei’s minions. Margaery looked around the table. Here was the small council. It had gotten much smaller. Ser Kevan and the Grand Maester were dead, Nymeria Sand and Lord Varys had disappeared. Ser Jaime could attend the meetings, as Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, though he never cared to take part to them before. Harys Swyft, whose daughter was Ser Kevan’s wife, was still Master of Coin, and now Randyll Tarly was Hand of the King and Master of Laws. Lord Redwyne was Master of Ships, but he was heading for the Iron Islands with his fleet as they spoke. They were only five to assist the meeting with Margaery and Tommen. Margaery should have been happy to see the Tyrells have greater control over the small council, but she wasn’t. Ser Kevan had been an ally, and without Lord Varys, they had no Master of Whisperers at all. Tommen’s rule was weakened, and so was Margaery’s. They had to re-establish the situation, and quickly.

Everyone was looking at Tommen, waiting for him to speak. The new Hand of the King was obviously growing impatient. Margaery decided she had to speak. “I think we should begin by naming new members on the small council. We need a new Grand Maester, a new Master of Whisperers, and of course, since Lord Tarly is now Hand of the King, we need another Master of Laws. We are sure you will keep performing the duties of your former office for the time being, Lord Tarly, but…”

“With all your respect, your Grace, this is not to you to lead the reunion of the small council, but to the king and his Hand.” Lord Tarly looked at her with hard eyes. He disapproved her presence just like he disapproved Cersei’s presence. He turned his attention to Tommen. “Your Grace, we must wait for the Citadel to name a new Grand Maester, so there’s nothing we can do about it for now. I have no name for a new Master of Whisperers, but I will start looking for one. As for the Master of Laws, I suggest you name Lord Selwyn Tarth at the office. There is no one from the Stormlands on the small council, which isn’t good. Lord Selwyn didn’t side with Stannis against your brother, and by bringing him here, you will instill loyalty to the Stormlands. He is a capable man who will do his job.”

“As… as you wish, my lord,” said Tommen. Lord Tarly’s direct style caused distraught with Tommen.

“Now, as your Hand, I would advise to declare war upon Dorne immediately. Doubts could still be allowed when Princess Myrcella died, but with Nymeria Sand who escaped the night when Ser Kevan was assassinated, no doubt is left. The Martells are working against your reign, and their rebellion must be crushed. They must pay for what they did. I will lead myself an army made of forces from the Reach and the Stormlands to the Dornish Marshes. One will penetrate through the Boneway, the other one will get through the Prince’s Pass. I would also send another army by sea to land at Planky Town. This way the Dornish will have to face an invasion from three points, and they won’t be able to hold all of them.”
“If… if you say so, Lord Tarly. I trust you.” Ser Kevan was more of the style to make Tommen understand the necessity of an action or another, while Randyll Tarly took the decision by himself. It was true that he was best positioned to decide in matters of war, but he was hard with Tommen. The king was still only a boy. Margaery wondered if he would ever stop to be one.

“Lord Tarly, are you sure you should lead the army?” she asked. “You are Hand of the King. Your presence is requested here to advise…”

“My place is on the battlefield, your Grace,” he cut, not without contempt. “The fanatics have been neutralized. They don’t cause much problem anymore. Their High Sparrow has most likely left the city, and we will never see him again. I’m of no more use here. I’ll leave the day-to-day running of the city to Ser Harys and Lord Tarth when he’ll be here. I’ll be of much more use on the front.”

“I believe we should call back Tyrion. His forces could help us in taking Dorne,” said Ser Jaime. He intervened for the first time since Lord Tarly was named Hand in his stead.

“The Lannister forces are already engaged in the North. The raven we received yesterday said that Moat Calin had fallen. Lord Tyrion will deal with the Boltons while I deal with the Martells,” replied the Hand with a voice that let no place to discussion.

“Myrcella was killed. She was a Lannister as much as a Baratheon. The Lannisters have to take part in this war.”

“Why? For revenge? For the sake of killing Doran Martell yourself? You remember me of Robert Baratheon when I fought him at Ashford. Heading right to his enemy, without looking back, acting without thinking. Like you did at Riverrun. You ran into the ambush Robb Stark settled for you at the Whispering Wood and your whole army was destroyed by a boy. If we were to recall Lord Tyrion and his men, the North would be lost to us forever, and your men would lose faith in their lord. Let the Imp, your brother, take Winterfell while I take care of Sunspear. That will be all for the better. In the meanwhile, the Redwynes and your ships at Lannisport will deal with the Iron Islands and this war will be over at last.”

“Then let me gather some troops in the Westerlands and join you.”

“Out of the question. They would make things more difficult for us. The bigger the army, the most difficult it is to control it and to maintain it. Your men would only be a nuisance. Anyway, they are needed against the Greyjoys and to protect your lands in case the Ironmen decide to attack.”

Ser Jaime and Randyll Tarly were looking at each other with great intensity. Lord Tarly wasn’t leaving him an inch. “Then I will follow you, alone.”

The Hand of the King almost scoffed. “A one-handed man won’t be of much use.”

“A kingsguard should accompany the king’s army. And I can fight with my left hand.”

“You can?” Lord Tarly seemed to doubt it.

“I can. You may have had a good reason to exclude Cersei from the war because she was a woman, but you cannot use this reason with me.” Jaime smirked. If the Lord of Horn Hill found the irony funny, he showed no sign of it.

“Alright. You may still be useful. I will go now. I have ravens to send and a war to prepare.”

“Lord Tarly,” began Margaery, “you will need to divert some of the ships of the Redwyne fleet to attack Planky Town. Don’t you think…”
“I won’t divert any ship. I’ll ask the Hightowers to send their own with their men. They have more than enough by themselves to take the harbor. Now if you’ll excuse me.”

He left on these words. Randyll Tarly wasn’t an easy man to speak with. If only Ser Kevan was still alive. The new Hand saw women as better for nothing else but bringing children into the world and raising them. Still, Margaery didn’t think she would have to suffer him for long. He would leave soon for the war, and he would bring Ser Jaime with him. Cersei would be gone as well, which meant all Margaery’s possible enemies would be away. However, this would leave her alone with Tommen until Lord Selwyn Tarth would arrive. Tommen wasn’t ready to rule on his own, and the Master of Coin didn’t prove to be up to the task. Varys and Pycelle were gone. She would need someone to help her, in case Selwyn Tarth proved to be a problem. Maybe they should have called back Tyrion and Sansa after all. Lord Tyrion would have been able to deal with all the problems, and Margaery doubted he would have been a threat to her. His wife was her friend after all.

The small council didn’t last for long afterwards. Ser Jaime left not long later, uninterested by the matters at hand, and once there was only Harys Swyft left, they discovered they didn’t have much to talk about. Margaery would have to get involved in the running of King’s Landing and the Realm more than she ever was. The small council was dismissed with only one man aside the king and the queen still at the meeting.

Later in their rooms, Margaery tried to talk to Tommen about what to do with the other offices. She talked to him about her granduncle, Garth Tyrell, Lord Seneschal at Highgarden, to name him Master of Whisperers in Varys’s replacement.

“He served my father well, and his father too before him. He has great experience in dealing with spies and information network. He could very helpful in administering the city as well,” she explained to him.

“Yes, of course. I’ll write to him tomorrow, after I visit Mother,” he said.

“Have you to?”

“She’s my mother.”

Tommen could never be decisive. “I think it’s a bad idea, my love. Especially after everything she did. You never told me to what extent Joffrey mistreated you.”

“No.” He looked on the floor. “He said I was stupid, and weak.”

She put a hand on his crossed fingers. “You’re not. You’re kind, and brave, and you don’t act without thinking. You’re everything Joffrey wasn’t.”

He nodded faintly. “I don’t want to part with her on bad terms. I just want to… try to reconcile with her. Before she leaves. That’s all I want.”

Margaery nodded. “Let me be there at least, just in case things don’t go well.”

He looked back at her, smiling. “Thank you.”

Later that day, she went to see Loras. Her brother wanted to leave King’s Landing and go to war with Lord Tarly and Ser Jaime, but Margaery put an end to his dreams. She needed her brother here. He wouldn’t make any difference in Dorne, but she would need him more than ever without Lord Tarly in the capital. They couldn’t be sure. The Sparrows were quiet now. They seemed to have entirely disappeared from most of the city’s districts, but Margaery was afraid they could come back at any moment and cause trouble again. Some of her contacts in the religious circles told her the
Sparrows were still active underground.

Margaery then went to meet Vallis, the maester who assisted Pycelle and who would act as a substitute Grand Maester until the Citadel sent them a new one. He informed her about all the messages they received today, and surprisingly one was for Margaery herself. When Margaery opened it, she saw the stamp of House Lannister, along with her friend’s signature.

*I hope you are well, Margaery. I am all right, and so is Mira. Moat Cailin has been taken and Tyrion is heading for Winterfell. I’ll get back my family’s home soon. I’m going to White Harbor in the meantime. I’m pregnant. I should deliver within three months at most. I can’t wait for this to happen. I hope everything is well for you in King’s Landing.*

Sansa

Margaery smiled at the end of the message. Sansa was pregnant. She knew they had breached through Moat Cailin, but not that her friend was with child. Sansa had finally made the best of her circumstances. These were wonderful news. Margaery hoped, just like her friend did, that everything would go well for Sansa, and that herself she would get pregnant soon as well. A child would be the best guarantee for Tommen to stay in power. She would have to keep working on it.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Jon
Jon V

Chapter Notes

A short chapter, but with important information. We’re getting closer to Winterfell.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

JOHN V

The camp wasn’t very large. It had nothing to see with Mance Rayder’s hundred thousand men, but it was a camp all the same, and they had an army. They could have gotten more, but that was what they had, and they would have to do with it. The location was very well chosen. Jon understood why Stannis decided to install his army here on his march to Winterfell. They had the Long Lake on their left, mountains on their right. They had a stream close for the horses. The enemy could only attack them from the south or from the north. They had left sentinels near the mouth of the lake, in case the Boltons or their allies attacked them from this direction, so they were protected from the rear. Jon was pressing the march south to reach the forest they would have to cross before Winterfell. In the forest, the wildlings and the mountain men would fare better than the Umbers, the Karstarks and the Boltons if they had to fight. Any ambush wouldn’t end well for Ramsay. He wouldn’t be able to repeat his exploit with twenty men.

This wasn’t the army Jon was hoping for. He had sent ravens to all the houses in the North with Castleblack’s ravens. Only the Mormonts, the Forresters and the Mazins answered the call, and Lyanna Mormont only agreed to join them thanks to Ser Davos’s intervention. He had been right to speak about the dead to her. Jon would never have. Any other lord would think he was mad. He was already a deserter for many people. There was no need to make everyone believe he was mad as well. The Mazins had only gathered one hundred and forty-three men, and the Forresters could only bring eighty-four men, remnants of their former army, sellswords, peasants and hunters who were barely trained. Tormund and his wildlings were about two thousand. The bulk of their forces was made of the mountain clans. Flints, Norreys, Wulls, Harclays, Knotts, Liddles, Burleys… They all had accepted to join Jon to save Arya and Rickon. They accounted for about three thousand men. He observed their courtesies his father had told him about so long ago when he visited them, and this gained him their loyalty. Jon still wished Lord Glover had accepted to help them. Instead, only one of his bannermen, one who was disgraced by the Boltons, accepted to join them.

Jon walked through the camp. He saw a brawl beginning not far from here. They had tried to keep the wildlings and the mountain clans as far away from each other as possible, but they had little to separate them with only two hundred men coming from other territories, and these men didn’t have much love for the wildlings either. Now a Norrey was quarreling with one of Tormund’s men. This had to be the third fight Jon saw since dawn. This army was no army. He said that to Ygritte once about Mance Rayder’s army, but now the same could be said about their own army, and it wasn’t big like Mance’s.

With a sigh, Jon walked to put an end to this. A group had begun to form, and he had to stop it before it got any further.

“Stop that right now!” He yelled as the Norrey was about to smash the wildling. He took his fist and
shoved it down.

“Why are they here?” the man of the mountain roared.

“They are allies.”

“Allies? They are wildlings!”

“We are the Free Folk, not kneelers like you,” loudly mocked the wildling.

The Norrey tried to punch the man again and Jon stopped him once more. “Why are you defending them?” he roared again.

“I told you they were allies.”

“Allies who say they will kidnap the Ned’s daughter.”

Jon looked at the wildling. “Is that true?”

The man shrugged. “I suppose she must be pretty, if she looks like you.”

The wildlings all laughed. The mountain clans’ men were boiling in anger. They were attached to Ned Stark and his children. Jon knew of course what the wildling meant. Their men kidnapped the woman they wanted for a wife, and if they could keep her against her family’s attempts to get her back and despite her own attempts to escape, then she was their wife. Jon knew what he had to do.

He approached the man slowly. “You want to kidnap my sister Arya?”

“Aye, I do,” he replied, a smirk on his face. Jon smiled at the man and feigned to walk away. Then he unsheathed his dagger and brought him to the man’s throat. All assurance had left his face.

“Listen to me. If you ever dare to approach Arya, I’ll kill you before you can even think of a place where to run away with her.” The blade was sinking into the man’s flesh. His face was mad with fear. “Did I make myself clear enough?”

He nodded after the moment of surprise had passed. That was the sort of wildlings who was more about big words than great deeds. Jon withdrew his dagger. Again, he feigned to walk away and saw relief on the man’s face, just at the moment when he turned back again and hit him hard in the stomach, then twice on the face, then brought him on his knees with a stroke from his knee.

“That’s only the beginning,” Jon told him. He gave him another stroke on the head and he fell on the ground, groaning.

The men of the mountain clans cheered behind him while most of the wildlings laughed at their fallen comrade. Jon left with Norreys and Flints tapping his back and shoulders. He avoided a fight between Northerners and Free Folk, but he doubted they could keep it going on for long. They still had a little more than a month before they reached Winterfell. This army could blow up any time on the way.

Jon resumed his walk. His feet brought him to a section of the camp where a banner with a white tree on a black field stood. His father always said they had to earn the respect of their bannermen, and one way to earn it was to visit them and show them you worried about their well-being. Furthermore, you couldn’t only feign worrying about them. You had to actually care about them. There were about twenty tents around the banner. The man at the entrance of the one at the center, next to the banner, who didn’t look like he was Westerosi, let Jon enter without a word.
Inside were five people, three women, a man and a boy. One of the women, with the scars on her face and arms and the weapons on her back, could have passed for a spearwife of the Free Folk if she wasn’t wearing an outfit that let her arms bare. Jon wondered how she managed to stay this way with the cold out there. The two other women were dressed like ladies from the North, with travelling clothes made for the North. The elder was quite beautiful, with prominent lips, brown hair with a hint of blond, and a face neither angular neither round. Jon never saw Gwyn Whitehill smile since they met two weeks ago. Talia Forrester was younger, with blond twisting hair like her younger brother and bigger cheeks than her sister-in-law. Jon had seen her smile a few times to her brothers. These two women reminded him of Lady Stark before she died. The young brother, Ryon, was coughing when Jon entered, and Asher Forrester, the Lord of Ironrath, was sharpening his sword with a whetstone. He looked up when Jon entered. His face was hard, like it always was since Jon saw him for the first time, emerging from the Wolfswood on his way back from Deepwood Motte. *You want people to kill a few Boltons? I’m your man,* he told Jon at the time. His resolve hadn’t faded ever since.

“Jon Snow,” he said.

“Lord Forrester,” Jon replied.

The Lord of Ironrath scoffed. “I’ll never get used to that. Not long ago I was a sellsword, and now I have people calling me *my lord.*”

“You are our lord, Asher,” said his sister. “You have to accept it.”

He nodded while grumbling. “What do you want?” he asked to Jon.

“I wanted to be sure everything was all right on your side.”

“It is the best it can be. I allowed my men to rest for today. I exhausted them more than enough with our constant attacks against the Whitehills’ supply lines, their woodworkers, their camps, their patrols and their villages, and then with this march. At least they don’t quarrel with wildlings today.”

That was a good thing. They already had more than enough problems between Northerners and Free Folk. “There’s another thing. We have a war council in a few minutes.”

He looked at him. “A change of plan?”

“Maybe. Mainly, new information.”

Asher Forrester raised from his seat and sheathed his sword. “I’m coming.”

Talia spoke up at this moment. “Jon, are there any news about Gared?”

Jon shook the head sadly. “Not yet. Tormund is still asking around among the Free Folk, but he came out with nothing so far. I don’t want to be pessimistic, my lady, but I’m afraid the most likely outcome is…”

“That he’s dead. I know. Still, tell me if you ever find something.”

“I promise.”

Gared Tuttle was the squire of the former Lord of Ironrath and the nephew of Duncan Tuttle, the man who was castellan at Ironrath while Lord Gregor Forrester was fighting at Robb’s side. He joined the Night’s Watch after he killed a man who murdered his family. Jon remembered the lad quite well. They had talked together on several occasions. He was at the Twins when Robb and Lady Stark
were slaughtered, but he survived. Later, he was accused of the murder of a fellow brother of the Watch, a man who participated to the murder of his family, and was sentenced to death for it. However, he managed to escape the night before his execution, and disappeared along with two friends he had at Castleblack. Jon wasn’t sure what to make of it. Gared had seemed honest and willing to do his best for the Watch. He said the man he killed attacked first and provoked him. Jon didn’t think it unlikely. Still, Gared had killed one of his sworn brothers, and the only outcome of this was death. He couldn’t say that the man asked him to murder him, like Jon did with Qhorin Halfhand. Jon hadn’t seen him from the day he left Castleblack for Craster’s Keep. He may be dead after so much time, just like Bran.

Jon walked out, following Asher. He felt several steps from the Lord of Ironrath, wishing to be alone. He didn’t like company very much since he came back to life. He still wondered what he was doing here. He knew he had to save Arya and Rickon for now, but after that, he had no idea what he would do. He couldn’t return to the Night’s Watch. How could he go back to people who murdered him?

“Jon Snow.” A voice called for him behind. It was Lady Gwyn Forrester. “May I walk with you? I would need to share a few words.”

“As you wish, my lady.”

They resumed the path Jon was following to the command tent. “I was wondering what you will do once you’ll have freed Winterfell. What will happen to the Boltons and their allies?”

“It depends. For the commanders, if they refuse to surrender and bend the knee, we’ll have to either execute them, or send them to the Wall. As for the soldiers, they are only following orders. We cannot hold them accountable for Ramsay’s atrocities. Ramsay will die no matter what happens.”

“Of course. You must know that I have a brother and my father on Ramsay’s side right now.”

Jon looked at her and asked something he often asked himself for days. “Why did you marry Asher? Shouldn’t you hate him? He killed your brother. What was his name? Gryff?”

She stopped and Jon stopped as well. “Gryff died on the battlefield. Asher didn’t murder him in cold blood. And when I compare my loss to Asher’s losses… His father, his mother, two brothers, not to mention the betrayal of a man everyone in his family trusted for years. And his sister Mira may be dead from what we know. The point is… I don’t want to hate someone for things that were done in the past. My family and Asher’s have fought for centuries. I tried to end this feud, and I failed. Now all I want is to prevent anyone else from dying.”

“It seems strange, considering we’re at war.”

They resumed to walk. “Ramsay is mad. Roose Bolton was dangerous, but as long as we followed him, we knew nothing would happen to us. His son is completely different. He’s a danger for us all. Everyone in the North is in danger as long as he lives. Even if we lose, Torrhen and my father will be in danger under Ramsay’s service. He could decide to skin or kill one of them for pleasure anytime. They’ll have more chance to live if Ramsay is dead.”

“Will they bend the knee to House Stark?” Jon asked.

“My father will never bend the knee. He will never surrender. Torrhen might, but if you let him have Highpoint, I’m afraid you will only delay another war between the Forresters and the Whitehills. Torrhen can wait a very long time to take his revenge. He won’t forget about Gryff, or our family’s defeat. I think the best thing to do would be to send them both to the Wall.”
“You would send you own family, all of them, to the Wall?”

“At least, they’ll be alive. They won’t be able to cause anymore trouble, and Asher won’t have a chance to kill them either.”

“You want to protect them from your husband?”

“Asher lost too much. If he is given a chance, he will kill my father, and most certainly Torrhen as well. I don’t want that to happen. Too many people have already died. But if they are sent to the Wall, then maybe peace will be possible. I tried to end the war between us with politics and diplomacy, and I failed. The only way I see now is for one of our two families to win for real, in a permanent way, while the other is exiled. That’s the only way out I can see that may end without more dead. Will you do that, Jon Snow?”

They were close to the command tent. “I’ll see what I can do, but the decision about Ironrath and Highpoint, exiles and executions won’t depend of me. I’m not the Warden of the North. The decision will belong to my sister. I’ll do what I can.”

“Thank you.” She walked away. She didn’t seem very satisfied, but she thanked Jon all the same.

Jon walked the few paces that were left and entered the command tent. Tormund and a few chiefs of the Free Folk, the leaders of the mountain clans, Lady Mormont, Lord Mazin, Lord Forrester and Ser Davos were present. Lady Melisandre was there as well, though in a corner, in retreat. She seldom spoke since they left Castleblack. She assisted the councils, but said nothing. Jon wasn’t the only one who changed after he came back.

“My lords, my ladies,” he began, “I asked you to come because we received news of interest.”

He looked at Lady Mormont. She spoke with an assurance over her age. “The Lannisters and their allies have breached Moat Cailin.”

The men began to discuss between themselves. “We can assume they are marching on Winterfell now,” Jon added.

“Then we’ll have show the Lannisters how well they are welcomed in the North. Let’s give the Imp a taste of Oxford and the Whispering Wood!” The clansmen roared all together at Lord Norrey’s outburst.

“This is folly!” Tormund had roared even louder. “How many men does this lord Tyrion have in his army?”

“More than us, for sure,” answered Ser Davos. “He won’t have come with a small army, we can be sure of that. He has lords of the Riverlands, and the Blackfish with him.”

That name shut the mouth of every Northerner, but not that of Tormungd. “We’re not going to fight two armies at the same time. We already have more than enough to fight with that fucker Ramsay.”

“Coward,” shouted a Northerner.

“Silence!” Jon brought back a temporary order with his command. “I understand your reluctance, but Tormund is right. We cannot fight the Lannisters and their allies, and the Boltons and their allies at the same time. We’re not enough.”

“Aye,” approved Ser Davos. “And though I am no military mind, it seems stupid to me to fight the Lannisters when they are after the same thing than us. They want to kill Ramsay, and throw the
Boltons out of Winterfell. We have a common goal. The most logical decision would be to fight with them, not against them.”

“You want us to make an alliance with the Lannisters?” Lord Mazin was both outraged and bewildered.

“It’s better than to fight them and die,” said Davos. “If we weaken each other, Ramsay could take that opportunity to destroy the remaining army after the battle, or to let the cold defeat it like it did for Stannis.”

“Winter won’t defeat us. We are Northerners!” said Lord Flint.

“My sister Sansa is with this army,” Jon pointed out. “The Lannisters have come to support her claim on Winterfell, remove Ramsay and save Arya and Rickon. By fighting against the Lannisters, you would be fighting Arya and Rickon. You would be fighting Ned Stark’s children.”

“Your sister is a Lannister now, Jon Snow,” said Lyanna Mormont. “She is no longer a Stark. She is Sansa Lannister.”

Jon looked at the girl of ten. Her face was unyielding. “We cannot fight two enemies. I told you what’s coming for us. You know what lies beyond the Wall. I’m not asking to forget the Red Wedding, but think about it. The Lannisters may have had a hand in the Red Wedding, I don’t contest this, but Roose Bolton is the one who murdered Robb, our king. His son is at Winterfell. Would you risk to have him ruling the North as we fight the Lannisters and weaken our troops while he stays warm inside the castle? For now, the best course of action is to ally ourselves with Lord Tyrion and my sister. I trust her, and I trust him.”

“You trust a Lannister?” Lady Lyanna showed high doubts.

“He saved my life once, at Castleblack. Without him, I would be dead right now.” Jon instinctively looked at Melisandre after he said it. She looked at him, but said nothing.

“We must send someone to negotiate with the Imp,” said Ser Davos. “We cannot wait for his army to come in sight of us, or else he could consider us as enemies.”

“I agree. That’s why I’m sending you, Ser Davos.”

The Onion Knight looked quite surprised. “Me?”

“Aye. I will stay here and lead the army to Winterfell. You go to Lord Tyrion, my sister and the Blackfish, and ensures they will fight with us. When Winterfell will be taken and Rickon is free, he will be declared Lord of Winterfell. Sansa won’t oppose this. Our brother comes before her in the succession. That’s all. You may all leave.”

The lords slowly left. Only Ser Davos and Lady Melisandre stayed behind. The knight’s face and the way his lips moved showed he hesitated to say something.

“Is there a problem, Ser Davos? If there’s one, speak up.” Jon said.

“There is. I don’t believe I’m well suited for this mission.”

“I cannot trust anyone else with this. All the Northerners hate the Lannisters, I cannot leave the army myself, and I cannot send a wildling.”

“My son died at the Battle of Blackwater.”
“I know. You told me.”

“Aye, but I didn’t tell you how he died. Our ship was among the first in Stannis’s fleet. We were hit hard by the wildfire. Our ship blew up. I saw him die right in front of my eyes. And you know who made this trick with the wildfire?”

Jon didn’t need to answer. They both knew who did it. “I fought against he wildlings. They killed my friends, men I respected, and I killed their men too. And yet here we are, in the same army. I understand what you feel, Ser Davos, but these wars don’t matter anymore. It’s in the past. We will need the men my sister and her husband are bringing to defend the Wall and to fight the Others, and we cannot do that if we cannot work with them like we work with the Free Folk now.”

“Jon Snow is right.” The Red Woman had gotten out of her mutism. “You’ll need men to fight the Great Other. There will be a great battle. I don’t know when it will take place, but it will come. When it comes, you’ll need as many men as you can muster, no matter who they are or where they come from.”

The former Hand of Stannis Baratheon looked at Jon, resigned. “Alright. I’ll do it.”

“You leave on the morrow,” said Jon. “I’ll ask Gwyn Forrester to accompany you. Her family has no grudge against the Lannisters. She may be of help.” And she may be safer in the Lannister camp than here. Being Bolton’s bannermen, the Whitehills weren’t loved among the Flints, the Norreys and the Mormonts.

Ser Davos turned away from Jon and looked at Melisandre. “Any advice from your fire?”

“Succeed,” she only said.

Davos almost grinned. He walked away. Melisandre followed not long after. Jon stayed behind. Arya and Rickon were getting closer, and now Sansa was closer than ever too. They could all be together again, but before, they would have to take Winterfell. One month before they reached it. One month. What could Ramsay do to Arya and Rickon in the meantime? Wishing they could move more quickly, Jon left the command tent, leaving it empty, hoping that Tyrion Lannister would let Rickon be Lord of Winterfell once it was taken.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
Sansa XXV

Chapter Notes

Before you read this chapter, I would like those who read ADWD to remember the chapters from Davos's perspective that took place in White Harbor. As for the others who didn't read the books, I just want to point out that White Harbor is the largest city in the North, as is King's Landing the largest city in the Seven Kingdoms. If King's Landing is the best place for betrayals, corruption, stabs in the back, lickspitting... I let you complete the sentence.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sansa XXV

When Sansa cast her eyes for the first time on the city of White Harbor, she found it beautiful. Arya had visited it twice with their father, but Sansa had never seen it for herself. The city was small when compared to King’s Landing, but it was a thousand times more pretty to the eye, though not as much as Casterly Rock when she admired it for the first time in the sunset.

The city had bright white walls, and the New Castle that stood on the top of a hill inside the walls was the same color as the summer snow. That would be where Sansa would reside for the next weeks, until she gave birth. A pain in the stomach reminded her of the little boy or the little girl growing inside of her. The journey from Moat Cailin to White Harbor had been without incident, but her state began to weigh on her. Fortunately, they weren’t far now. In an hour, she would be in a castle for the first time in months. She thought about Tyrion, and Arya, and Ser Brynden, and Mira. They had to be around Castle Cerwyn by now. She missed them. She missed Tyrion more than all. It was the first time they were truly separated. There had been the months when he was imprisoned, wrongly accused of his father’s death, but they weren’t far from each other, and Sansa hadn’t yet fallen in love with him. For a moment, she wondered if he would have a whore brought into their bed while she was away, but she cast the thought away immediately. Tyrion wouldn’t lay with another woman when he didn’t spend time with Shae at the beginning of their marriage. Where was her former handmaiden now? How did she fare in Pentos?

They arrived at the gates of the city in no time. Their retinue, composed of soldiers sworn to House Tully, House Lannister and House Manderly drew attention from the people out of the battlements. Brienne, Sansa’s handmaiden Willia and Ser Wylis Manderly were with them, and they also brought home the bones of Ser Wendel Manderly, who was killed at the Red Wedding. A group of men with the arms of the Manderlys were waiting for them right before the entrance of the city. They stopped and Willia helped Sansa to get off her horse. Another stroke came from inside her belly. After seven months, it had become quite big.

A knight approached her. “Lady Sansa. Ser Henry of House Clam. Lord Manderly sends us to lead you to the New Castle. There is a litter to carry you up there.”

“Thank you, ser.”

Gods be good. She didn’t feel like climbing on feet, not even to meet the Lord of White Harbor.
Willia helped her to get to the litter. Sansa almost fell in. She lied down, feeling another kick in her belly. She was tired of this journey. She felt the litter move. She closed her eyes while they went forward. She needed rest, and put protectively her hands over her belly. She didn’t think it would be long now. She wished Tyrion was there. That wasn’t how she had imagined things back at Winterfell. She thought her husband would be there when she would give birth. At the same time, the little girl she had been would certainly had found it chivalric that her husband fought a monster to give her back her home and that she would bring him their child once it was taken. Only, she couldn’t be sure they would defeat Ramsay. She couldn’t be sure of anything. She was afraid. The singer in her dreams was wrong. Life wasn’t a song.

She felt they were climbing. She let the movements of the litter carry her, relaxing after a short but exhausting trip. She wished she had her husband, or Arya, or even Mira with her. Brienne was there, of course, but she wasn’t the most talkative person, and she was more a personal guard than a confident.

They stopped. Sansa got herself out of her drowse and left the litter, once again helped by Willia Marbrand. The New Castle was indeed a very handsome construction. Winterfell was huge and impressive, but it was stern, built to be useful rather than gorgeous. The Manderlys obviously came from the Reach. The city below was organized, the houses built of whitewashed stone and steeply-pitched roofs of dark grey slate. That was nothing like the mess King’s Landing was. The capital could be the biggest city in all the Seven Kingdoms, but Lannisport and White Harbor outshined her on every aspect but the number of people living there.

Before the entrance of New Castle stood a very burly man, bigger than Robert Baratheon and Genna Lannister, with silver hair. Sansa slowly walked to him. “Lord Manderly.”

“Lady Lannister.” He bowed his head, and many behind him did, though Sansa noticed a few people who didn’t. Among them were a young girl about Sansa’s age who had her hair dyed in green.

“Welcome to White Harbor. The hospitality of my house is yours.”

“Thank you, my lord,” she said.

“You must be tired. I can have my men show you and your people to their rooms so you can rest. We will have time to speak later.”

“Yes, thank you, Lord Manderly.”

The Lord of White Harbor went past her and walked to his son. They hugged fiercely. It may be against conveniences, but she wouldn’t blame Lord Manderly for this. A woman joined him. She had to be Ser Wylis’s wife. His other son was dead, and the only one he had left just returned after almost three years in the Riverlands. A young woman approached Sansa. She had her hair bound in a long braid like the other one, but her own hair was brown instead of green. It didn’t look dyed.

“Lady Lannister, I am Lady Wynafryd Manderly,” she introduced herself. “I will lead you to your chambers.”

“Why not have a hot bath prepared for her while you’re at it?” scornfully said the girl with green hair.

“Yes, that’s exactly what I had prepared for her,” replied the eldest.

The young one scoffed. “We are housing Lannisters now, after what they did. What will we do next? Hand them White Harbor?”
“Wylla, be careful. You’re talking before the Lady of Casterly Rock.”

“Well, all the better reason to say that.”

“She is also the daughter of Eddard Stark.”

“No true daughter of Eddard Stark would marry a Lannister. No true Northerner would marry a Lannister. They killed Wendel.”

“Wylla, that’s enough,” ordered her grandfather. Sansa remembered that these two young women were the granddaughters of Lord Manderly. Their father was Ser Wylis. Sansa found it odd they didn’t join their grandfather to welcome back their father. She was too tired to argue, even when someone said again that she was no Stark. Maybe she was getting used to it. Another kick in her belly

Lady Wylla finally said nothing more and her sister escorted Sansa inside New Castle. She noticed the queer looks people shot at Brienne as she followed them. Willia accompanied them as well, while stewards took care of the guards who came with them. The castle was richly decorated from the inside. It wasn’t luxurious like Casterly Rock, but it was rich. The Manderlys were obviously the richest family in the North.

“Please excuse my sister’s behaviour, my lady,” Wynafryd said. “She is strong willed, and she’s angry after what happened to our uncle. I’m sorry she threw all her anger at you.”

“I thought she could show some restraint after I annulled her betrothal,” said Sansa gloomily. The exhaustion, mixed with months spent with Tyrion, made her forget her courtesies. They had decided to annul the betrothals between he Freys and the Manderlys when they besieged the Twins. That was part of the agreement with Lord Manderly so he would provide them information and side with them against the Boltons.

“She should. By the way, I thank you, my lady. You avoided me a horrible marriage with a Frey as well.”

“No one deserves to marry a Frey, and the Freys don’t deserve to marry at all.” Except Genna’s sons and grandsons, maybe.

They arrived at Sansa’s chambers. They were greater than the one she had at Winterfell, though smaller than the ones she shared with Tyrion at Casterly Rock. Lady Wynafryd told her that if she ever needed anything, she only had to ask. Servants had already prepared a warm bath for her. Sansa got out of her clothes with Willia’s help and entered the tub. She sent Willia away, asking for some time alone.

The hot water encircled her tired and heavy body. Bearing a child was much harder than she ever thought it would be. The stories never told about the hardships you met while carrying a son. Sansa wondered how her mother managed to bring her and four other children into the world. The journey had exhausted every part of her body and she only wanted to sleep for the next few days. She let her breathing grow steady and slow, the warmth filling every part of her with contentment. She thought of nothing. All she could feel was the hot water surrounding her and the kicks her children gave from time to time. She remembered a bath she took with Tyrion before they left Casterly Rock. It already looked far away, and yet not a year passed since they left. Her time as Lady of Casterly Rock had been what she hoped for her time in King’s Landing to be, back when she left Winterfell to marry Joffrey. She wished she could just go back there, to the months she and Tyrion spent there, getting to know each other, slowly building their love. She wished she had been betrothed to the Imp when the king visited them at Winterfell, instead of Joffrey. How better her life would have been.
She wandered her hand over her belly. Tyrion used to lay his hand there during the night. Again, she wished he was with her. If only she could accompany them to Winterfell, but she had to admit Tyrion and Ser Brynden were right. She couldn’t follow them while carrying a child. And the truth was, Sansa was afraid for him. She had the future heir of Casterly Rock, Tyrion’s child, inside her belly. Her duty was to protect him now. Tyrion and her granduncle would take back Winterfell. That was their battle now. Her battle was to bring this child safe into the world. So far, it proved to be quite an ordeal. They should tell them about that when they instructed the young ladies. Her mother and Septa Mordane never warned her about the hardships that came with pregnancy.

Her child was restless. He moved a lot. If his behavior before his birth was any indication of how he would be in the world, she had to expect an Arya or a Bran more than a new version of herself. She caressed her belly, trying to calm the growing life inside of her. In her drowsing state, she began to sing a lullaby she heard her mother sing to Bran or Rickon long ago.

\begin{verbatim}
The Father's face is stern and strong,  
he sits and judges right from wrong.  
He weighs our lives, the short and long,  
and loves the little children

The Mother gives the gift of life,  
and watches over every wife.  
Her gentle smile ends all strife,  
and she loves her little children

The Warrior stands before the foe,  
protecting us where e'er we go.  
With sword and shield and spear and bow,  
he guards the little children.

The Crone is very wise and old,  
and sees our fates as they unfold.  
She lifts her lamp of shining gold  
to lead the little children.

The Smith, he labors day and night,  
to put the world of men to right.  
With hammer, plow, and fire bright,  
he builds for little children.

The Maiden dances through the sky,  
she lives in every lover's sigh.  
Her smiles teach the birds to fly,  
and gives dreams to little children.

The Seven Gods who made us all,  
are listening if we should call.  
So close your eyes, you shall not fall,  
they see you, little children.

Just close your eyes, you shall not fall,  
they see you, little children.
\end{verbatim}
The kicks ceased. Sansa had noticed on the way to White Harbor that if she hummed a lullaby, then her child would stop moving. She kept her eyes shut, enjoying the peace after months spent on the road.

Willia came back after some time, and helped Sansa to clean herself of all the dirt that had accumulated while she travelled. Once they were done, Sansa’s skin being all pink and sore from the strong brushing, Willia helped her to don a grey gown. Sansa had arrived with a blue travelling dress, but she thought it would be better to remind everyone that she was a Stark from now on. She wouldn’t wear red before long.

“That’s fine, Willia. Thank you,” Sansa told her once it was over. “You may leave me alone. Could you please tell Lord Manderly that I will talk to him tomorrow? We could break our fast together.”

“Of course, my lady. Though, you should know that Lord Manderly is throwing a feast tonight for Ser Wylis’s return. He’s inviting you.”

Sansa thought about it for a moment. Her time in the tub made her better, but she wanted to sleep all the same. She didn’t think she could participate to a feast. “Thank Lord Manderly in my name for his invitation, but tell him my condition doesn’t allow me to be present. The journey really wore me off.”

“I’ll tell him, my lady. I’m sure he will understand.”

Willia left to bear Sansa’s reply. She hadn’t left for a few seconds that Sansa was already lying down in her bed. It was a featherbed, very comfortable. She lied on her side and dozed off. She was woken by the time of dinner when Willia brought her a tray and that Maester Theomore came to see if everything was alright with her and the baby. Sansa thought he looked quite cold and even rough, but she trusted him since he was a Lannister of Lannisport. He was the main link between Lord Manderly and Tyrion, and it was in part thanks to him if they could gather information on the North. Sansa ate a few crumbs, but she soon ordered Willia to prepare her for the night. Once it was done, her handmaiden left with the tray and Sansa went back to sleep.

She was back at Winterfell. The courtyard was full of people, and a small shape stood before her, examining her. He looked on her left. “She’s going to break hearts, and a lot of them.” She didn’t know why her husband was saying that. She walked away and left the courtyard. She thought she recognized someone else in the courtyard, someone who never came to Winterfell.

Sansa stood in the glass garden now. She recognized the blue winter roses of her childhood. It seemed to be so long since she saw one for the last time. The sky was clear over her head. It was a beautiful day, with a temperature everyone could expect from a summer day in the North. She heard a screech over her head, something she never heard before. She searched the skies and found its source. A large creature with scales and huge wings was flying through the sky. On the back of it, Sansa could see a young woman with blond hair.

“Fire and Blood,” said a voice behind her.

When Sansa turned to look at the intruder, she saw a hooded figure walking away. The figure had its back turned on her, so she couldn’t see anything under the cloak.

She was in King’s Landing, in the Great Hall. She saw Tyrion Lannister greeting her. He wore a complete set of armor. The battle for King’s Landing was about to begin. She had seen him wearing an armor before, when he first arrived in King’s Landing, though he had been all dirty from the battle he came from and the journey that followed. Now he was all in red shining armor, ready for battle. If
he had been taller, he would have looked like a great knight. She remembered when he rescued her not long ago in that same place, when no one else dared to speak against Joffrey. He had been brave like a true knight, as small as he could be.

“I will pray for your safe return, my lord,” she told him.

Sansa woke up. The sun was appearing through the window. She slowly got up and came to look outside. Her chamber gave on the harbor, and she could see several ships coming in and out, along with smaller boats, maybe fishing boats, all along the coast. She inhaled the air. It was quite similar to the one in Casterly Rock, the New Castle being close to the sea just like the seat of House Lannister, though the air had something different too. Maybe the Narrow Sea didn’t smell the same way as did the Sunset Sea, or maybe it was something else she was missing. Lannisport and White Harbor didn’t stink like King’s Landing. They were much better places to live in, and according to Mira, Oldtown was a wonderful place as well. Gulltown was the only city Sansa hadn’t visited yet.

The door opened and Willia came in. “Excuse me, my lady, but Lord Manderly is wondering if you’re awake,” she said.

Sansa remembered her breakfast with the Lord of White Harbor. “Of course, I’m coming.”

“He says he can come, my lady. He doesn’t want to burden you with unnecessary walk.”

“Very well. Tell him to come in fifteen minutes.”

“Yes, my lady.”

Willia left, but came back quite quickly to help Sansa to dress for the day. She chose a grey gown like yesterday. She wore no jewel either, except for the necklace Tyrion gave her so long ago. As they prepared, other servants came in and filled the table with tons of food. Sansa found it to be a lot for breakfast, even now as she ate more than usual. The Lord of White Harbor arrived not long after Sansa was ready.

“Lady Lannister,” he greeted her. He wore a green doublet made for his size.

“Lord Manderly.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t welcome you appropriately yesterday. I hope you’ll forgive a father who feared his son was lost.”

“That’s alright, my lord. I know what it is to find someone you thought was lost to you. I don’t blame you. And I apologize for not attending the feast in your son’s honor yesterday.”

He raised a hand. “No apologies are required, my lady. I understand that in your condition and after a long journey, you need rest. I hope you are satisfied with the accommodations we made for you?”

“I am. Thank you.”

“Well, maybe we could break our fast. I don’t know for you, my lady, but personally, I’m hungry.”

Sansa nodded. She noticed that a special seat, larger than any she ever saw, had been brought for the lord. He really was big, and his appetite soon proved to equal his size. He ate much more than Sansa, which said a lot considering the amount of food she ate each day since she got pregnant. There were several fruits, including strawberries and peaches, and bread, but most of the meal consisted in products of the sea. Whitefish, crabs, clams, lampreys, winkles, mussels, cod, salmon, lobster, herring competed for place on the large table and in Lord Manderly’s mouth.
"Let me tell you, my lady, that this is a pleasure and an honor, and a great relief too, to welcome a Stark once more in White Harbor. Your lord father visited our city about five years ago. We feared no Stark would ever come here again."

"Thank you, Lord Manderly. My father always spoke highly of you."

He nodded, sadness plain on his face now. "We all wept for him when he died, here in the city. We also wept when your brother, our king, and your lady mother died, as much as we wept for my son."

"I’m sorry for Ser Wendel, my lord. You have all my condolences."

He bowed to show he appreciated the thought. "You have mine for your losses as well, my lady. I lost a son, but you lost much more. Thank you for bringing back Wylis and Wendel’s bones with you. I can assure you we won’t forget that. Centuries ago, our family was cast out of the Reach, and your ancestors welcomed us and granted us the Wolf’s Den. The North remembers. We will do everything to free Winterfell and to reinstate House Stark."

"Thank you, my lord." She drank some water. "My sister visited White Harbor with my father in the past."

"Aye, I remember her from her last visit. She didn’t look quite like a lady, but she remembered me of your aunt, Lady Lyanna Stark. She asked all sort of questions on the city, and even wanted to visit the Wolf’s Den. She reminded me of Wylla sometimes. It is horrible that she finds herself in the hands of the bastard."

Of course, Arya wasn’t in the hands of Ramsay, but Sansa didn’t enlighten the Lord of White Harbor on this. It was better if he didn’t know. "We’ll save her, and whatever Ramsay may have done to her, he will pay for that."

Lord Wyman obviously approved. "Which leaves us a few questions, my lady. Once the bastard of the Dreadfort is dead, what will we do with the Dreadfort?"

"Do you think it would be a good idea to burn it to the ground?" Sansa asked. She wanted to see Lord Wyman’s reaction to this idea.

He smiled. "The idea is pleasing. Though the Dreadfort remains a strategic point. It would be better to wipe out House Bolton and to give their seat to someone the Starks could trust."

"I do agree, my lord. In fact, maybe I shouldn’t tell you, but I thought I could give it to my sister Arya once she was freed."

Lord Manderly looked thoughtful. "This sounds like… a good idea," he finally said.

"The only houses that are known for family links with House Bolton are the Ryswells and the Dustins, and only through the women. The Dustins and the Ryswells fought against me. I won’t let them take the Dreadfort."

"A wise decision, Lady Lannister," Lord Wyman approved. "We cannot let rebels and traitors get the Dreadfort. Though, I’m not sure you’ll have the power to give the Dreadfort to the Lady Arya."

"Why is that? I am the Wardeness of the North. You pledged yourself and your family to me, Lord Manderly."

"Of course, I don’t question your position or your power, my lady. You are the daughter of Eddard Stark. However, since your brother, Rickon Stark, is alive, shouldn’t he be Lord of Winterfell? In
this case, the decision belongs to him, and not to you.”

Sansa was finishing a few blueberries. She wiped her hands with a cloth. “Lord Manderly, I don’t want to look pessimistic. I do hope we will rescue my brother, but you know who Ramsay Bolton is. You know what he does. Do you think my brother has great chances of survival?”

Lord Manderly had his eyes cast on the table. “The bastard could kill him,” he recognized.

“I do hope we will save him, but I’m afraid we won’t.” Sansa couldn’t even know for sure that Rickon really lived. Everyone said he was dead, burned by Theon Greyjoy. The Boltons lied about Arya, so who said they didn’t lie about Rickon too? “My husband’s and my brother Jon’s armies will take back Winterfell. We have at least five times the men Ramsay has, and if Rickon is still alive, he will be acknowledged by the Iron Throne as long as he bends the knee and recognize Tommen for his king. He will be Warden of the North and Lord of Winterfell.”

“Well, I suppose this will be more than enough, to have a Stark back at Winterfell.”

“Lord Manderly,” added Sansa, “you must know that if Rickon dies, I will be Lady of Winterfell and Wardeness of the North. Lord Tyrion will have no title in the North. He will only be a consort. He is satisfied with Casterly Rock. Our children will have Winterfell, but the one who will become the lord at my death will receive the Stark name.”

“I know. Lord Tyrion already explained it to me in a letter. I just want you to know my lady, that if your brother becomes Lord of Winterfell, I have two daughters who could both make a very decent bride for him.”

“My brother is still a prisoner, Lord Manderly,” Sansa pointed out. Rickon wasn’t yet free and they already spoke about finding him a wife to be the future Lady of Winterfell. If Lord Manderly was loyal to her family, he wasn’t without ambition either.

“I just wanted you to know, my lady.”

“I’ll keep that in mind, and when the time comes, I will consider your daughters if my brother must choose a wife.”

That was the diplomatic answer to give. You had to promise to give it a thought, without promising anything tangible. The truth was, even if Rickon was alive and survived Ramsay, Sansa expected Ser Kevan to demand that he marries a Lannister, maybe Cerenna or Myrielle, or even Janei when she would be old enough, or one of Sansa’s children if she had daughters. The Lannister wouldn’t agree to freeing the North without getting anything. If Sansa wasn’t Wardeness of the North, they would ask for something else. If it wasn’t a Lannister bride for Rickon, it would be something else. Tyrion had to give the sense to his bannermen that they came here for something else than just helping a sister or a brother of their lord’s northern lady. He may ask for the Dreadfort if Sansa didn’t get Winterfell.

“Still,” resumed Sansa, “the North must abandon any idea of sovereignty. The Iron Throne may grant us a few advantages, Tommen isn’t hard and Ser Kevan is reasonable, but they won’t allow the North to get its independence. Whoever is Lord or Lady of Winterfell, he or she will have to swear fealty to King Tommen.”

The Lord of White Harbor looked at her queerly. “My lady, I don’t believe Ser Kevan Lannister could receive any request we could send to the king.”

“What do you mean? Why not?”
“Don’t you know?”

“Know what?” What was Lord Manderly talking about?

“Ser Kevan Lannister is dead, my lady.”

For a time, Sansa was too shocked to speak. Then she croaked. “Ser Kevan… is dead?”

“Yes, my lady. The Grand Maester Pycelle is dead too. The versions contradict. Some say they killed each other, others that they were assassinated by the Sparrows in the streets of King’s Landing, some even have them murdered inside the Red Keep. The new Hand, Lord Randyll Tarly, claims that they were assassinated by the Martells. King Tommen has declared war against Dorne.”

Another surprise. “What? But they can’t. The Martells are allies with the Crown. Princess Myrcella is betrothed to Prince Trystane. They cannot…”

“The Princess Myrcella died a few months ago, my lady. She was murdered in Dorne.”

The news of Ser Kevan’s death was already distressing. Sansa couldn’t claim she had been fond of the man, but he wasn’t evil like Lord Tywin and had spared Tyrion at the trial. He even supported his claim on Casterly Rock. And Dorna… and their daughter, Janei… Sansa remembered how the little girl used to play with her hair back at the Rock. Now her father was dead. Dorna just lost a husband after she lost her three sons. What would happen to her now?

But Myrcella? Myrcella was dead too? Sansa hadn’t known her that well, but she was always kind with her. Just like Tommen, she was all the opposite of Joffrey. Naïve, but kind and gentle. Sansa remembered seeing her cry while she was carried out to the ship that would lead her to Dorne. Did Tyrion know? He loved his niece. Sansa didn’t even want to imagine how Tommen was affected by this. Hopefully Margaery could support him a little. She may have married Tommen only to be queen, but she wasn’t insensitive either. Sansa didn’t think Margaery hated Tommen.

“Are you all right, my lady?” asked Lord Manderly.

“Yes.” Sansa took some time to reorganize her thoughts. “It’s just… I knew Myrcella, and she was always kind to me, to the opposite of her brother. I mean Joffrey. And Ser Kevan… Well, he was gentler than Lord Tywin.”

Lord Manderly nodded. “Well, I suppose that’s not difficult to be kinder than Tywin Lannister.” He cleared his throat again. “If you would pardon me, my lady, I have duties to attend.”

“Of course, you may go, Lord Manderly.” Ser Kevan and Myrcella were dead, and now they were at war with Dorne, right at the moment they thought war could end with the taking of Winterfell and the Iron Islands.

Lord Wyman stood up. “By the way, my lady, you should know that reinforcements are coming next week to help our forces against the Boltons. From the Vale of Arryn.”

“The Vale of Arryn?”

“Aye, my lady. The knights of the Vale have finally decided to join the war. Lord Arryn is coming to White Harbor with an army of five thousand men.”

“Lord Arryn?” If what they said about him was true, and that Arya told the truth, which she had no reason to not tell to Sansa, then the Defender of the Vale would probably spend all his time in White Harbor while his men were on campaign. “I’m surprised the Vale changed his policy so suddenly.”
Sansa didn’t like it. Littlefinger was in the Eyrie. What if he was behind this? Sansa would have to learn more about this. He couldn’t be coming here for a good reason.

“Well, their new lord is obviously quite different from the previous,” stated Lord Manderly.

“What do you mean, the new Lord?” Sansa asked.

“You don’t know that either, my lady? Robin Arryn died not long ago.” Another thing Sansa never expected. Her aunt Lysa was dead, and now her son too. She liked even less than before. She didn’t like it at all. Again, she suspected Lord Baelish’s hand. “There is a lot going on in the Seven Kingdoms you don’t seem to be aware of.”

“I was in the Neck for months, Lord Manderly. News don’t reach us easily there,” Sansa pointed out, not without reproach.

“Please forgive me, Lady Lannister. I didn’t mean to insult you.”

“How did he die?” she asked.

“A sickness. That’s no surprise. I heard the boy was quite frail, and the death of his mother must have been hard on him. Still, the new Lord of the Eyrie decided it was time for the knights of the Vale to take part in the wars of the Seven Kingdoms. Though they’re quite late,” Lord Wyman added dryly.

There was something wrong in all this. “Lord Manderly, who’s the new Lord Arryn? My cousin had no brothers and no sisters, and no children either. Who’s the new Lord of the Eyrie?”

“A distant cousin to Robin Arryn. I don’t know his exact parentage with Jon Arryn’s son, but he is the Warden of the East now, and he decided like that to involve the Vale in the war in the North.”

“But who is he? What is his name?”

“Harrold Arryn,” Lord Manderly answered.

Chapter End Notes

So, basically, Sansa finds herself on her own again. Of course, that's not as if she was back in King's Landing in the Lannister's custody, but... Let's just say she was a Stark among lions in the capital. Now she is a wolf/lioness among Northerners. The following chapters in White Harbor will show us Sansa dealing with politics alone. I hope you'll find it interesting.

Please review

Next chapter: Davos
Today is a very special day. Last year, on February 13th, 2016, the first chapter of "A Shadow and a Wolf" was published. One year later, after 111 chapters, over 582 000 words, 1700 comments, 800 kudos, 90 bookmarks and 41 000 hits, I can't believe where this adventure brought me. I enjoyed writing this story very much, and I enjoyed every comment that was made about it, even those criticizing it. I can't believe that this story is on its way to become the longest fanfiction of ASOIAF on this web site. I really must be mad and have no life.

I want to thank everyone who read this story so far, and I give special thanks to my recurrent reviewers: Tativi, CLH_CLH, AzraelGFG, Alice, ThamasD, ValeriaTripodi, Adira, Morgana67, and many others. Thank you very much.

Hopefully, this story will come to an end before this same day in 2018, though I wouldn't bet on it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The horses crunched the snow under their hooves. Thin flakes were falling around them. For now, it was only a light snow. Davos hoped it wouldn’t turn into a storm. Stannis hadn’t been able to defeat this enemy, and Davos had no wish to fight someone, or something, that defeated Stannis. They weren’t far away now. They had managed to avoid Winterfell and the Bolton patrols around it. They were only six, Davos, Lady Forrester and four guards, all Northerners. They were to reach the Lannister army as quickly as possible. Jon Snow wouldn’t be far from his home when they would come back, and they had to make sure they could fight with the Lannisters on their side.

Davos served Jon Snow, like he served Stannis before. The young man may be a bastard, but he was brave, right, and deserved Davos’s respect. Stannis had seen something in him, the Red Woman now saw him as the Prince who was Promised, the men of the Night’s Watch saw something in him too, and the wildlings as well. He had what was needed to fight the dead. Davos had no love for the Red Woman, but he had to admit there was something unnatural about Jon Snow. He could lead them against the dead, and the fact he came back from the dead… This was freaking mad. Davos wasn’t sure he really believed Melisandre could bring him back when he asked her to try, but she did, to their mutual astonishment.

Despite being in service to Jon Snow, Davos couldn’t say he was pleased by making an alliance with the Lannisters. Matthes had died right before him, and Davos almost died as well, when the Imp set their fleet ablaze. His only son had died in this trap. Jon Snow trusted the Imp, saying he saved his life once, but Davos couldn’t agree to making an alliance with him without grumbling. The Imp was the brother of Cersei and Jaime Lannister, who committed incest and had three children together. His father organized the Red Wedding. Davos didn’t think the Lord of Casterly Rock would only help them to free Winterfell, then let Rickon Stark rule without question. The Imp wanted the North. Why else would he marry Sansa Stark? Davos would form an alliance with Lord Tyrion in the name of Jon Snow, but he wouldn’t trust him. He would never trust the Lannisters, no matter what Jon Snow
thought of his brother-in-law.

They kept going on through the light snow. Davos would give anything for the warmth of Dragonstone right now, but that was something he couldn’t have. The fortress had been lost. The Lannisters took it. Davos had nowhere to go in the south. The Imp might decide to execute him when he would reveal his identity. After all, he served the rightful king of Westeros, and the rightful king was dead. A bastard boy born of an incest was now sitting on the Iron Throne, and may well sentence him to die for fighting against him.

“Do you think we are close, ser?” Lady Gwyn asked him.

“We’re not far, my lady. Castle Cerwyn is close, and the Lannister army is certainly not far from it. They got through Moat Cailin a while ago. There was no storm, no heavy rain, so there wasn’t much to slow them down. They can’t be far.”

“You’re not looking forward to these negotiations, Ser Davos, aren’t you?”

Davos sighed and tightened his cloak around him. “No, my lady. My son died at the Blackwater, and I served a king who fought Lord Tyrion’s nephew for years. And I don’t trust the Lannisters.”

“I suppose you don’t trust the Whitehills either. You can say you don’t, Ser Davos. I know what my family has done.”

“With all due respect, my lady, you’re not really a Whitehill anymore,” he said carefully.

“Maybe not in my father’s eyes,” she agreed, “but when people look at me, they see the daughter of Ludd Whitehill, bannerman of House Bolton and servant of Ramsay Bolton. It is the way people look at us that matters. They see the Whitehill when they look at me, just like they see the Onion Knight when they look at you.”

Davos knew that only too well. Despite serving Stannis loyally for years, all the lords still saw the up-jumped smuggler when they looked at him. How ironic that he survived most of them. They died with their king at Winterfell or King’s Landing, and now he served a bastard who deserted the Night’s Watch. A bastard who Stannis respected.

“I suppose the Lannisters will welcome you more warmly than me, my lady. You didn’t serve an official usurper, after all. I’ll be lucky if I get out of this camp with my head still on my shoulders,” he said.

“You are an emissary. I doubt they would kill you since you represent Jon Snow and that his sister will be there. But I may not be well perceived. The Whitehills took part in the Red Wedding. The Lady of Casterly Rock lost her brother and her mother in this, and my family helped to kill them. And now they serve the man who rapes her sister and tortures her little brother.”

“Our odds to get out of the negotiations alive may not be great. I wouldn’t bet on it.” Lady Gwyn didn’t seem to find the joke funny.

They continued to ride in silence. They were approaching a bridge that crossed the tributary of the White Knife near Castle Cerwyn. Then they heard shouts. A dozen riders came from their right, and before Davos could react, they were surrounded. They were outnumbered two to one, and Lady Forrester couldn’t fight. She had a dagger at her belt, but what good a dagger could do against the swords and crossbows pointed at them. A robust old man with greyish hair addressed them.

“Who are you? What is your business here?”
Davos looked to their arms on their surcoat. It displayed a trout. They were not Lannisters. They were Tullys. Maybe he wouldn’t die immediately.

“I am Ser Davos, of House Seaworth. Former Hand to Stannis Baratheon, and now in service to Jon Snow. We are on our way to meet Tyrion Lannister, Lord of Casterly Rock and Warden of the West, and his wife, the Lady Sansa.”

The man moved his mount forward. “So, you are the Onion Knight? Show me your hand.”

Davos removed his glove and showed the missing fingers of his right hand for everyone to see. “Is that proof enough?”

“It seems it’s you, so you’re not lying about this. But what tells me that you’re telling the truth? Why would the Onion Knight serve Jon Snow?”

“Stannis is dead, for a start, and I trust Jon Snow.” Davos took a scroll from the bad attached to his saddle. “This is my proof.”

The man seized it without ceremony and unfolded it. “That’s Jon Snow’s signature. I recognize it from his letters he sent from the Wall.”

“We need to speak to his sister, the Lady Sansa, and to Lord Tyrion, as quickly as possible. And to your commander too, Ser Brynden Tully.”

The man looked at Davos with an amused face, and the other soldiers with the Tully arms looked amused too. “You have him right before you.”

He rolled the parchment and put it into his own bag. Davos stammered. He didn’t realize. Of course, this was the Blackfish. The trout was black on his surcoat. “Excuse me, my lord. I…”

“I’m not a lord. Only a knight. You want to see my grandniece? I’m afraid that won’t be possible. She is at White Harbor.”

“What is Lady Sansa doing at White Harbor? We thought she was riding with the Lannister army,” intervened Gwyn Forrester.

“My grandniece is pregnant. We couldn’t bring her with us, but her husband is there. I’ll lead you to our camp. But may I know who you are, my lady?”

“Gwyn Forrester. My husband, Lord Asher, the Lord of Ironrath, is riding with Jon Snow. We are loyal to the Starks.”

“Very well, follow us. But you have to surrender all your weapons.”

That was quickly done. Anyway, a few weapons wouldn’t help them. They were far outnumbered, and they had no chance to escape by their own means once they would be inside the Lannister camp. Lady Gwyn handed her dagger and said she had nothing else dangerous on her, but forbade the men to touch her. They didn’t dare to disobey the command.

There was a camp on the northern side of the stream. They crossed the bridge and rode for an hour for the south. On their way, Davos tried to speak with the Blackfish. He had more chance to find a listening ear with him than with the Imp, and bore no ill to the war veteran.

“Ser Brynden, I want to know if I’ll be able to speak before I am executed,” Davos asked.
“You will be able to speak, I think, but I can’t guarantee you will live afterwards,” he said as a matter of fact.

“I know I served the wrong king…”

“Indeed, and so I did. You served Stannis, I served Robb Stark. And yet, here I am, riding with the man whose father plotted the murder of my niece and my king.”

“I just… I fought Lord Tyrion on the Blackwater. I don’t know if I can trust him. Can I?”

“You served a king who burned people alive, but it depends. You say you’re serving Jon Snow now.”

“Aye, I am.”

“Then he might spare you, as he spared me and my family. He killed those Frey fuckers who killed Robb Stark and his mother at the Twins, and he forced Walder Frey to eat wet shit. My home was given back to my house, my nephew is Lord Paramount of the Trident again, and we had our revenge on the people who betrayed us, but in exchange we had to bend the knee to the Imp’s nephew. If he lets you live, expect that he will ask you the same.”

That wasn’t a prospect Davos really loved. Stannis had been his king, and Tommen the usurper. But Stannis was dead, and so was his wife, Queen Selyse, and his daughter, Shireen. There was nothing left of Stannis’s legacy to protect. His death would accomplish nothing. He was more useful alive, especially when the dead were coming. There was a great war coming. On that, the red lady was right. They needed all the men they could get for it. Dying for a dead king wouldn’t help.

“Can I expect him to keep his word?” Davos asked.

“As he always says, a Lannister always pays his debts. He will be true to his word, if you remain true to yours. He pays his debts in both directions… and so do I.”

They arrived at a much larger camp. Davos saw sigils of House Lannister and their vassals everywhere, along with sigils of the Tullys, the Freys and other river lords. He even spotted a banner of House Hightower and the mermaid of House Manderly. They were brought to the middle of the camp, where a large red pavilion had been raised, a high banner with a golden lion flying by its side. The snow kept falling here, just like on the other side of the river. Ser Brynden had sent a rider ahead of them, so they were surely expected.

They were introduced into the large pavilion. There, a man half the size of any common grown man was waiting for them. There was another, of more common height, with him, all clad in black boiled leather. He looked at Davos as they entered.

“So, that’s the Onion Knight. Not very impressive, but better than most knights I saw in my life,” the man commented.

Davos only had eyes for the Imp. Tyrion Lannister wasn’t clad in armor. He wore a red doublet with gold incrusted in it. A huge scar was crossing his face. That was the man who burned their fleet on the Blackwater, the man who killed Matthos.

“Ser Davos,” he said.

“Lord Lannister,” Davos replied. “This is Lady Gwyn Forrester, Lady of Ironrath, and one of Jon Snow’s supporter.”
“Forrester?” The Lord of Casterly Rock eyed Lady Gwyn for a moment. “Pod.” Davos noticed a boy in a corner of the room. “Can you fetch Lady Hightower, please?”

“Yes, my lord.”

The boy named Pod left. Why was he asking for Lady Hightower? Their banner was here, Davos remembered that, but why bring her here? What were the Hightowers doing here in the first place?

“You may sit,” said the small lord. They took place. The Blackfish sat on the right of the Imp, while the other man sat on his left, his legs on the table. “This is Ser Bronn of the Blackwater. He was knighted after that battle.”

“I was the one to shoot the arrow,” Ser Bronn said with a satisfied smile.

Davos now understood. This man had been the one to start the fire that destroyed the fleet, and he was knighted for this. He was obviously no more of noble birth than Davos himself. He was a sellsword who reached knighthood by making the dirty work for the right people. Davos had to beware of him.

“So, you represent Jon Snow?” asked the Imp.

“I am. I gave a letter he wrote for you and Lady Sansa to Ser Brynden.”

The Blackfish showed the scroll to Lord Tyrion who read it. “It seems to be the case. I recognize my half-brother-in-law’s signature and writing. How interesting. Two Hands for two different dead kings. Mine shot on his people and told them to eat their dead when they were starving, yours burned people because he thought that would please his god. It seems to me our two kings met ends they deserved.”

Was it a test? Did he expect Davos to agree with him and recognize that Joffrey was a monster, or to defend Stannis’s honor? In both cases, he could be condemned to death. Or perhaps he expected him to deny Joffrey’s crimes and to denounce Stannis’s. Davos couldn’t do that.

“Whatever Stannis did, he’s dead. I am no longer in his service, and I have no reason to serve a dead king. I serve Jon Snow now,” Davos replied.

Lord Tyrion seemed to examine Davos. “Did Stannis really burn people, as a sacrifice for his Lord of Light?”

“He did.” That was the truth, and it would do no good to lie about it. A hard truth was better than a soft lie. “I advised against it, but he did it all the same.”

“And you did nothing to stop him?”

“Did you try to stop Joffrey’s cruelties?” Davos countered.

The Imp remained silent for a moment, then leaned forward. “In the time when Lady Sansa was betrothed to Joffrey, he had her beaten naked in front of the whole court. Do you think I did nothing while he humiliated and mistreated an innocent girl?”

Davos could see that the answer was no. Strangely, he didn’t think the Imp was lying on this. “Once, Stannis wanted to sacrifice a boy and use blood magic to destroy his enemies with this sacrifice. I helped the boy to escape. I saved his life, and I got almost executed for that. I may not have saved the lives of everybody Stannis wanted to burn, but I saved the life of this boy. The others Stannis burned were traitors who disobeyed his orders. The penalty for this was death.”
What he didn’t say was that some simply disobeyed Stannis by worshipping the Seven, but it wasn’t a lie. He only didn’t say everything.

“Very well. I think we can both agree we served terrible kings,” Lord Tyrion said. “But now they’re dead, and we have new enemies. The Boltons are possibly keeping Arya and Rickon Stark prisoners. I think we both agree they must be removed from Winterfell.”

“We agree,” said Lady Gwyn.

“Jon Snow says he wants to join his forces to us in his letter.”

“That’s right,” confirmed Davos.

“How many men does he have?”

“About five thousand.”

“Five thousand.” The Imp looked thoughtful. “My spies say that Ramsay has about six thousand men. Where are they from?”

“The bulk is made of the mountain clans. Flints, Norreys, and many other small lords.”

“Who else?”

“We have House Mormont, House Mazin and House Forrester to support us.”

“That’s all?” There was a false surprise on Lord Tyrion’s face. “These houses cannot muster many men, if I recall well. Are you telling me the mountain clans could bring about five thousand men on their own?”

Davos had to reveal the truth. “The mountain clans brought three thousand men. Most of the other two thousand are wildlings.”

“Wildings?” said Ser Brynden, not without scorn. “So the rumors are true.”

“Ramsay threatened to kill them all, so the wildling leaders accepted to help us.”

“And the Northerners? Are they getting along well with them?” asked the Lord of Casterly Rock.

Davos sighed. “It’s not easy to march to war with former enemies, but they do.”

Lord Tyrion seemed to think about it for a time. “We have about twenty-five thousand men, Ser Davos, including the men I brought from the Westerlands, the Tullys, the Freys and the other river lords, to which we must add a small detachment from House Hightower, and a few houses of the North, including the Manderlys, the Reeds and the Hornwoods, and the Cerwyns and the Dustins who joined us recently. They won’t be happy to learn that they will have to side with wildlings.”

“Jon Snow will not send them back north of the Wall.”

“Why wouldn’t he?” asked the Blackfish.

“Because they will die there, and worse.”

He looked at Lord Tyrion, trying to make him understand only with visual contact. If Jon Snow said the truth and that Tyrion Lannister knew the threat the White Walkers represented, then he might understand. Lord Lannister looked queerly at him.
“Well,” the Imp finally said, “we’ll have to live with it. Our forces will join before Winterfell, and we will try to keep the Northerners away from the wildlings, and from the Freys too. Once Winterfell is taken, the fate of the wildlings will be decided. My wife, Lady Sansa, will have to decide as Wardeness of the North and Lady of Winterfell.”

“Please excuse me, my lord, but Rickon Stark is the Lord of Winterfell,” Davos pointed out.

Davos felt a chill down his spine. The flap of the tent had been opened. The boy had come back with a young woman who was probably the Lady Hightower the Imp asked for.

“Lady Hightower,” the lad said. The lady in question was quite young, with black hair and green eyes, wearing furs with a common dress from the southern regions.

“Lady Mira, do you know this woman?” asked the Imp.

“Gwyn!” Lady Mira Hightower was looking in utter shock at Lady Gwyn, who looked as shocked as she was.

“Mira! It’s you. It’s really you?”

Davos looked at the women. “My lady,” he asked to Gwyn, “may I know what this is about?”

“She is Asher’s sister, Ser Davos,” Gwyn Forrester answered.

Davos looked at the young woman. He couldn’t see much resemblance between her and the hard Lord of Ironrath. Maybe some, if he looked more closely.

“What are you doing here?” asked Lady Mira, anger plain on her face.

“We have come to negotiate, my lady,” tried to explain Davos. “We are…”

“I have nothing to negotiate with her. Her family slaughtered mine. I have nothing to tell her.” Lady Mira turned on her heels.

“Mira, wait. Your brothers and your sister are alive,” said Gwyn.

The young lady stopped and looked at them. “What?”

“That is, some of them. Asher is alive, and so is Talia, and Ryon too. They are with Jon Snow, in his army.”

A silence followed. The Lady Hightower was speechless.

“Maybe you could continue this conversation in private, somewhere else,” suggested the Imp. “Lady Mira, you could speak with Lady Forrester or Whitehill, whatever her name is, in your own pavilion.”

“Yes… Yes, I suppose. Follow me, Gwyn.”

On that she left. Lady Gwyn excused herself, to Davos and the others, and followed her sister-in-law.

“Sorry for the interruption,” said Lord Tyrion. “You were saying that Rickon Stark is the Lord of Winterfell, didn’t you?”
“I did,” confirmed Davos. “Robb Stark died without children, so the title goes to his older brother still alive. Rickon Stark is alive, which makes of him the Lord of Winterfell.”

“Rickon Stark, as far as we know, is held prisoner by Ramsay. He is in no position to be Lord of Winterfell. Until he is free, Sansa is the Lady of Winterfell and the Wardeness of the North, fully recognized and supported by a royal decree from Tommen Baratheon the First of His Name. When we take Winterfell and that Rickon Stark is free, we will settle things with the king for Rickon to be acknowledged, but not before.”

Davos didn’t like the sound of it. The Lord of Casterly Rock wanted Winterfell for his wife, the Lady Sansa, so he could hold the North. He would have to report this to Jon Snow.

“Ser Davos,” said the Blackfish, “you have to understand that until recently, we all believed that Brandon and Rickon Stark died when the Ironmen took Winterfell. Some believe that all this might be a lie, entirely made by Ramsay Bolton.”

“Jon Snow received a letter from Ramsay, saying he had his sister Arya and his brother,” Davos argued.

“That was very convenient,” said Tyrion. “What better way to attract the last living son of Eddard Stark to Winterfell where he could be easily killed, and remove a great threat to Ramsay’s claim on the throne of the North?”

“You believe all of this is an invention?”

“It might be. We cannot be sure. Don’t get me wrong, Ser Davos. If Rickon Stark is alive, I will do everything I can to save him. He is my wife’s brother, and I brought a whole army this far north to save her sister. If I can save her brother in the process, I will gladly do it. But if he’s dead, there is nothing I can do. Even if he is alive, I doubt he has much chance to live until we get to him. You surely heard about Ramsay’s reputation.” Davos had heard of it, of course. He read the letter he sent to Jon Snow. He wasn’t sure for a moment after reading it if it had been a good thing to become literate. “Even if Rickon Stark still lives when we find him, the odds are heavy that he won’t be able to father any children. Even my wife prefers to believe that he’s dead because of that.”

There was something in Lord Tyrion’s face that made Davos believe what he said. He looked sorry about Rickon Stark. Maybe he was sincere on this.

“We will join our army with Jon Snow’s forces,” declared the Blackfish. “We will meet near Winterfell and fight Ramsay together. You have our word, Ser Davos. We will take Winterfell, free Arya and Rickon Stark, and reinstate House Stark as the Wardens of the North. I lost my niece at the Red Wedding. The Freys paid for their crimes, and I intend to make the Boltons pay their share too. And I am well determined to make sure that the children of my niece get what is owed to them.”

If Davos had doubts about the Imp, he couldn’t doubt the Blackfish. The man was a legend, and well known for his honour. They used the rest of the time to discuss details, exchanging information, deciding where and when the armies would join, settling the preliminary decisions concerning the aftermath of the battle. Davos got a tent to sleep tonight. It was a welcomed offer after weeks on the road and in the snow. He also got a hot meal, which was delicious compared to the food he ate lately. The Northerners weren’t renowned for their food, and the Night’s Watch was even worse.

Lady Forrester came to see him during dinner. They exchanged news. He told her about his discussion with Lord Tyrion, including the fact that Lord Tyrion would give the Stark name to his child with Lady Sansa who would get Winterfell, if Rickon Stark couldn’t be saved. He shared his doubts about Lord Tyrion’s motives, which Lady Gwyn approved. They had to be careful with the
Imp. It was a strange thing that the Lady Sansa wasn’t here. The excuse of a pregnancy was legitimate, but who said it was true, or even entirely true, or that this situation wasn’t used to keep the eldest daughter of Eddard Stark far from Winterfell when it would be taken? Davos didn’t know how Jon Snow would react to the new that his sister was pregnant from the Imp. Lady Gwyn revealed on her side her discussion with her sister-in-law. Apparently, Lady Mira Forrester, Lord Asher’s sister, was a handmaiden for Margaery Tyrell during the war. She was later a handmaiden for Lady Sansa Stark, then went back to the service of the queen when Jon Snow’s sister left the capital. The Lannisters planned to marry her to Gwyn’s brother, Torrhen Whitehill, but she managed to persuade the queen to arrange her a marriage with a grandson of Leyton Hightower, Lord of the Hightower. The Hightower troops with the army were under her husband’s command. They had come to take back Ironrath from the Whitehills. They believed that all Mira’s family died in the Battle of Ironrath. Davos could see some trouble ahead.

Later, Davos was wondering what he should do. He had a new letter in his bag, written by Lord Tyrion for Jon Snow. There was a letter Jon Snow gave him that he hadn’t delivered. It was a letter for his sister and her husband, different from the other one he gave to Ser Brynden, and with a much different content. Davos wished the Lady Sansa was here. Was it possible that she was left behind to not interfere with a possible conquest of the North by the Lannisters? Davos didn’t think the Blackfish was conspiring with the Lannisters, but he may be manipulated. All the same, the content of the letter was too important. He had to deliver it, even if only to the Imp. He left his tent.

The young squire introduced him in Lord Tyrion’s tent. Davos lost no time and handed the second scroll to the Lord of Casterly Rock. He read it carefully, frowning quite often. Davos thought the Imp read it more than once.

“Is that true?” Lord Tyrion finally asked.

“Jon Snow wouldn’t be lying about this, and I know he sent you ravens on the matter. He says you’ve been at the Wall, that you know the dangers behind it. The real dangers.”

Lord Tyrion looked at the letter again. He finally laid it on his desk. “Did he really fight them at Hardhome?”

“Aye, he did.”

“Did you see the dead? Yourself?”

“No, but I believe Jon Snow when he says he saw them. All the wildlings saw them too, and many men in the Night’s Watch. And I’ve seen things…”

Shadows. A woman drinking poison without dying. A man brought back from the dead. There was nothing Davos could believe to be impossible now.

“I don’t believe Jon Snow is lying. Jeor Mormont and Maester Aemon believed the White Walkers were real, and they were far from lunatics,” the Imp said. He looked very thoughtful. “It almost seems a blessing that I received information that my sister-in-law was at Winterfell, or else I would never have brought my army here, and the North would be defenseless against the White Walkers.”

“With all your respect, my lord, I don’t believe the rape of a little girl can be considered a blessing.”

The Imp looked at him. There was silence for some time. “I need to show you something, Ser Davos. Come with me.”

They walked through the camp and arrived at a section where the banners showed plants and flowers
you could mostly see in marshes. They stopped before one with three black water lilies on a pale violet field. Lord Tyrion walked from there to a tent and indicated to Davos to follow him.

Inside, the furniture was quite simple and minimalist. Only the necessary was there. The tent only had one occupant right now. It was a girl wearing dirty clothes, with brown hair and grey eyes, skinny, short for her age (Davos thought she could be fourteen or fifteen), and with a fierceness in her face.

“What is it?” she asked to Lord Tyrion. Then her eyes caught Davos. “Who’s that?”

Tyrion Lannister introduced them both. “This is Ser Davos Seaworth. Ser Davos, I present you the Lady Arya Stark of Winterfell.”

Davos looked at the girl. Arya Stark? How could that be? “Is that some joke?” he asked.

“It’s not. While I was at Casterly Rock, I received reports that Arya Stark was at Winterfell, wed by force to Ramsay Bolton, but when we arrived in the Neck, we discovered she had been at Greywater Watch with Lord Howland Reed all this time.” Davos looked at the girl again. He had to admit she had similarities with Jon Snow. They had the same eyes and the same hair. “You understand now, why I have doubts about Rickon Stark being in Winterfell. The Boltons lied about Arya Stark. Do you think it’s so unlikely that they are lying about Rickon Stark too?”

Davos kept looking at the girl. She fitted the description that Jon Snow gave of her. Everything he remembered Jon Snow saying about his sister matched the appearance of the girl standing before him.

“Who are you?” she asked.

Could she really be Arya Stark? Davos had to be sure. You never knew with the Lannisters. “May I ask you something, my lady? What was the thing your brother Jon Snow used to do with your hair very often?”

She looked at him with a strange expression. “Why are you asking me this?”

“Please, answer.”

“He ruffled them. Why?”

“Because that’s what he told me.”

Her eyes suddenly widened. “You know Jon? You saw him?”

“Aye. I did. I’m at his service, in fact. He sent me here to negotiate with Lord Tyrion, so we could join our forces to free Winterfell, and you my lady. We were sure you were a prisoner there.”

She remained silent for a moment. Then the questions rained. “How is he? Where is he? Is he alright? When can I see him?”

However, Davos still had some doubts. He had to be absolutely sure that this was Arya Stark. After all, many people could know that Jon Snow used to ruffle his sister’s hair. Lord Tyrion visited Winterfell before. He could have seen it, and tell the girl. He needed to ask her something that only the true Arya Stark would know.

“Before I answer, can you tell me what was the name of the sword that your brother gave you, before you left Winterfell?” he asked.
A short silence followed. Then the girl answered. “Needle.”

There was no doubt left. She was Arya Stark.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Cersei

I may publish one chapter per week from time to time in the near future. My Master is really taking me a lot of time, and I started an original story with that. I wish there were more than twenty-four hours within a single day.
“Everything is ready?” she asked.

“Everything was done as you ordered, your Grace,” the man before her assured.

Qyburn was a maester. Well, not really a maester. The Citadel had taken away his chains for practices they considered immoral. Cersei didn’t care. If her father had considered the morality of his actions, the Lannisters wouldn’t be powerful like they were today. Qyburn was useful, and as long as he would be useful, she would use him. He had healed Jaime after he lost his hand, and now he was in Cersei’s personal service. She kept him near her, in part as gratitude for helping Jaime, in part because she couldn’t suffer Pycelle anymore.

She didn’t miss Pycelle. The Grand Maester had become entirely useless. She had been wrong to rely on him for so long. He proved to be stupid every time she used him. He allowed Tyrion to put him into a cell when he was acting Hand of the King, and allowed doubt to be cast on his testimony at the trial. Because of his failures, the Imp had gotten out of it alive, Casterly Rock now belonged to him and Sansa, Joffrey was dead, Myrcella was dead, and Kevan died.

Kevan had been a fool to trust the Tyrells and the Martells. His most stupid idea had been to make an alliance with Margaery. The queen sends her regards. He even trusted Tyrion. Tyrion and Margaery had plotted against her and against Joffrey. Cersei warned her uncle, and he did nothing. He preferred to listen to the Imp, and Jaime had been barely better. Now, everything fell back on Cersei. She had to save Tommen, her last child, and her family, just like her lord father did when their grandfather died.

The task wasn’t easy, especially in her position, almost without power and without position, but it wasn’t desperate. If only events had unfolded in her favor. She wished Margaery, the little whore, had gotten a child from Tyrion during their conspiracy. Cersei could easily have accused her of fornication and adultery when the child would have been born and the world would have seen it was a monster like her brother. Unfortunately, it didn’t happen. Margaery surely took moon tea. She already had her claws in Tommen. Cersei couldn’t convince Tommen to set her aside. Margaery had enthralled him. She had stolen her son, almost.

Cersei’s situation was precarious, but not lost. She still had friends in the city, Qyburn the first, and some Lannister guards still had some respect for her. Some didn’t like to have a dwarf for their lord. Kevan’s death and Randyll Tarly’s departure for Dorne also left empty places she could fill, and Tommen wasn’t entirely lost to her. She still had some influence on him. He refused to make her go
and decided she could stay. She was still being watched, but loosely. More guards patrolled the
corridors than before, but that left less of them to watch over her. Randyll Tarly’s men left with their
lord for Dorne, and with Varys gone, there was no Master of Whisperers to tell everything to
Margaery. Cersei had to deal with her, and quickly. Lord Selwyn Tarth couldn’t be far away now,
and Tommen had named Garth Tyrell to be the new Master of Whisperers lately. He was surely on
his way from Highgarden. She had to do something before these men arrived and reinforced
Margaery’s position. If Jaime had remained in the capital, she would have one more ally, but she
would have to do without him.

Cersei looked at Qyburn. She didn’t know where he came from, his age, his family if he had one.
She couldn’t even be sure Qyburn was his real name, but he was loyal, and right now loyalty was all
she needed from him. He followed her to Stokeworth, then back to King’s Landing when Myrcella
died, and he would stay at her service as long as she would want him to.

“If this doesn’t work,” she said, “you know how we will both end.”

“Yes, your Grace.”

He turned to the wall behind him and pushed two blocks, then two others. Cersei heard something
rattling, like some sort of mechanism. Qyburn pushed the wall, and it gave way to a secret passage.
They were at the fourth level of the dungeon, the one where prisoners came alive and left dead, if
they ever left. Qyburn had wanted to forego any torch, for people said it was preferable to not see the
things at this level, but Cersei had declined. She had seen much worse than the things there could be
in the Red Keep’s dungeon. She wasn’t shocked by the things she saw down there. Disturbed,
maybe, but not shocked.

Cersei entered the secret passage, Qyburn on her heels. He closed the entrance behind him. This was
one of those passages the Spider and his little birds used, according to Qyburn. He managed to bribe
some of Varys’s little birds, and they gave him information about these tunnels. Cersei would make
him Master of Whisperers if she could, but Tommen had refused, preferring an uncle of his whore
queen, no matter how Cersei strongly advised against it.

Qyburn took the lead, his torch held up. They made their way in silence. Cersei knew she was taking
a huge risk, but the risk was worth it. She could do it. She was a lioness, the daughter of Tywin
Lannister, a child of the Rock, the true Lady of the Westerlands, the queen. She had more of her
father in her than any of his other children. If she was a man, she would have everything she wanted.
They turned right, then left, left again, then on the right thrice, before they turned left one last time.
They got through three other doors and arrived to a ladder. Qyburn climbed it first, and Cersei
followed. Her arms were aching when they reached the top and the disgraced maester opened the
trapdoor. He helped her get inside and closed the trapdoor behind them.

They were in an abandoned room, in an inn near the Iron Gate. There was a table, with black bread
and a decanter full of water, and three chairs, nothing more, nothing less.

“The little birds I spoke with told me that Lord Varys used to meet some of his informers here,”
explained Qyburn. “No one ever comes in this room. He has an arrangement with the owner of the
inn, but he only speaks with him through his little birds. The innkeeper won’t know it was us. He
never enters this room. He only leads the people to it when they ask.”

“What do we do now?”

“We wait, your Grace. And we pray for our guest to come.”

Pray. As if prayers would help them. She prayed when she was young, to bring her mother back to
life, and to have Tyrion die, and both demands remained unanswered for thirty-five years. The gods
wouldn’t help her. She would have to deal with her enemies all alone. Cersei waited. Qyburn helped
himself with some of the water, but Cersei refused any. She didn’t trust the quality of the water that
was served here. She remembered a time when they were on the road to Winterfell, back when
Robert decided to make Ned Stark his Hand. Tyrion had drunk with thieves and sellswords who
stayed at an inn where they stopped, drinking wine of the place without complaint. There was a
whore in the place, and of course Tyrion spent the night with her, while Robert spent his night with
the daughter of the innkeeper. Cersei had been able to spend the night with Jaime this time. Everyone
had been happy.

The same couldn’t be said now. Cersei raged when she learned that Tyrion had gotten the Stark girl
with a child. If Tyrion had a son, it would complicate matters a lot. Cersei would have to take care of
that, when the time would come. For now, however, she needed to take care of Margaery. Her little
brother was far away, and she would find a way to deal with him and his wife later. Cersei was glad
that they cancelled the betrothal between Joffrey and Sansa. No woman who would bear children for
the Imp was worthy to marry her son. A woman who had children with Tyrion was nothing better
than a common whore, which madeSansa a whore as much as Margaery was, and that made her
unworthy of being Lady of Casterly Rock. Cersei should have foreseen the influence Margaery had
on Sansa Stark. She should have prevented that. She should have married the little dove to someone
else after her father was arrested. Littlefinger had proposed to marry the Stark girl himself, but she
had refused. He wasn’t highborn enough. Now, Sansa was parading with the titles that were
Cersei’s. Margaery used other people against her, and she succeeded in setting her aside. For now.
Things were about to change.

The door opened. An old man, with falling grey hair, unwashed, wearing rags, without shoes,
stinking shit and piss, came in. Cersei sniffed at the smell he emitted. Qyburn didn’t look bothered by
it. The man stood before them, smiling like a fool, not bowing, nor kneeling. Cersei would have him
flogged for such impertinence in normal times, but right now she needed him.

“High Sparrow.”

“Your Grace.” He still didn’t bow.

“Would you like a seat?”

“Yes, gladly. My legs don’t support me as well as they used to.” He laughed shortly, and Cersei
imitated him dryly.

“Thank you for coming.”

“I have to admit, I found your invitation quite… unexpected. My relations with the Crown could
have been better lately.”

“I’m sorry for the way Lord Tarly beat down you and your followers, but I can assure you that
things are about to change.”

“Well, this is good news. I would like it if I could walk the streets again without fearing to be
executed any second.” Another short laugh. With such a leader, no wonder the Sparrows posed no
problem to Randyll Tarly. Her uncle had to be very weak to have let them become a threat at all.
Still, they could be useful. “How may I serve?”

“My son, the king, is very concerned. About the state of the Faith.”

“We share this concern.”
“The Faith has grown into a corrupt institution, led by men who are more occupied by their riches and comforts in life than the souls of the people and the worshipping of the gods.”

“A great shame it is, which is why I came here.”

“And you were right to come, but that’s not everything. All over Westeros, we hear of septs being burned, Silent Sisters raped, bodies of holy men piled in the streets.”

“Wars teach people to obey the sword, not the gods,” he stated.

“My son, the king, knows that, and he wants to put an end to it.”

“I thank the king for that. I pray for his Grace every day.”

“However, he feels that you could help him in reaching that goal, to protect the Faith, and to restore it in its former purity.”

The High Sparrow looked a little surprised for a moment. “I’m quite touched that his Grace thought I could help him, but I don’t really see how.”

“You want to restore the Faith, something the actual High Septon refuses to do. The king believes you should be the High Septon.”

“I’m quite honored of his opinion. I didn’t know the king thought so much of me.”

“He does, and he also knows that the gods need a sword of their own, if they are to be obeyed. In the days before the Targaryens, the Faith Militant dispensed the justice of the Seven.”

“Well, the Faith Militant was disarmed more than two centuries ago.”

“My son believes it is time to bring them back. He believes you are well placed to choose the believers who are worthy of such a task.”

“An army that defends the bodies and souls of the common people?” That was something the old man never expected, obviously.

“An army in the service to the gods themselves. And to you, of course, as the chosen representative of the Seven.”

“An honor I never expected, or wished for. But I’m afraid I’m not the High Septon. Sorold was chosen by the Most Devout…”

“The Most Devout are corrupted, and sinners. Which you are not. Which is why my son issued a decree making you the real High Septon. Unlike the Most Devout, the king is not corrupted, and he cares for his people, both their bodies and their souls.”

“I have to admit I was no longer sure of that, after everything that happened in the last weeks.”

Cersei looked at Qyburn. He produced a parchment from his sleeve and gave it to the High Sparrow. He looked at it and read it. It hadn’t been difficult for Cersei to have Tommen sign it. She simply went to see him while he was signing decrees, and slipped it in the pile. He never read what he signed, so much he loved to sign and stamp. He never took notice of what was written on the papers he signed.

“I wonder if I’m dreaming,” the man finally said. He seemed capable of reading. Cersei hadn’t been sure he could.
“You’re not. The gods are leading the king, and they led him to you. You have all you need to protect the people and restore the Faith. I hope we can count on you to defend the king.”

“The king is anointed by the Seven. He is chosen by them as much as the High Septon, as their chosen representative. We shall do everything to protect his Grace.”

Cersei smirked, but took a sadder expression. She gave herself a concerned look. “Would you help the king against his will?”

“What do you mean, your Grace, if I may?”

“The king wants to do what is best, but he is surrounded by corrupted people. They stopped him from acting in your favor before, and he could only do that because these people are gone now. Most of them.” She looked on the floor. “I’m afraid for him. Afraid of what could happen to him. Afraid that evil men may divert him from the rightful path. He wants so much to do what is good, and yet… I fear for his life.”

A moment of silence went on. “You love your children, don’t you?”

She looked back at him. Of course, I love my children, you dumb fool! “Yes, I do. I do love them so much.”

The High Sparrow seemed to sympathize. “I can feel the Mother’s presence in you, your Grace. When you speak of your children, the Mother’s love outshines everything.” Cersei was in no mood for religious discussions, but she kept playing her part. The High Sparrow had men, and she needed those men. “It was horrible what happened to them. You have my deepest condolences. You can be sure that we will do everything we can to protect the king. We will do everything we can to protect your son.”

You can’t protect him. Only I can protect him. “I thank you so much, but he needs protection from someone very specific. Someone close to him. Someone wicked, a sinner beyond the reach of justice. My son cannot punish that person, as much as she deserves it.”

“A very sad thing, but all sinners are equal before the gods. He shall not escape justice forever.”

“But this sinner endangers the king. We cannot wait for him to face justice in the other world. He is shielded by gold and privilege. He is in our very mist, and yet the king can do nothing against him. But I think you can.”

“I live to serve the gods, and to serve his servant, the king.”

“Then he needs you on this, more than ever.”

They spent some time talking about arrangements afterwards. They would need to act quickly tomorrow. Everything had to be prepared in detail. It wouldn’t be difficult to execute, but they needed to be well prepared and to take everyone by surprise. There weren’t enough men in the Red Keep to pose a real threat if everything was done swiftly. They were scattered through the castle.

That night, Cersei didn’t sleep well. She saw Maggy the Frog again, and Tyrion standing before her, two shadows behind him, his own shadow covering her. She never realized how long and dark his shadow was. She felt hands around her throat. She was suffocating. She saw three bodies in front of her, lying down on the floor. Joffrey and Myrcella had their faces covered by blood, and Tommen, her little Tommen, had his body all distorted. His face looked as if someone crushed it against a wall. She cried, and the life choked from her.
She woke up. That was only a dream. There was no truth in that prophecy. Tyrion was far away. She would deal with him before he could touch her. She called her handmaidens to prepare her for the day. By now, the Sparrows surely occupied the Great Sept of Baelor, and no one knew. It wouldn’t be long before the second part of the plan was executed. Qyburn would see that everything went right.

In the morning, Cersei walked on the battlements. She came over one of the courtyards and saw a few people looking at two young knights sparring. He always sparred at this time of the day. She looked at them for a long time. Jaime was much better than them. It was a shame that Jaime wasn’t there, but it didn’t matter. She was saving their son. Her son.

They came out. There were about twenty of them. Qyburn had made sure they found their way through the tunnels under the Red Keep, to a place very close to this yard. One of the knights was knocked out on the ground. The other one, still standing, could barely remove his helmet before the Sparrows put their hands on him and deprived him of any weapon he had. The squires and other men who were present didn’t react. Even if only armed with clubs and maces, they were more dangerous than knights without their swords.

Cersei saw them gag him and bring him away quickly, to the consternation of everyone. A note was left behind by one of the Sparrows. She wished the whore could be here to see it. She would learn it soon anyway. Cersei gloated. She wished she had wine with her. She walked away on the battlements, enjoying the sun and the fresh air of the autumn. Winter was coming, indeed. It was coming for some people, particularly. She went back to her room and poured herself a cup of her best flagon of wine. She savoured it, along with her first victory in more than a year. In a coat of gold, or a coat of red, a lioness still had claws.

Chapter End Notes
Sansa XXVI

Chapter Notes

This chapter is one of my favourites that I wrote recently. Sansa's storyline in White Harbor is the one going on that I like the most right now, followed by the Meereen plot.

By the way, for those who feel I abandoned Tyrion recently (more than ten chapters since his last POV), don't worry, he'll come back soon. Only there are so many major characters converging on Winterfell that it's difficult to find place for everyone.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Anything special with the other servants here?” Sansa asked to her handmaiden, as she brushed her hair.

“No, my lady. Only the usual gossips,” Willia answered.

“I hope you don’t feel out of place.”

“Not really, my lady. In fact, it’s much similar to Casterly Rock. People don’t look different from there.”

Sansa nodded. She supposed that Willia had been somewhat afraid to go in the North. She grew up in the Westerlands, and of course she shared all the preconceived opinions the people of the south had over those of the North. Attending to a Lady of Casterly Rock who came from the North was one thing, but to actually go in the North was entirely different, or so Sansa thought. She didn’t speak a lot with Willia. Since Shae betrayed her, she didn’t really try to get friendly with her handmaidens or to know them. Mira was an exception, since she came from the North just like Sansa and she had lost all her family too. Unlike Sansa, Mira had no chance of ever seeing again her sister or one of her brothers. She really was the last of her family. Except Mira, Sansa didn’t try to know more than necessary about her handmaidens, and mostly spoke with them when it was required and nothing more.

“Did you hear anything about the Freys?” Sansa asked her.

“Not much, my lady. Except, a handmaiden of Lady Manderly who said something like… She said they were surely happy with their accommodations, but she didn’t seem quite convinced, more sarcastic.”

Sansa nodded. She couldn’t get any information about the three Freys who were kept here. She never saw them, and truth be told she didn’t want to see them, but she was curious about their comings and goings. Rhaegar, Symond and Jared Frey had been sent to White Harbor by Walder Frey after the Red Wedding. Rhaegar Frey was supposed to marry Wynafryd Manderly, thus ensuring House Manderly would bend the knee to the Iron Throne. However, when Tyrion and Sansa turned on the Freys at Riverrun, they forced Walder Frey to bend the knee to House Tully
again, cancelled the betrothal, as well as another betrothal between Wylla Manderly and some other son of Walder Frey. There were so many that Sansa didn’t know which son it was. She thought there were probably twenty different Walder Frey. Still, not only the betrothals in question were called out, but the three Freys in question were to remain in White Harbor as guests, just like Sansa was a guest in King’s Landing after her father was killed.

The whispers wanted that the Freys were kept in the cells of the Wolf’s Den. Sansa didn’t see the problem in that. Her uncle Edmure had been kept in an open cell when he wasn’t on a gibbet during the siege of Riverrun, and for almost a year. Let the Freys rot in prison. However, there was a remark that she heard from Wylla Manderly not long ago that puzzled her. *I suppose the Freys love rats.* Were they starving them? She and Tyrion had thought they shouldn’t push too far on the Freys. They already killed many of them, though sometimes Sansa thought this wasn’t enough. She may agree with Wylla Manderly on that matter. The Manderlys were better to keep these Freys out of her sight. Ser Perwyn and Olyvar Frey were decent enough, but she wouldn’t trust any Frey on sight for the rest of her life.

The door opened. Another handmaiden, who was placed at her service by Lord Manderly, came in. “Lady Lannister, Lady Wynafryd is waiting for you.”

“I’m coming,” Sansa said.

Willia hurried to finish her hair. Then, as always when she brushed Sansa’s hair, she put her necklace with a golden lion around her throat. She always had it on her, even here. That was the one thing she would never make any compromise with. Wylla Manderly once looked disdainfully at it, but Sansa wouldn’t stop wearing it for anything in the world.

Lady Wynafryd Manderly was waiting for her outside, indeed. She was richly dressed. If Sansa had visited White Harbor before, she wouldn’t have thought that the North was without interest. There were knights here, and the city was much more welcoming than King’s Landing. They walked to the Merman’s Court where they would welcome the lords, Brienne following them behind. She was Sansa’s shadow here, and was never far from her.

“Still wearing that necklace?” Wynafryd asked her.

“Yes, always.”

Wynafryd smiled to her. “A Lannister outside, and a Stark inside.”

She had been a good friend for Sansa since they arrived. While Wylla Manderly kept sneering and discreetly insulting Sansa and the Lannisters as if they were Freys or Boltons, Wynafryd proved to be very civil. She made Sansa visit White Harbor as much as she could with her growing belly and often kept her company. When she had asked Sansa why she wore the same Lannister necklace all the time, Sansa had showed her the silver direwolf hidden inside. Wynafryd had been courteous with Sansa before, though not more than necessary. After that, she warmed up towards her. Even Wylla looked with a curious glance at Sansa’s neck the next day. She supposed her sister told her the truth about it.

“Do you know anything about this Lord Harrold Arryn?” Sansa asked her. The ships of the Vale had been spotted coming yesterday.

“I never heard about him, but I suppose there had to be some distant relative of Jon Arryn somewhere. The man had a brother and a sister. I heard the brother is dead, and we know his only son, Elbert Arryn, was killed by the Mad King at the same time than your lord grandfather, Lord Rickard Stark, and his son Brandon. Maybe the sister had children.”
“Maybe,” conceded Sansa.

“Well, he already seems better than the previous lord. Robin Arryn remained in his castle at the top of the mountains, doing nothing, while we bled and died on the battlefields.”

Sansa couldn’t agree more. “Robin Arryn was a coward. Just like Joffrey was.”

Wynafryd and Sansa exchanged a smile again. Sansa had nothing to fear from speaking ill of Joffrey with a Northerner. Still, she was careful with the arrival of this new Lord of the Eyrie. Her aunt and her cousin died quite close to each other. Of course, she knew who actually killed Lysa Arryn, but what about Robin Arryn? She suspected Littlefinger to have some role in that. It wouldn’t be the first time he had someone assassinated, or at least helped to his assassination. If the Knights of the Vale were coming and that Petyr Baelish was behind it one way or another, she had to be wary with them. She could still remember the dagger of Ser Dontos on her throat. A man who claims he loved your mother. I think you know who I’m talking about. Don’t trust him! Don’t trust anybody! The last words Shae told her pounded in her head. Don’t trust anybody! Indeed, she couldn’t trust anybody here, except the ones who proved they wanted to help her, and only wanted to help her. There weren’t much people aside her family she could include in that. Except the woman clad in armor who walked behind her, and her lord husband, of course, though Tyrion was family now for her, more than ever with the child they were about to have. The kicks reminded her of this fact once more.

“I’m not sure the Knights of the Vale can help us,” said Sansa. “We already have more than enough men in the North, and they are arriving quite late.”

“We will defeat the Boltons, with or without this Lord Arryn, my lady. We will make them pay. We will avenge the Red Wedding. You can be sure of that. We will avenge Robb Stark, our king.”

“We will, but we will avenge my brother Robb, not our king.”

“What do you mean?”

“Robb died because of the crown on his head. I don’t want to avenge him as a king. I want to avenge him as my brother, and as the Lord of Winterfell. Ramsay will die, and I will make sure that he is the last one to ever be called King in the North by anyone.”

A moment passed. “Of course, my lady.” Lady Wynafryd sounded a bit cold in her answer.

In the Merman’s Court, the great hall of the New Castle, people were gathering all around. People let Sansa and Wynafryd get through. With Brienne close and at hands, no one dared to get in her way, and Sansa’s position as Lady of the Westerlands and Wardeness of the North, added to her condition as a pregnant woman, completed the whole set of circumstances that made everyone careful around her. Despite all this, Sansa could see the few looks of hatred and contempt thrown at her. Many saw her as a Lannister. Again, Sansa wondered who she was. If people looked at her this way here, how would that be farther in the North, when she would take her place at Winterfell?

“Lady Lannister,” Lord Manderly welcomed her when they arrived on the dais. “As Wardeness of the North, you may take my seat to receive Lord Arryn.”

Sansa looked at the large cushioned throne. “Thank you, my lord, but I’m afraid I’m not large enough to take your seat.”

Lod Manderly laughed after a moment. “As you wish, my lady. Take place on my left.”

Sansa sat on the designated seat. She sighed in relief. It became harder to walk. She thought she
would be less tired in White Harbor than on the road, but it didn’t seem to be the case. She stayed in her rooms most of the time. Wynafryd took place to her left and Brienne behind her. Lady Wylla sat on her sister’s left. She nodded towards Sansa, the best courtesy she could show towards the Lady of the Westerlands. Ser Wylis Manderly and his wife, on Lord Wyman’s right, completed the set of people on the dais.

Sansa’s thoughts turned to Tyrion and Arya, and to Jon. It had been so long since she last saw him. She had so much to tell him, so much she couldn’t write down on the ravens she sent to Castleblack. She tried to focus on the present time. She had to discover who this Harrold Arryn was. The name rang no bell to anyone here. Maybe Tyrion would know. What would he do in her stead? With all the suspicion surrounding her, Sansa thought this wasn’t that different from King’s Landing. She had to find out the most she could about the others’ intentions, both Manderlys and Arryns. She could see that Lord Manderly wasn’t entirely won to Tyrion’s side. He made an alliance with them mostly to get his son back, and protect his daughters from marrying Freys. Sansa wouldn’t blame him for that, but since she bore the name Lannister now, she saw that the Lord of White Harbor was reluctant in some way to see her as the Wardeness of the North. Tyrion was right. Their son would have to be named a Stark. It was obvious from their first conversation last week that the Lord of White Harbor would rather have her brother Rickon to serve. Shae had been right. She couldn’t trust anybody.

Someone came in from the doors and announced that Lord Arryn and the lords of the Vale were coming. People gathered on the sides of the Court. Sansa tried to look as dignified as she could with the heavy burden in her stomach. The huge doors of the Court slowly opened. The blue banners with a falcon on a moon were the first things to be seen. Two lines of men carrying them took place at each side of the alley that opened between the dais and the doors. Then they came. A few lords and ladies came, all dressed in different ways, but Sansa only had eyes for one of them.

The moustache, along with the small beard on the chin, the face that smiled while the eyes didn’t… Petyr Baelish walked toward her. He was still wearing his mockingbird pin at the collar of his doublet. His smiled as if he was mocking her, and Sansa was quite sure he mocked her more often than she ever realized it. He had claimed to be her friend, but in fact he had tried to abduct her, to use her, he lied to her, betrayed her… Fury was growing inside of her. The small group stopped before the dais. He kept looking at her, and she returned the gaze. If he was surprised to see her, he showed nothing of it. She had a great envy to tell everyone here everything he did, and to have him executed right away. She was Wardeness of the North. Surely she could order his death now if she wanted to.

A stick hit the floor. “Harrold, son of Edmund, of House Arryn, Lord of the Eyrie, Defender of the Vale, and Warden of the East, comes seeking the hospitality of House Manderly,” announced a man Sansa didn’t see. Her eyes turned to the new Lord of the Eyrie.

He was staring at her, and it was as if she received another kick in the stomach, this time not from her baby. She knew this man. Sandy hair, blue eyes, dimples when he smiled like he did right now, broad of shoulders under his armor. Ser Harold Hardyng. Sansa could barely keep her mouth shut.

“Lord Arryn, the hospitality of White Harbor is yours,” declared Lord Manderly.

“Thank you, my lord,” replied the young man. He only looked at Lord Manderly for a moment, turning again to Sansa. There was no doubt. This was Harrold Arryn. How could that be? He stepped back, still looking at Sansa, and pointed his hand towards the people behind him. “Let me introduce you to a few of my most loyal bannermen. Lady Anya Waynwood, Lady of Ironoaks.” An old woman with curly grey hair came forth. “Lord Benedar Belmore, of Strongsong.” An old man with a beard advanced this time. “And Lord Yohn Royce, of Runestone.” The man who stepped forward wasn’t of the first youth anymore, but he seemed quite strong and muscular. Sansa recognized him. She saw him at Winterfell, a long time ago, when he accompanied his son Waymar
“Lord Manderly,” The Lord of Runestone bowed to the Lord of White Harbor, then turned to Sansa. “Lady Lannister, it’s a relief to see you again, after all this time.”

“Indeed. Thank you, Lord Royce. It’s a pleasure to see you too,” Sansa replied.

The Lord of Runestone seemed to hesitate for some time. “I’m glad to see you are well.”

“As am I.” The new Lord of the Eyrie joined the conversation, uninvited. “It’s been a long time, my lady. I’m proud to tell you that the Knights of the Vale will fight and do everything necessary to bring back the North to the true daughter of Eddard Stark.”

There were cheers. Sansa felt gazes on her. Was she to explain how they met at her name day? She couldn’t make a misstep when so many people were looking at her. “When we met several months ago, Lord Arryn, you were a knight named Harrold Hardyng, if I remember well. I also remember you were unhorsed by a woman in a tourney.”

A moment of silence went, then a few coughed among the assistance. Sansa noticed that Wynafryd had some difficulty to not laugh as well. The Lord of the Eyrie was stammering, and some of his bannermen were looking at him with queer looks. He didn’t know what to answer.

Sansa decided to add some more. “I’m sure you remember my sworn shield, Lady Brienne of Tarth, daughter and heir to Lord Selwyn Tarth. I do hope you will fight better against the Boltons than against her.” The Lord of the Eyrie seemed to realize who was the woman who stood behind Sansa at this moment. People laughed again.

“Yes, of course, I remember.” The Warden of the East was obviously displeased by Brienne’s presence. “My name was Harrold Hardyng at the time, but my grandmother was Alys Waynwood, the sister of our regretted Lord Jon Arryn. I am the last of her grandchildren.”

Now Sansa understood why he became Lord of the Eyrie. “I’m sorry for your loss, Lord Arryn,” said Sansa.

“What loss?” He really was lost.

“I’m sure you regret the death of your dear cousin, Robin Arryn, very deeply.”

He seemed to realize what she had meant. “Yes, I am. Of course. A terrible sickness that took our dear lord away from us.”

He didn’t look very sad about it. Sansa doubted he was ever fond of Robin Arryn. Maybe he never met him. He told her at Casterly Rock that he was a ward to Lady Waynwood. He was certainly quite happy to be Lord of the Eyrie, and was certainly at best indifferent to his cousin’s death.

“Rooms have been prepared for you, my lords,” declared Lord Manderly. “Your men will have the right to camp outside the city.”

“Thank you, Lord Manderly,” answered Lady Waynwood. It wasn’t Lord Arryn who answered. He seemed quite uncomfortable in the actual situation. Sansa had just humiliated him.

The Merman’s Court was cleared and Sansa got back to her rooms with Brienne. Wynafryd accompanied her. Sansa regaled her with all the anecdotes she could remember on Lord Arryn’s passage at her name day. Both agreed that he mostly looked like a young and arrogant knight who believed he was the best. Brienne remained mostly placid, but Sansa thought she saw a smile
threatening to appear a few times as they walked. Wynafryd’s comment that Sansa had the Lord of the Eyrie on her heels and that the Imp should be careful to not lose her didn’t sound very funny to Sansa.

Back in her rooms, Sansa took her leave of Wynafryd and asked Brienne to come in with her. They had to discuss. Brienne spoke before she could.

“We can laugh, my lady, but I don’t like this. This Harrold Arryn… He shouldn’t be there. I don’t know why he came, but I don’t like the idea of him being here.”

“Me neither, but I’m more concerned about Baelish being present. Did you notice Harold Arryn didn’t introduce him with the other lords?”

“I did, my lady. I kept an eye on him all this time. I think we should tell Lord Manderly about Littlefinger’s doings. He is true to the memory of Lord Eddard Stark your father, my lady. If he knows what Baelish did to him…”

“What could he do, Brienne? There will be men of the Vale everywhere inside and outside the city very soon. We know he is bringing ten thousand men now, not only five thousand. If we arrested Littlefinger or executed him, we could have a war at White Harbor. The Knights of the Vale won’t stand idle while the husband of their former lady is being beheaded.”

“We could tell the truth to them as well,” Brienne suggested. “And we could reveal that your sister is alive, and tell them what she told us, about Littlefinger trying to sell her off to the Boltons. No one honorable would follow him.”

“I doubt that all the Knights of the Vale ae honorable.” She remembered the things Arya told them about Ser Lyn Corbray, and Ser Meryn and Ser Boros’s fists. “And even if we did, what proof do we have? My sister is miles away and Littlefinger could reveal the truth about the death of Lady Lysa Arryn. Arya told us that Lady Waynwood and Lord Royce were there when she confessed doing so. He has witnesses. We have none.”

“You are the Wardeness of the North, my lady. The people will believe you.”

Sansa shook her head. She appreciated Brienne’s respect for her, but not everybody shared it. “I am the Imp’s wife, the Lady of Casterly Rock, the first lady of House Lannister, and I’m bearing the future heir to Casterly Rock. For most of these people outside, I am Sansa Lannister, Brienne. They won’t listen to me because I’m he daughter of Eddard Stark, especially not when they believe Rickon could still be alive.”

Brienne looked down, realizing something now. She stared again at Sansa. “You could tell them to leave. No matter what the lords of the North think of you, you are their lady to them all, and all the North belongs to you. You could order the Knights of the Vale to leave.”

“I could, but what reason will I give? That I don’t want their help to get back Winterfell, when they traveled all this way? And I’m quite sure Littlefinger will find a way to keep the Knights of the Vale here.”

“Maybe we could talk with Harrold Arryn. I don’t like him, but he doesn’t seem fond of Baelish. He didn’t introduce him, like you said. Maybe if you tell him about his betrayal of your lord father, after all you told me he said he admired him…”

“No, Brienne. I can’t take that risk,” Sansa cut her. “We must get rid of Baelish, but for now we can’t. I can’t rely on Harrold Arryn. He could be a creature of Littlefinger, just like Ser Dontos. It’s
possible he left him in the shadows so he wouldn’t be noticed. Littlefinger always proceeds this way. He stays in the dark. We can hardly retrace everything to him.”

“What do we do, then?”

“We find a way to get rid of Littlefinger without having the Knights of the Vale against us.”

“How?”

A knock on the door interrupted them. Willia announced Lord Baelish. Brienne looked at Sansa, her hand on the pommel of her sword.

“Let Lord Baelish come in, Willia,” Sansa replied.

The former Master of Coin entered in Sansa’s personal room. Brienne still had her hand ready to unsheathe her sword. He acted as if nothing was amiss and that he and Sansa met in the most normal circumstances.

“My lady, to see you after so much time is a blessing,” he said.

Sansa forced a smile upon her face. “Lord Baelish. I’m glad to see you again. There are few left in the world that I can call friends.”

Brienne looked at her, astonished. “You flatter me, my lady.”

Littlefinger cast a look at Brienne, then at Sansa. He wanted them to be alone. Sansa looked at Brienne.

“You may leave us, Brienne. I doubt Lord Baelish will try to kill me with a dagger hidden in his breeches.”

Littlefinger sniggered at the jape. It was half a jape, because it was true. Sansa knew that Baelish was dangerous, but he wouldn’t try to kill her here, and even less by himself. That wasn’t his way of doing things. He always let the others do his dirty work. Sansa made Brienne understand that with her eyes, and Brienne finally accepted to leave, not without casting a threatening look to the former acting Lord of the Eyrie.

Once she was outside, Littlefinger took a seat near the table where Sansa ate most of the time. However, he didn’t sit at the table. He brought the chair close to her, face to face, and sat. Sansa didn’t like the way he looked at her. Men only want one thing from a pretty girl. Now she thought she understood what Shae meant.

“Please forgive Brienne. She’s only trying to protect me,” said Sansa, trying to end the heavy silence that lingered.

“There’s no offense. I understand your need for someone to protect you. Though I wouldn’t have chosen Brienne of Tarth for this.”

“She served my mother before,” Sansa pointed.

“Until she helped Ser Jaime Lannister to escape, which deprived your brother from his only mean to get you back.” He took her right hand in his own. “I’m really sorry about them. What happened at the Twins… is unforgiveable.”

Indeed, it is unforgiveable. As is your part in my father’s execution, and your attempt to sell Arya
like cattle to Roose Bolton. “Thank you, Lord Baelish.” His hands were cold.

“And I can’t imagine what an ordeal it has been to be married to a man whose family participated to the murders of your brother and your mother. I can’t begin to imagine how Cat would feel about that.”

Sansa slowly removed her hand from Littlefinger’s, trying to not do it too quickly. “It could have been worse. I could have married Joffrey.”

He smiled. “Indeed. In normal circumstances, I believe congratulations would be in order, but I’m not entirely sure on this one.” He was looking down at her belly.

“That’s alright. Lord Tyrion was quite kind with me. He didn’t force himself upon me.”

Lord Baelish had a queer and curious expression. “Does that mean the child…?”

“No, he’s his. I gave in at the end. I didn’t see the point of remaining a maid forever. And he was kind. He never mistreated me. I suppose I was married to the most decent Lannister I could hope for.”

Lord Baelish’s face was still smiling, but his eyes had grown cold, even furious. “I suppose you were lucky in some way. And your child will be the future Lord of Casterly Rock and Winterfell I presume.”

“For the time being,” Sansa confirmed.

His smile widened once more. “I shall be careful with that guard you’ve got, still. Lady Brienne of Tarth was kingsguard to Renly Baratheon.”

“I know it.”

“And do you know she killed him?”

“I don’t think so. My mother was in his tent when Lord Renly died, and I doubt she would have fled with Lady Brienne is she was an assassin.”

“I was in the camp when the accident happened. From what I gathered, your mother left the tent not long before Renly Baratheon was killed. Lady Brienne was alone with him when he died. I suppose Cat never knew who actually killed him. She was suspected of his murder, and escaped with the first person she crossed who could help her to get outside this camp.”

He lied very well. Sansa wanted to shout at him, and accuse him of all the tragedies that had befallen to her family during these past years, and to call Brienne immediately to kill him, but she didn’t. She had to play the game, just like he did. Margaery was capable of manipulating Joffrey, so surely there was a way to manipulate Littlefinger.

“I didn’t know.” She feigned ignorance.

“I wouldn’t keep her so close of me if I were you.”

“I will look into this, but I don’t believe Tyrion would allow me to send her away.”

“A pity. The Imp seems to impose you a few things that are not to your taste.”

“He’s my husband, and the only protection I have now.”
“Do you think he will still protect you once he’s got all the children he needs from you?”

“I highly doubt he would kill me.”

“Do you really know who the Imp is?”

“I know that he’s been kind to me, and that he treated me better than everyone else in King’s Landing.”

“I don’t doubt it. That’s the same he did the first time he was married.” A silence followed. Sansa didn’t answer. How could he know? “You didn’t know it, didn’t you? You’re not the first wife of Tyrion Lannister.”

He thought she didn’t know. Better to encourage him in this way. “I didn’t know.”

“Well, he did have one. She was about your age, from what I know, quite pretty, but not highborn at all. He remained with her for two weeks. And when he grew bored with her, he made a gift of her to his father’s guardsmen. He might do the same to you, in time.”

He had a sorry and concerned look on his face, but again his eyes didn’t follow. Sansa wanted to slap him in the face just like she did for Black Walder at Riverrun, but she stopped herself from doing so. He was lying outrageously. She would have him dead. Later.

“I didn’t know.” Her voice was trembling. She hoped he would mistake it for fear, or that he would think she was angry at her husband, which wasn’t the case. She knew Tyrion would never do something like that. Littlefinger had lied to her, to her mother, to her father, to everyone. She knew the real story, and Littlefinger wouldn’t fool her again.

“Well, now you do. Do you think you’re that lucky with the Imp?”

“No.” That was all she could reply. He took her hand in his once more. She wanted to snatch it away, but she didn’t.

“I hope you know that I’m your friend, Sansa. Your true friend.”

“I do, Lord Baelish.” She tried to look as sincere as she was two years ago, back when she refused to follow him when he left King’s Landing. She regretted it later, when it was decided she would marry Tyrion, but now she thought it was probably the best decision she ever took before her family died.

“Then believe me when I tell you that I want to help you.”

“I believe you, of course.”

“Then listen to me. I know that you don’t like Harrold Arryn. It is quite obvious from the way you received him today.”

“No, I don’t like him. He reminds too much of Joffrey. He’s arrogant just like him.”

“I understand. Joffrey had you beaten and worse, and it’s understandable that you don’t like anything that looks like him in any way.” Yes, Joffrey had me beaten, and it was Tyrion who saved me, not you. He was my true friend in King’s Landing, and now he’s my husband, and I’m carrying his child. Our child. “But you have to understand that when he visited Casterly Rock for your tourney, Harrold was smitten by you. I am still one of his advisers. He was still a ward to Lady Waynwood until recently, and she says all he could talk about after he visited the Rock was you. You were the first woman to really reject him, and he won’t stop following you. He will do everything for you. If
you want to escape the Imp, then he is your best chance. Once he wants something, he doesn’t give up until he gets it. Make of him your ally, and you will be able to escape the Lannisters.”

Sansa thought she ought to look uncertain. “Are you sure?”

“I am sure. Harrold Arryn will do everything for you.”

“But won’t he want me to marry him after I’m free?”

“He already wants to marry you. He has quite a lot of success with women. He already had two bastards, but you’re not of the ordinary sort. You are the daughter of Eddard Stark. He won’t want you for a single night. He wants you as his wife.”

“But I already have a child.”

“He won’t care about that. I think it might even make you more attractive in his eyes. You are a lady in distress who he can help. Ask him to help you, to do anything, and he will do it.”

That looked like a knight from the stories Sansa loved a long time ago. But that was a long time ago.

“I will try.”

“Good.” He let go her hand. “We will see each other at the feast tonight. Make sure to be at your best. Make him fall in love with you even more than he already is. I wish you well.”

Littlefinger left on this. Sansa sighed when the door closed. She wanted so much to kill him. She needed to be patient. She would have him killed, when the time would be right.

Brienne entered the room. “Are you all right, my lady?” she asked.

“I am.”

“Did he do anything to you? What did he tell you?”

Sansa smiled wickedly. “Something that gave me the way to kill him.”

Sansa had Willia prepare her for the feast. She wouldn’t miss it like the one for Ser Wylis’s return. She put on a gorgeous blue gown and had her hair well braided. She also put a few jewels, though not as much as she usually had in Casterly Rock. She couldn’t look too much like the Lady of the Westerlands. She ordered Brienne to keep an eye on her from afar for all the evening, and agreed with her on a course of action.

The feast was refined, with refined music, refined dance and refined food like always. To Sansa, it looked quite casual now, after all her time in King’s Landing and Casterly Rock. She had other concerns. She could feel the gaze of Harrold Arryn on her. She wished he could be away. He was already insufferable back when they met at Casterly Rock, and now was no different. Sansa ignored him and focused on her food. Anyway, according to Lord Baelish, the more she remained indifferent to Harrold Arryn, the more he would be following her everywhere. Though, she couldn’t be sure she could believe what this man said. After all, he lied to her more than often. He may have lied about it as well. Either way, Sansa gave no attention to the Lord of the Eyrie.

Still, he came to her on the dais and bowed deeply. “My lady.”

“Lord Arryn. I hope you’ll forgive the way I welcomed you. You understand, women in my condition have a sensible mood and our last meeting didn’t go very well,” Sansa said.
“No, indeed. That’s why I came to you. I wanted to apologize for what happened the last time, at Casterly Rock.”

“A wise man once said that only great men admitted their mistakes.”

“Well, I agree with him.” He looked as arrogant as he always was. He was too much like Ser Loras.

“Let us put our differences aside. You came to help my family. I appreciate that.”

“I came here to help you, my lady.” The little girl she once was would have been touched. The woman she became wasn’t.

“I thank you, Lord Arryn.”

“I would gladly invite you to dance.”

“I’m afraid I can’t, in my condition.”

He laughed. “No. It’s a shame. I would like to know if I could see you later. Speak to you more… privately.”

She didn’t like the sound of it. She would have to be careful. She smiled sweetly. “As you wish. Come to see me in the godswood in the evening. I always go there to pray before I go to bed.”

“I’ll see you there, my lady.”

He had a large grin as he turned around. Sansa would make sure he wouldn’t try anything. Brienne and a few hidden men should be enough to keep her safe. The lords of the Vale who were present came to see her as well. Lady Waynwood was quite kind, and defended her liege lord, who was her ward until very recently. Lord Vance Corbray was brief in his salutations. Lord Belmore assured her they would free her sister. Lord Royce was the one to speak the most at length with her after Lady Waynwood. He spoke a lot about her father, how they used to hunt with Robert Baratheon when he lived at the Eyrie. Before he left however, he gave her a warning.

“Be careful around Lord Baelish, my lady. He is not to be trusted. He had a very inappropriate and harmful influence on our lord Robin Arryn, and I fear he is too close to Lord Arryn now. Lord Harrold listens to him too much. He…” He opened his mouth to say something, but he didn’t. “Don’t trust him. Never trust him.”

That, Sansa already knew it. However, Lord Royce just gave her more proof that Harrold Arryn may be Littlefinger’s toy. She could be sure now that he wasn’t to be trusted. Sansa sent Brienne off the hall before she left herself the feast, giving her specific orders to position men in key positions inside the godswood. Later, after she had gone back to her chambers and put on a warm cloak for the cold temperature outside, Sansa went to the godswood with Willia. She left her handmaiden at the entrance. She wasn’t supposed to be with anyone when Lord Arryn would come.

She knelt before the tree. New Castle’s godswood wasn’t much used. Most of the people in White Harbor worshiped the Seven. She was all alone, except for her men hidden in bushes and behind trees. She closed her eyes and prayed. She prayed every day for her child, and for all those she loved who were far away. Tyrion. Arya. Jon. Edmure. Ser Brynden. Mira. Cerenna. Dorna. Joy. Myrielle. Janei. Margaery. She prayed a lot. She didn’t have much else to do. What was left of her family was in danger, fighting or about to fight Ramsay. Dorna and Janei had lost a husband and a father. Ser Kevan had been the first one to tell her she had to take care of Tyrion. How many people still had to die before it was all over, if all this ever came to an end? Would the bloodshed ever end?
She heard a branch crack. She opened her eyes and turned to see the source of the noise. The Warden of the East was there. “Please excuse me, my lady. I just thought… You are beautiful like this. I couldn’t stop myself from admiring you.”

Who did he think she was? Probably a shy maid. “I’m sure there are many other things of interest you could look at.”

He laughed shortly. “Not when you’re around.” He really started to get on her nerves. She was a married woman, and she was carrying a child.

“You wanted to talk with me alone?” she asked, focusing the topic of discussion about the matter at hand.

“I did, though I wonder why you brought me here, in a such a deserted place.”

“I was praying.”

“Sometimes I forget that you are from the North.”

“You have quite a lot of nerves, to say that to the Wardeness of the North, Lord Arryn. Especially when you are in her kingdom. I could order my men to throw you into the sea and let you swim all the way back to Gulltown.”

She let a smile appear on her lips. He laughed. “I’ll have to get used to this sharp tongue of yours, Lady Sansa.”

If he wasn’t more careful with what he said, she might really order her men to throw him into the sea, and right away. “What did you want to tell me?”

He approached her. “Only that, back in Casterly Rock, I meant what I told you. I really meant it when I said I would do everything to help you. The Vale should have helped your family during the war, and we didn’t. I intend to correct this. If you ever need my help in anything, I’m here for you, Lady Sansa.”

He really saw himself like a knight in shining armor. “Thank you, Lord Arryn.”

“I will give you back your home, my lady. You can rely on me.” He was getting closer. Sansa didn’t feel comfortable about it.

“My sister and my little brother are at Winterfell,” she said, making her voice weak.

“I will free them. I promise you.” He stepped forward again. Could he stop coming closer? Sansa doubted that a man who was Baelish’s creature could be trusted. She walked away a little, taking a pained expression.

“Each day Arya and Rickon spend at Winterfell is a day they suffer in the hands of a monster.” Sansa couldn’t be sure Rickon truly lived, and she didn’t want him to be alive if he was to be… She couldn’t imagine the things Ramsay may be doing to him if he really was alive. Tears that were not entirely false ran down on her cheeks. “The more time your men spend here, the more my little sister and my little brother will suffer.”

A silence followed. “Of course. We will head north to Winterfell as quickly as possible, and we will free Lady Arya and Lord Rickon.”

“You must bring all your men with you.” Sansa turned again to face him. “Absolutely all of them.
Don’t leave any of them behind. I must be sure they will be freed.”

“Don’t worry, we will release them.”

Again, he was closing on her. “Bring all your men. Promise me.”

“I promise, my lady. You have my word.”

He put a hand on hers. At least they were not as cold as Littlefinger’s, but they couldn’t reassure Sansa like Tyrion’s hands could. She remembered the first time he took her hand, in the Great Hall, after she was stripped naked and beaten by Ser Meryn Trant. It was Tyrion who saved her back then, and Sandor Clegane who wrapped her in his cloak to cover her. It wasn’t a knight, and even less Petyr Baelish, who saved her that day. She wanted to jerk away, but she didn’t. She needed one last thing.

“I would have one thing to ask you, Lord Arryn.”

“You may ask anything you want, my lady.” He looked intensively at her.

“I know Lord Baelish is one of your advisors, but back in King’s Landing he was the only true friend I had. I cried when he left for the Vale. Couldn’t you could make him stay in White Harbor once you’ve left? I would feel much safer if he was close.”

“Of course, that won’t be a problem. I need to leave someone behind to represent me before Lord Manderly, anyway. I will order Lord Baelish to stay here with you. I could also leave you some of my men to protect you.”

“No, thank you. I have my own men. My granduncle, Ser Brynden, gave me some of his own to ensure my safety. I would feel much better if your men were put to good use in saving Arya.”

“As you wish, my lady.” He kissed her hand. “Is there anything else you require of me?”

“No. Thank you, Lord Arryn. I will go back to my rooms now. I feel very tired.”

“Let me accompany you back there.”

Sansa decided to not object. She couldn’t really refuse. She had no guard to escort her, at least not visibly, and only a handmaiden at the entrance of the godswood. Lord Arryn walked quite close to her all the time. She longed for her rooms where she would be separated from him. Still, she used this walk to get more information about the forces he brought. He had ten thousand men. They would all be here within a few days, then they would all leave for Winterfell. She grabbed some information about the other lords of the Vale, and managed to know some which were at odds with Littlefinger, and others who were better disposed towards him. She even managed to learn how many men would stay behind as a guard of honor for Lord Baelish.

They finally arrived to her rooms, and Sansa got rid of the Lord of the Eyrie, not without another kiss on her hand. Inside her rooms, she sighed in relief as Willia prepared her for the night. Her child kept moving. When Willia was away, she sang another lullaby, and he stopped kicking her as she laid in her bed. She wished Tyrion was there to help her, but he was miles away, fighting to give her back her home. She would have to deal with Littlefinger on her own. She hoped the Knights of the Vale would leave very soon. Only Baelish would remain behind. A mockingbird, all alone among Northerners. Sansa was eager for this to happen. As she fell asleep, she dreamed of Tyrion.
Sansa is playing the game of thrones.

Please review

Next chapter: Margaery
Chapter Notes

We get to see how Margaery reacts to Cersei’s actions. Don’t expect her to be happy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

MARGAERY VII

“She should have left weeks ago. You were supposed to send her back to Stokeworth!” Margaery shouted. She never yelled to her husband, but now her patience was at an end.

“I wanted to send her away…”

“But you didn’t. Why? Why are you keeping her here?”

“She’s my mother,” he answered weakly. That didn’t calm Margaery.

“Her place is not here. She tried to kill your uncle, Tommen, her own brother, and still you’re keeping her here. Her place is no longer at court. Your cousin Lancel even said she had your father assassinated. I was there. I heard him. You want to keep the woman who murdered your father, tried to assassinate your uncle, and let Joffrey mistreat you and your sister, close to you?”

“No, I don’t.”

“Then it’s time for her to leave.”

“Yes, you’re right.” He didn’t look convinced. “I’ll go and tell her. She leaves on the morning.”

“No. Every time you went to tell her to leave, you allowed her to stay in the end. It’s time you take decisions, Tommen. Cersei Lannister is leaving, and is never to come back to King’s Landing under any circumstance.”

“No. She will never come back.” He tried to look sure. He tried.

“I’ll break the news to her. In the meantime, you stay here.”

Margaery left on these words. For the first time, she really got angry with Tommen and forced him to do as she said. That wasn’t her usual way, but she was fed up with Tommen’s inability to rule. Her grandmother had been right. She would have been better off with Lord Tyrion. Tommen couldn’t even get a child in her. Margaery was almost jealous of her friend. Sansa was pregnant, on her way to have two kingdoms, and she was about to be reunited with her sister, and maybe her half-brother too. Margaery, on her side, was still waiting for Tommen’s seed to quicken and produce an heir, and had her brother imprisoned.

It had been a shock for everyone. Last week, the Sparrows had taken the Great Sept of Baelor in the favor of the night. Before reports reached the Red Keep of this event, a group of Sparrows had erupted into Maegor’s Holdfast and taken away her brother. No one knew how they entered, nor
how they left. All entrances to the Red Keep were guarded, and no one allowed any Sparrow to enter, nor let any leave. None was seen in the corridors. That made no sense. Margaery had guards at the doors of the royal apartments day and night, and kingsguard followed her and Tommen everywhere. She didn’t feel safe inside the Red Keep anymore. Ser Kevan and the Grand Maester assassinated, her brother kidnapped in the light of day, and no one saw anything. Could it be Varys? It was said there were secret passages all over the Red Keep, and that the Spider knew them better than anyone. Was it his doing? But why? What interest would he have in doing so? Margaery had no idea what were the eunuch’s motives. Of course, there was another logical explanation. Varys was working for Cersei, and he was the one who assassinated Pycelle and Kevan and who helped the Sparrows to kidnap Loras. But then, why would Nymeria Sand disappear? Maybe there was no link. However, Margaery had less difficulty than ever to imagine Cersei killing her uncle. Ser Kevan had been Margaery’s ally, and he turned against Cersei at Lord Tyrion’s trial. His death allowed her to stay in the capital and now, Loras was arrested by fanatics inside the Red Keep, no one knowing how they got inside or how they left. This stank of Cersei Lannister more than sheep shift hidden inside a mattress, like Sansa used to say.

Tommen had failed to free Margaery’s brother. He had tried to speak with the High Sparrow several times, only to see his path blocked on the way to the Great Sept of Baelor. Every time, the new High Septon said he was praying. Because the High Sparrow was now the High Septon. Tommen made him High Septon instead of Sorold by royal decree.

When Sorold came to them with the decree, escorted and watched by a dozen of Sparrows, Tommen had been speechless. He didn’t remember signing anything like that. Margaery thought she knew what happened. Tommen never read the decrees he signed. Cersei had certainly put this one among the others he signed one day, then found a way to give it to the High Sparrow. As a result, the High Sparrow was now High Septon, Sorold was kept into custody into the Great Sept, Loras was imprisoned somewhere there as well, and an army of Sparrows, now called the Faith Militia, ran all over the city, smashing barrels of ale, ransacking brothels, assaulting merchants selling religious objects from other devotions, forcing so-called sinners to make walks of shame. Margaery should have taken matters into hand and forced Cersei out of the city immediately after Lord Tarly left. No, she should have forced her to leave much before, right after Ser Kevan was killed. She wouldn’t make the same mistake twice. Cersei Lannister would never come back to King’s Landing.

Margaery walked decisively to the wing of the Red Keep where the apartments of the Queen Mother were located. Her handmaiden told her she asked for the vintage of Arbor Gold the morning Loras was arrested. Doubts may be left about Cersei’s participation to her uncle’s death, but Margaery had none when it came to her brother’s current predicament. She was afraid for him, afraid and terrified. What were they doing to him right now? There were already rumors circulating that the Faith Militia killed men surprised into inappropriate coupling into brothels. What had happened to Loras? What would they do to her little brother?

Two men in Lannister armors were standing guard before the doors that gave access to the Dowager Queen. Margaery had six men of her own and kingsguards. She didn’t want to take any chance. Who knew what Cersei was capable of?

“I wish to speak with the Queen Mother,” Margaery said to the men.

One of them went into the room and came back immediately. “The queen doesn’t wish to be disturbed. She’s resting.”

Did she take Margaery for her son trying to talk with the High Sparrow? “I’m afraid I’ll have to disturb her all the same.” She proceeded to walk, and one of the men got in her way. “You’re blocking the passage to your queen, ser.”
After some hesitation and the look at the eight men behind Margaery, the man stepped aside and let her go in. Margaery’s mother-in-law was sitting in her chair, looking at the wall.

“I said I wanted no visitor,” she said.

“To the opposite of you, your men seem to understand who is the queen,” Margaery harshly retorted. Cersei didn’t like the remark. “It’s not because you’re married to my son…”

“I didn’t come here to listen to you, Cersei. I came here to tell you that you’re leaving.”

Cersei smiled. “I’m not leaving.” She took a glass of wine on her table and drank some of it.

“You are leaving. There’s a litter waiting for you before the Red Keep. You’ll have a carriage to bring you back to Stokeworth once you’ve got through the Iron Gate. I made sure you had everything necessary for the road. Your luggage will be sent to you while you’re riding for the castle. You will have guards and servants…”

“I’m not leaving,” Cersei said. Margaery expected this reaction.

“Yes, you are,” she said loudly. Her men came into the room.

“You think you can threaten me?”

“I think it, because it is true.” Two of her men went on both Cersei’s sides. “You can either follow them willingly to your litter, or shout, yell and fight all the way long, and lose what little dignity you still have.”

“You have no right to threaten me. I am the queen. The fact that you’re married to my son…”

“You are not the queen, Cersei, because you’re not married to the king. I do appreciate these things can get a bit confusing in your family.” Cersei was fuming. “I am the queen, Cersei. To misquote Lord Tarly, your time as queen is over. Go to Stokeworth, and never come back. Try to find some solace in the fact that you could have ended beheaded for your crimes against the king and Lord Tyrion.”

Her men took Cersei’s arms. She threw the arms away, but didn’t try to escape. Instead, she looked at Margaery with more anger and fury than ever. “You won’t get away with this. I will not let you take my son away from me. You will pay for this.”

Margaery smiled. “I’m not taking your son away from you. You’re the one who pushed your son into my arms. You will never see him again. The Lannisters are not the only ones to pay their debts, Cersei, and the Northerners are not the only ones to remember. I will never forget what you did. Make sure you never find yourself again in my presence, because the next time I see you, I will be without pity.”

On that, Margaery left. Her men made sure Cersei left. From the battlements, she saw Cersei get into the litter and leave the Red Keep, escorted by some of Margaery’s guards along with her own. She didn’t struggle, which was a good thing. The last thing Margaery needed was a scene from the Dowager Queen before she left. At least, she was rid of Cersei. She would never allow her to come back to King’s Landing.

Later, in the night, Margaery was lying down on her stomach. She and Tommen had done their marital duty, though Tommen did it without enthusiasm. Margaery was beginning to feel tired of trying to excite him, and to look excited herself. Loras was still in danger. After Cersei left in the
morning, Tommen had gone to see the High Sparrow again. Finally, the new High Septon had called for an inquest on Loras. It wasn’t a trial, as he said, and once it was proved that the accusations against Loras were false, he would be released. He had allowed Margaery and Tommen to assist it, and with the kingsguards present as a sign of goodwill, even though swords were forbidden inside the Great Sept of Baelor. He would make an exception for them. Margaery didn’t trust the High Sparrow, but it was their only chance to save Loras. They had to be present, to make sure this was a real hearing and not a show like the one Cersei tried to make at her brother’s trial. They had to save Loras. Anyway, she doubted the High Sparrow would dare anything against her and Tommen. If anything happened to them, all the forces of the Reach, the Westerlands and the Stormlands would march on King’s Landing immediately to free them, and the High Sparrow would be lost.

Margaery was eager to free her brother. Once he was safe, they could deal with the Sparrows. They didn’t have enough men right now, but she sent a raven to Highgarden to tell her uncle Garth to bring reinforcements from the Reach in King’s Landing when he would come to take his position as Master of Whisperers. Then they would have enough men with the City Watch to hunt down the Sparrows and restore Sorold as High Septon. That would cause some problem, since Tommen issued a decree for the Sparrows, but they could still turn it down with another decree. Nothing stopped a king from cancelling a former decree by issuing a new one. They would have to use force against the Sparrows. They were armed now, and their numbers were growing. All the work Ser Kevan, Margaery and Lord Tarly did to neutralize the Sparrows had been for naught. Cersei had all destroyed it within a fortnight. This time, they would have to make sure they captured and killed the High Sparrow when everything would be over.

On the morning, Sera prepared her for the inquiry. She wore a yellow cream gown, with earrings and a necklace with blue pearls. She would see her brother soon.

“Do you want to let two strands fall before your shoulders, my lady?” her handmaiden asked.

“Yes. Yes, let’s do it.” Margaery only half-listened.

“Are you worried, my lady?”

“Yes, I am. I’m worried for Loras. They accuse him of all sorts of crimes. We can’t be sure with the Sparrows. They are fanatics. Who knows what they could do? We thought we dealt with them, but we only needed Cersei to make Tommen sign a piece of paper to see them back, more dangerous than ever.”

“Perhaps you shouldn’t go, my lady. It may be dangerous.”

“No. I must go. Loras needs me. If I’m there, I can have him released. Anyway, we’ll have the kingsguards with us. The Sparrows won’t dare to assault me or Tommen with them at our side. They would lose all support and the whole might of the Reach would march against them.”

“If you say so, my lady.”

Margaery looked at her reflection in the glass. “By the way, Sera, I wrote to Lord Tarwick. It seems he’s interested again.”

Sera stopped to brush her hair. “Really?” Hope was visible both in her voice and on her face.

“Yes. It seems he recovered from your time in prison. He’s open to discussion once more.”

Sera’s smile was wider than all those Margaery ever saw on her face. “My lady… I don’t know what to say.”
“Don’t thank me yet. He only agreed to discuss, not to marry you, but I think I’ll be able to bring him around. I’m the queen, after all. It’s difficult to refuse something to a queen.”

Sera resumed to brush her hair. Her hands were trembling with excitement, which made her work clumsy. “I can’t wait to see him again.”

“You won’t have any reason to be jealous of Mira anymore.”

“No indeed. I wonder where she is right now.”

“She may be riding with her husband’s army to Winterfell, or at White Harbor, with Sansa. You know she’s pregnant? Sansa, not Mira.”

“Yes, I know. I wonder when Mira will be with child.”

Margaery made a sound with her mouth that was close to a muffled laugh. “How strange. Sansa got married with a dwarf, while Mira and I are married to normal men, and yet Sansa is the first one to get pregnant.”

Sera kept brushing her hair with more tact than before. After a moment, she asked something. “My lady, when was your last moonblood?”

Margaery thought about it. “Last month.”

“Aren’t you a few days past? I think you are.”

Margaery shrugged. “Maybe. I’m sure I’ll bleed soon. Tommen doesn’t seem very good at making children. Let’s wait before we jump to conclusions.”

That would be indeed a miracle if she discovered that she was pregnant the day Loras was freed. The gods would really have a strange sense of humor then. Sera finished to brush Margaery’s hair and placed the necklace around her throat. With uncertainty, she left her rooms and joined Tommen.

The way to the Great Sept of Baelor was eventless. She and Tommen shared the same litter. They didn’t talk much. Tommen was trying to reassure her, saying nothing would happen to her brother, but Margaery was afraid. Tommen wasn’t the best person to reassure. He was good with cats, but not with humans. All along the way, she saw Sparrows through the shutters, and people crying at her, praying for her brother’s salvation. She saw a Sparrow hit a person who yelled the gods would save Ser Loras Tyrell from the unfaithful. She didn’t know if the Sparrow beat the man for his words, or because of the glass of ale he had in his hand as he said it. Margaery couldn’t intervene on that.

When they arrived before the Great Sept, a small crowd had gathered. They were praying for her brother. Margaery was quite touched by it. The people didn’t abandon her. The help she provided them bore fruits. They offered good wishes and prayers when Margaery left the litter with Tommen. They had brought about twenty guards with them, but only the kingsguards were allowed to follow them inside. Margaery noticed the great numbers of men with the seven-pointed star carved on their forehead on the steps leading to the Great Sept as they climbed. There were so many. The new High Septon hadn’t lost time to recruit for the Faith Militia. If they ever wanted to kill them or keep them in detention, Margaery, Tommen and her kingsguards wouldn’t stand a chance.

They were introduced in a small room. It was obviously meant to pray more than to make inquiries, but in a chair sat her brother. She restrained herself and only hugged him briefly. He was all covered with filth, his hair unwashed, a beard growing, his clothes dirty.
“Glad to see you, sister,” he said. He looked tired.

“Did they mistreat you?” She tried to see any trace of bruises or cuts on his face or anywhere else on him.

“No. They only let me rot in a cell with only bread to eat and water to drink.”

“Most of the people must content themselves only with that every day.” The High Sparrow was old, and in a much worse state than Loras. He had no shoes. Margaery may have mistaken him for a beggar under other circumstances. “We shall begin. Take place.”

Margaery sat down with Loras on her right while Tommen took place on her left. The six kingsguards (Ser Jaime was with Lord Tarly’s army) stood behind them. If the High Sparrow feared them, he showed no sign of it. There were a few Sparrows in the rooms, all armed, but without armor. A scribe was taking note of everything that was said at a desk.

“This is not a trial. We are only leading an inquiry to see if there is any need for a trial,” said the old man. “If we find out that the suspicions cast upon Ser Loras of House Tyrell were unfounded, he will be free. If we find out that some facts are true, he will face a trial before seven septons. We all hope it won’t come to that. May the Father judge us justly, and may the Crone gives us wisdom.” He cleared his throat. “Ser Loras Tyrell is charged with fornication, buggery, and blasphemy. We call him forward to answer to these charges.”

Her brother walked to the chair where the witness was to take place. He seemed to have some difficulty to walk. “What do you have to say about the charges against you?” asked the High Sparrow.

“They are lies. I don’t know where they come from, but they are false,” her brother answered.

“You are aware of the rumors concerning you and Renly Baratheon?”

“I don’t pay attention to rumors.”

“You were said to be despondent when he died. Witnesses state that you refused to leave his bedside, even as Stannis’s army closed in.”

“He was my friend. He was my king.”

“Wasn’t Joffrey your king? He was anointed by the Seven, not Renly.” Loras just made a mistake, but he tried to catch it back.

“I was wrong to support Renly’s claim, I know that. But I was forgiven by Joffrey. I fought for him at the Battle of Blackwater.”

“Yes, wearing Renly’s armor.” It wasn’t difficult to know what the High Sparrow implied.

“Why does it matter what I wore?”


“Of course, I deny them.” Loras said it as if it was an evidence. Anyone with some brain would know that Loras would never confess such allegations, even if they knew they were true.

“You never lay with Renly Baratheon?”

“Never.”
“Nor any other man?”

“Never.”

“That will be all, Ser Loras.”

Loras left the seat of the witness and came to Margaery’s right, still displaying some hardship to walk. “I believe we have everything we need. My brother is innocent,” stated Margaery. She began to rise.

“The Faith calls Queen Margaery forward.”

“You call me forward?” she asked him, unbelieving.

“Yes, we have some questions for you.”

“I am the queen,” Margaery reminded him.

“You are. And according to the law of the Seven, neither kings nor queens are exempt from testimony at a holy inquest.”

He sounded very serious. Who did he think he was? Margaery sighed. “As you wish, but that won’t make any difference on the outcome of the inquest.”

“The gods will be the judges of that.” Margaery took place on the seat Loras just left. “How do you respond to these charges against your brother?”

“They are lies.” How many times would they have to say it?

“All of them?”

“All of them,” she confirmed.

“Queen Margaery, in the presence of the gods, do you swear that your brother is innocent of these charges against him, to the best of your knowledge?”

“Yes, I swear it.”

“Thank you, your Grace.” He didn’t look happy.

“May I say something?”

“Of course, you can.”

“In the Seven-Pointed Star, each book of each god talks about love. The Book of the Father talks about the love of the family a father is in charge, the Book of the Mother talks about the love a woman feels for her children, the Book of the Maid talks about the love of man for woman and of woman for man…”

“We know that, your Grace.”

“The Book of the Warrior speaks about the love that links a knight to the lord he is sworn to, among other things. My brother squired for Renly Baratheon at Storm’s End when he was only twelve. They developed a powerful bond of respect and friendship, and love during this time. Not a carnal love, but a love that a lord feels for the people sworn to him, and that the people return to him. Loras knew Lord Renly for a very long time. He knew him even better than myself because of that long
friendship. I barely knew Renly Baratheon before I married him. I wept for him, when he died. He was my husband, but Loras knew him better than everyone, and wept for the loss of his lord, not a lover. Loras rode with Renly’s armor in the Battle of Blackwater, but it was a trick, to create fear in the minds of Stannis’s men.”

“So you made everyone believe that Renly was back to life?”

“That’s the reaction the soldiers had in the heat of battle. Without that, Lord Stannis would have seized King’s Landing, the witch from Asshai he had at his side would have burned the Great Sept and all the other septs, and she would have made human sacrifices. My brother behaved heroically on that day. He saved the Faith. He fought for the Faith.”

The High Sparrow nodded. “Thank you, your Grace. We will take that into consideration.”

Margaery walked back to her seat. She was eager to leave this place. Before she could sit back, doors opened. When she looked at the people who came in, she realized she knew one of them. It was Olyvar. She saw him with Loras once, during the ceremony for Tommen’s coronation. The last time she heard of him, he was running the brothels of Lord Petyr Baelish. He took place. She looked at Loras. Fear was plain on his face. This was as Margaery feared.

“Do you know this man?” the old man asked him.

“Yes, very well,” he answered. “He is Ser Loras Tyrell, heir to Highgarden.”

“How did you come to meet him?”

“I squired for him. He took a liking to me. He summoned me to his chambers the first day we met.”

“And what occurred in his chamber?”

“We engaged in intimate relations.”

“You lay with him?” She didn’t know if that question was meant for her brother or for Olyvar. Margaery should have known that. The High Sparrow knew what he was doing. Maybe Cersei gave him information.

“That night and many others,” Olyvar confirmed.

“Liar. He’s a liar,” Loras yelled.

“Is there anyone else who can support your claim?”

“No. Not directly. But while I talked with Ser Loras, he confessed that he was Renly Baratheon’s lover, and that his sister knew. He said that Queen Margaery slept in a separate tent while he spent the night with her husband.”

“That’s enough. Are we supposed to listen to such lies?” Margaery said. “This man is a squire, but he doesn’t tell the whole truth.”

“Your Grace…” tried to intervene the High Sparrow.

“He is a prostitute. He runs the brothels of Petyr Baelish. Are we going to believe the word of that man over a knight who saved the city and the future Lord of Highgarden? He didn’t even swear that he was saying the truth.”

“I swear by the Seven that I’m telling the truth,” Olyar said.
“There was a prostitute at a trial, not long ago. She swore by all the gods, including the Seven, that she would tell the truth. The next day, a dozen people destroyed her testimony word by word, proving that her testimony was a pack of lies.”

“He has a birthmark, your Grace. Quite high on his thigh. Wine-colored and roughly the shape of Dorne.”

Loras jumped. “Liar! You’re a liar!” Two Sparrows seized him as he tried to assault Olyvar. Margaery watched, powerless, as they carried her brother away.

“Release him! Now!” she ordered.

“The Faith is satisfied there is enough evidence to bring a formal trial for Ser Loras, and Queen Margaery.”

“What?”

“Bearing false witness before the gods is as grave a sin as any, your Grace. Take her.”

A Sparrow grabbed her arm. She tried to jerk away, but another one seized her by the other arm, just like her brother. “This is an outrage. You’re going to arrest us on the word of a brothelkeeper. How dare you? I am your queen.” They kept bringing her away. “Tommen. No. Tommen!”

She looked desperately at her husband, who was looking everywhere, as if searching for someone to tell him what to do. The kingsguards had their hands on their pommels, but they did nothing. They received no order. The moment when Margaery needed Tommen, he failed her. He did nothing while she was dragged away. Like always, he did nothing.

Chapter End Notes

I know it may look like the Sparrows gained back power too quickly and easily, but there's an explanation to that. Cersei is not the only one to help the High Sparrow. All will be explained in the future chapters. Now we're back to the situation in the show at the end of Season 5.

Please review.

Next chapter: Jon
Jon VI

Chapter Notes

Jon sees someone he hasn't seen in a very long time.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

JON VI

The flap of the tent opened. Jon looked up to the intruder. All wrapped in furs, she looked quite beefy for a girl of her age, but Jon knew that they shouldn’t rely solely on appearances. Lyanna Mormont, daughter of Maege Mormont, Lady of Bear Island, wasn’t to be taken lightly. Her voice commanded respect in the war councils, even among the wildlings. Tormund once told him that whoever would try to kidnap her would have a very hard time. He also said that if he didn’t have a wife already and that she was older, he might have kidnapped her for himself. Jon didn’t think this would end well for Tormund.

“How may I help you, my lady?” he asked.

“We need to talk.” She sat without being invited. “We cannot trust the Lannisters.”

Straight to the point. Jon was still unused to her way of telling things without preamble or greetings or small talk. “My lady, we cannot fight…”

“I know. We cannot fight the Lannisters and the Boltons at the same time, and I’m aware of how dangerous the Blackfish and the Imp can be with a stronger army than ours. That doesn’t mean we should trust them.”

Jon sighed. Everyone in this camp hated the Lannisters, and for good reasons, except maybe the wildlings who never had to deal with them up to now. “Ser Brynden Tully is riding with them, and he always was loyal to my brother Robb. He wouldn’t ride with Tyrion Lannister if he didn’t trust him in some way.”

“Maybe not, but you seem to assume that he is trustworthy only because he saved you once at Castleblack. The Lannisters murdered your father, your brother and our king, his mother. They broke the guest rights, and gave the Riverlands to those who plotted this crime with them.”

“The Riverlands have been given back to the Tullys, by Lord Tyrion himself.”

“He was on the small council when the Red Wedding happened. Do you really think he took no part in it?”

She had a point that Jon couldn’t deny. “My sister Sansa trusts him.”

She looked at him with sorry eyes. “Your sister is a Lannister now, Jon Snow. We cannot trust her either.” She stood up. “Don’t believe the Imp will give up his claim on Winterfell when we free Rickon Stark.”
She left on these words, proud and fierce. Jon wondered if she inherited the wolf blood of his aunt with her name. He admired her in some way. He wished he could be proud like her, but after everything he had done, he couldn’t pretend being proud of anything.

They were barely a week of distance from Winterfell. They were so close. The Lannister army was certainly not far ahead. A scout had gone ahead as far as Winterfell itself. He spotted the banners of House Bolton along with those of House Karstark and House Umber. A part of the army was encamped before the walls. They estimated it to five thousand men at least. They are as many as we are. But while the Boltons and the Lannisters had organized and well equipped armies, the same couldn’t be said about the wildlings, or even the mountain clans. Ramsay’s men had faced battle against Stannis, while Jon’s never faced it for the most, or at least those from the houses who answered his call. Asher Forrester’s men were good at ambush and guerrilla, but not ranged battles. Fights took place each day. Their army was disorganized, and quarrelling. He could only hope the same held for their enemies. And Ser Davos and Lady Forrester hadn’t come back yet.

They needed the Lannisters and the Tullys. They had no choice. Still, even if Jon hated to admit it, Lady Mormont may not be entirely wrong. When they met years ago, Jon was a bastard and Tyrion Lannister was a dwarf. All dwarves are bastards in their father’s eyes, he told him back then. Before he left the Wall, he also told him something else that Jon would always remember. Not all bastards need to be dwarves. Well, they both went high. Jon became Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch, and Lord Tyrion was now Lord of Casterly Rock and Warden of the West. And yet, Jon had been killed, while Lord Tyrion had been accused by his own family of assassinating his father. For Jon, it had meant the end of his watch, but for Tyrion Lannister, it had led to his beginning as a powerful lord. Now they were half-brothers-in-law, and both marching on Winterfell. But what were the Imp’s motivations? Could he be after Winterfell for himself through Sansa? Jon knew that Sansa would never approved of that. Lord Tyrion didn’t strike him for a child’s killer. Lady Stark had arrested him, but he was released, cleared of his charges. And he treated Sansa well. No, he wouldn’t dare to kill Rickon, even if that meant he couldn’t have Winterfell. He gave back Riverrun to the Tullys, who were Lady Stark’s family. Why wouldn’t he give back Winterfell too? Jon would need a good discussion with Sansa when they would meet again. He wondered how she looked like now, and Arya and Rickon, and Bran if he was still alive north of the Wall. It had been so long since they were all together.

Thin snow was falling outside. No storm was coming for now but Jon didn’t want them to linger any longer. They had to reach Winterfell and take it as quickly as possible. They were in open field now, and not in forests any longer. They lost the advantage the mountain clans had when fighting in the woods. The Northerners could say they were used to winter, but it didn’t change the fact that many died during the harsh winters of the North. Snow and cold wouldn’t defeat them as easily as they defeated Stannis, but they could defeat them all the same, or at least weaken them, while the Bolton troops didn’t have to march every day and could still find shelter inside Winterfell, warm and well fed. Jon wondered if they would have enough provisions for winter when all of this would be over, if they lasted through winter.

Another intruder entered the tent. He was about the same age than Lyanna Mormont, but unlike her, he had the right to enter Jon’s tent without asking. Ryon was his squire after all.

“What is it, Ryon?” He smiled at the boy. He remembered him of Rickon, the brother he was trying to save. Jon envied Asher. He still had some of his family with him.

“A wildling said that Ser Davos is back.”

Finally. Jon raised and took his sword belt. “Let’s go greet them.”
He left the tent, Ryon on his heels. Jon had made him his squire only a few weeks ago. The boy wanted to learn how to fight and be a knight someday, and what better way for that than to make him squire. The idea had come to him during a conversation with Asher, and Ryon’s brother had immediately accepted.

Ser Davos arrived in the middle of the camp with the other men Jon sent with him, and two women. Jon was surprised. Gwyn Forrester was one of them, but he never saw the other one. Before she could dismount, he heard a cry next to him.

“Mira!” Ryon ran before him. The young woman dismounted just in time to receive him in her arms. What was going on? But Jon didn’t have time to ask himself more questions.

Ser Davos had dismounted as well, but another shape emerged from behind him. Jon wasn’t sure about what he saw first, but after a second he recognized her. She had grown up, she had her hair arranged differently, but it was her. The same grey eyes, the same brown hair, and she was as skinny as ever, but it was her. She slowly walked to him. Jon didn’t dare to move. Time seemed to slow down. How was it possible? Was he dreaming? How could she be there? He felt multiple gazes upon them. She stopped only one foot from him. Was she real? Was it really her? She smiled, and threw herself in his arms. Jon smiled as well and wrapped his arms around her too. She had to be real. He remembered the last time they hugged. It seemed like a lifetime ago. His little sister, Arya, was back.

Later, in Jon’s tent, Arya was swallowing heartily a bowl of hot stew. “Thank you.”

Jon smiled. He remembered how Arya used to eat everything presented before her with her hands, under the scandalized eyes of her mother, Sansa and her septa. She hadn’t changed in any way. She was still the little sister he knew at Winterfell.

“I hope you won’t throw food at me like you used to do with Sansa,” Jon said. They both giggled.

“I did it with Sansa because it was funny,” she replied.

“Wouldn’t it be funny with me too?” She looked at him for a time, then threw at him a spoon of her stew. New laughs followed as Jon tried to wash his face with his hands. “Glad to see you again, Arya.”

“I’m happy to see you too.” So much passed between their eyes. They had been two outcasts at Winterfell, the bastard and the girl who wanted to play with swords.

“I feared the worst for you. How did you escape Winterfell? Did you see Rickon there?”

Arya looked at him for a long time. She laid down her bowl. “I wasn’t at Winterfell, Jon. I was at Greywater Watch.”

“Greywater Watch?”

“Aye.” She told him everything from the day their father was arrested to her journey in the Neck. “I remained there for all this time. Lord Reed taught me how to fight like his men and I lived with him.”

“So Ramsay lied,” Jon realized. That letter was only a bait, to bring him to Winterfell.

“He may still have Rickon,” Arya specified.

“Aye, you’re right. He may have Rickon.” Their brother was probably still at Winterfell. Jon knew he could still be alive. What they heard told them that he was given to Ramsay by Jon Umber.
“The Imp says he doesn’t believe Rickon is alive.”

Jon came back to reality when Arya mentioned his friend. “You met Tyrion?”

“Aye. I rode with his army to Winterfell, and Lord Reed too.”

Lord Reed was with Lord Tyrion. That meant another house of the North had taken arms against the Boltons. “Who else is with him?”

“The Manderlys, the Hornwoods, the Cerwyns, the Blackfish… and Freys.”

She said the last word with obvious disgust. Jon shared it, but he supposed Tyrion Lannister knew what he was doing if Freys were following him. Jon was relieved for the most. “Well, we should have enough to take back Winterfell.”

“I think he wants Winterfell for himself, Jon. He says he doesn’t think that Rickon could be alive, and the Blackfish agrees with him. They say he was killed by Theon.”

Jon thought about it for some time. “What about Sansa? What does she think of it?”

Arya’s face turned sad, and disappointed. “She says she would rather believe that he’s dead.”

Jon was shocked. Rickon was their brother. How could Sansa give up on him so quickly? He could understand for Tyrion and the Blackfish, after all everyone believed Bran and Rickon were burned at Winterfell, but Sansa? Jon realized something. Sansa believed as well that Bran and Rickon died at Winterfell. She didn’t know that Bran had been seen at the Wall. Arya didn’t know it either.

“She doesn’t know,” said Jon. “That’s not her fault.”

“She’s giving up on him. She prefers to believe that he’s dead, only because she doesn’t want to imagine that he could be tortured. Just like she wanted to believe that Joffrey was her charming prince.”

“Arya, I know that Rickon didn’t die at Winterfell, but Sansa doesn’t.”

His sister looked at him with round eyes. “You know?”

“About two years ago, one of my sworn brothers at the Wall crossed Bran’s path at the Nightfort…”

“Bran is alive!?”

“Aye, he was. But he was going north of the Wall. Summer and Hodor were with him, and two other people, a girl and a boy. He didn’t remember their names, but their clothes were strange, and they were very small.”

A moment went on. “We should try to find him. If Bran is still alive…”

“How? By searching the whole territory beyond the Wall? We can’t find him Arya.” He looked down. “What are the chances of a cripple boy to survive so long north of the Wall?”

“You’re not giving up on him, you too?” She sounded angry.

“I’m not giving up on Bran, Arya, but we have to face the facts. We cannot rescue him. Not now. We have to take Winterfell. If Rickon is there, then we must save him at all cost. We cannot save Bran right now.”
She seemed to accept this logic. “Aye. We must save Rickon.”

They stayed silent for a time. “What about Sansa? How is she?”

He may have been closer to Arya than to Sansa, but both were his sisters. “She was well, the last time I saw her.”

Jon frowned. “The last time you saw her?”

“We met in the Neck when the Lannisters besieged Moat Cailin, but when it fell, we got separated. Sansa went to White Harbor.”

“White Harbor? Why would she go there?” Jon would have thought that Sansa would follow the Lannister army to Winterfell. After all, she was proclaimed Wardeness of the North. Wardens of the North were to lead the armies of the North, and even if Sansa was a woman, she ought to be present when the battle would take place.

Arya looked uncomfortable. “Sansa is pregnant.”

Jon looked at his little sister for some time, trying to catch the meaning of her words. Sansa was pregnant? Pregnant? “Sansa is… with child?”

“Aye.” She didn’t seem to know what to think of it, and Jon didn’t know what to think of it either. “She said she was six months into it when she left. That’s why she didn’t come with us.”

Of course, that explained it very well. If Sansa was bearing a child, she couldn’t follow an army on campaign. Still, for Jon, it seemed quite odd. Sansa was pregnant… from Tyrion Lannister. “Is that really the Imp who’s the father?” he finally asked.

“I think so.”

The idea of Sansa having a child with Lord Tyrion was troubling. Sansa… a mother. Tyrion Lannister being the father of her children. In other circumstances, he would have laughed out loud at the idea. Sansa, who dreamed of knights, handsome princes, married to a dwarf.

“I know it’s strange, but she loves him,” said Arya. Jon looked at her once more.

“She loves him?” he asked, bewildered.

“Aye.” Arya burst into laughs. Jon joined her after a moment. The situation looked so hilarious. Their sister Sansa, in love with Imp! They could have imagined everything, but this?

It was while they were trying to stop their uncontrollable laughing that Ser Davos and Lady Melisandre walked in. They looked puzzled by the sight of their commander laughing this way with his sister. The Red Woman looked particularly surprised by Arya’s appearance.

“Please forgive us to interrupt,” began the Onion Knight, “but I thought that I should…”

“YOU!”

The shout came from Arya. She seized the dagger Jon had at his belt. Instinctively, Jon grabbed her arm. After so much time spent with the Free Folk, he learnt to always be ready in case someone would try to steal his weapons. She struggled without success to escape his grip, shouting curses Jon thought impossible even for Arya. She seemed to be after the Lady Melisandre, and the Red Woman was looking at Arya with a mix of fascination and fear.
“Release me! I’m going to kill her!” Arya kept yelling.

“Calm down!” Jon almost pushed his sister against the table and placed himself between her and the Red Woman. “What’s going on?”

“It seems I was right after all. We were to meet again,” said the Red Priestess.

“Wait a second! You know each other?” asked Ser Davos.

“We met in the Riverlands, two years ago. She was with the Brotherhood Without Banners. That’s where I met Thoros of Myr, the priest who could bring a dead man back to life.”

“She took my friend Gendry. She’s a witch. What is she doing here? What did you do to Gendry?” asked Arya angrily. She and Melisandre were obviously not in good terms. What could have happened for that to happen? Arya wouldn’t hate someone without good reasons.

“Gendry Waters? You knew him?” asked her Ser Davos.

“He was my friend. What happened to him?”

“He’s alive, don’t worry, my lady. Or so I think. We cannot be sure. He left Dragonstone in a bark a long time ago. We don’t know of his whereabouts after that, but as far as I know, he’s alive.”

Jon looked at Melisandre. Arya had told him about the two boys she travelled with while she was in the Riverlands. Gendry was one of them. “Tell me what happened.”

Melisandre looked back at Jon. “After the Battle of Blackwater, I went into the Riverlands. I knew there was a natural son of Robert Baratheon there, and that he was with the Brotherhood Without Banners.”

“Gendry? He was the son of Robert Baratheon?”

“Aye,” confirmed Ser Davos. “I have to admit that myself, he looked a lot like the king when I met him.”

“I found him, and I brought him to Dragonstone,” resumed the Red Woman.

“You took him prisoner,” Arya shouted once more.

“What did you do to him?” Jon asked.

“I used his blood. There is great power in king’s blood. I used it to perform magic.”

“You killed him?” Jon felt anger and horror gain him, just like it gained his sister before.

“No. I needed his blood, not his life. I only made him a few cuts and mixed his blood to leeches that Stannis threw into a fire. It is an ancient spell, that allows the man performing it to say three names of people he wants dead. Stannis did so, and the three people he named died afterwards. That’s all I did. I didn’t kill the boy. His death would have been useless.”

“What she doesn’t say, is that she wanted to kill him,” intervened Ser Davos. “She wanted to make a sacrifice to her god. That’s why I got the boy out of his cell and made him escape in the middle of the night.”

“You tried to kill him!” accused Arya.
“I didn’t kill him,” replied the Red Woman.

“No, you didn’t,” said the Onion Knight. “But you wanted to kill him. You wanted to burn him, just like you burned all these people on Dragonstone because they chose not to follow your god.”

“They were burned because they refused to follow Stannis’s orders, and because Stannis had ordered them to abandon their old gods, and they didn’t do it.”

“Stannis gave them this order because you poisoned his mind and told him that if he sacrificed all these people he would win, and he didn’t. He died all the same. You lied to him and you led him to his grave.”

“I didn’t lie to him. I was wrong.”

“How many died because you were wrong? Thousands of good men! Stannis, Shireen, the queen, and all of those who followed them.”

“She should die! She’s a witch,” declared Arya.

Jon looked at Lady Melisandre. She didn’t seem afraid, but not sure of herself either. She really was no longer the woman who disrobed before him in his solar so long ago. She had almost succeeded in convincing him to lay with her at the time.

“Ser Davos, find a tent for Arya. Make sure she’s comfortable,” Jon said.

The knight nodded. Jon shot a glance to Arya, showing her the exit with a move of his head. She walked away angrily, but stopped next to the Red Woman on her way. “I’ll kill you one day.”

“Maybe you will,” Melisandre answered without emotion. Ser Davos and Arya left.

Jon was all alone with Melisandre now. He doubted it would go the same way than she visited him in his solar at Castleblack. “You really tried to kill that boy?” he asked.

“That was my intent,” she recognized.

“Why?”

“There is great power in king’s blood. I thought that by sacrificing him I could get Stannis his victory over his enemies.”

“You wanted to kill an innocent boy?!” Jon snarled.

“I wanted to make Stannis win this war.”

“By slaughtering innocents? By burning people alive?”

“How many innocents died in your brother’s war?” she asked.

“Joffrey started this war. Robb was only trying to avenge our father.”

“And how many died to avenge your father? How many thousands of people found death in this war Robb Stark led to kill Joffrey? How many died at the Blackwater when Stannis tried to take the city? How many died because Stannis and your brother believed they were right when they started a war?”

“That was different,” said Jon.
Melisandre shook her head. “That wasn’t different, Jon Snow. People died, and they died for nothing. They died fighting each other, when they should have fought side by side against the Great Other. They kept quarrelling around the Iron Throne while the dead came back. At least, this boy’s death would have meant something.”

“Really? I don’t think so.”

She dropped her eyes. “No, you’re right. I was wrong to support Stannis. I thought he was Azor Ahai reborn, that he would defeat the Night King, and lead this country through the Great Night, but he wasn’t the Prince that was Promised. I burned people alive, it’s true. It was a mistake, and I will rue it to the end of my days. Their deaths were useless. I’m glad Ser Davos took the boy Gendry out of Dragonstone. He did the right thing, and he warned us afterwards about the Others coming at the Wall. I cannot undo the things that I’ve done, but I can still help you in the great war yet to come. You saw the dead. You know you’ll need my help.”

“Maybe,” Jon admitted. “But I will not allow any human sacrifice, not while I’m alive.”

“I didn’t intend to make any… unless it was really necessary.”

“No more people burning!”

“You may have to choose to do it one day, Jon Snow.”

“I won’t.” He wouldn’t allow human sacrifices like Stannis did. She may have saved his life, but that didn’t allow her to do as she liked and to give him orders.

“I hope you won’t, but you may have to.”

She bowed and left on these words, the face still defeated. Jon sat down. He owed his life to a woman who burned people alive because they refused to follow her faith, or her king. On the other side, Stannis had ordered people to be burned alive because they refused to bend the knee. Jon knew very well that Stannis bore a part of the blame, but he doubted he would have come to such ways without this woman’s influence. His father always told him that Stannis was a just man. Hard, but just. He wouldn’t let this woman influence him like she influenced Stannis. She had tried to seduce him the way she seduced Stannis, and Jon had resisted. However, he didn’t think she would try to subdue him again. The self-confident woman was gone ever since Stannis was defeated. And she was right, he needed her. Her powers were real. Jon was the living walking proof of it.

Ser Davos came back. “I made arrangements for your sister. She is well settled,” he said.

“Thank you, ser.”

“What will you do about the Red Woman?”

“For now, nothing. I forbade her to make any sacrifice.”

“We cannot be sure she will obey.”

“I don’t think she will perform any.”

“Very well,” grumbled the Onion Knight. “I suppose you want to hear my report of the discussions I had with the Imp.”

“Aye. Go on.”
Ser Davos sat down and began. “Tyrion Lannister agreed to join his forces to ours, but he did it at his own conditions. We are to meet him southwest of Winterfell.”

“Southwest? This means we must get around the castle entirely. The Boltons could attack us anytime while we do it.”

“I tried to explain it to him, but he wouldn’t change his mind, and like he reminded me, we are in no place to demand anything from him.”

Jon sighed angrily. Tyrion Lannister was endangering his army for nothing. “Very well. How many men does he have?”

“Twenty-five thousand. I saw the camp. It is huge. The bulk of the army is made of forces from the Westerlands. There are also lords from the Riverlands, including Freys, a detachment from House Hightower in the Reach, and Northerners. The Manderlys, the Hornwoods, the Reeds, the Cerwyns, and a few others. Now we know why these houses didn’t answer our call. They had already answered the call of the Imp for your sister.”

“She is the Wardeness of the North,” said Jon, not without regret.

He could be Lord of Winterfell if he had accepted Stannis’s offer. His father’s bannermen would have answered if they knew a Stark would rule the North again, and Stannis’s march would have succeeded then. Jon had sentenced Stannis to failure when he refused him. But he had refused, and now the lords of the North were fighting for Sansa’s birthright. She was the Lady of Winterfell and the Wardeness of the North, acknowledged both by the North and the Iron Throne. Well, not all the North. You only had to listen to Lady Mormont. Jon had given up any claim on Winterfell. It had never been his. It belonged to Sansa, to Arya, to Rickon, and to Bran if he was still alive somewhere.

“Jon Snow, you must know that your sister is pregnant,” Ser Davos said carefully.

“Arya told me.”

“If the child is a boy… Tyrion Lannister could push forward his son’s claim on Winterfell.”

Again. No one trusted Jon’s old friend here. “Do you think he could do it?”

“I think he may do so. After all, he keeps saying that we cannot be sure that your brother Rickon is alive. He said it quite often while I was negotiating with him.”

This concurred with Arya’s version. “What about Sansa?”

“I didn’t see her. She was at White Harbor, according to Lord Tyrion, but if what he says is true, she seems to believe your brother is dead. Again, I cannot verify this.” But Arya said she did. Tyrion Lannister was certainly telling the truth then. “I’m afraid. They might try to kill Rickon Stark in the heat of battle, while no one is looking, and have it pass as an accident.”

“Sansa wouldn’t allow something like that.”

“Your sister is not here.”

“I don’t believe Tyrion Lannister could do such a thing.”

“I wish I could be as sure as you were.”

The truth was, Jon wasn’t sure at all. He received ravens from Sansa, but they were all sent from
Casterly Rock. Maybe her words were dictated, and she was being controlled. However, it didn’t fit with Arya’s story that their sister was in love with Tyrion. No, Tyrion Lannister really seemed to have taken care of Sansa. Still, Arya believed he wanted Winterfell for himself. Was he to be trusted or not? Jon had trusted his sworn brothers, until they killed him. Mance Rayder had trusted him, until Jon betrayed the man as well. Could they never trust each other? Ser Davos, Arya and Lyanna didn’t trust Tyrion Lannister. Lady Mormont didn’t trust Sansa, nor did Arya. The Free Folk didn’t trust the Northerners, and the Northerners didn’t trust the Free Folk. No one trusted the Red Woman. And here he was, Jon Snow, a bastard of the North, trying to trust people but failing to do so. With everything he heard in the last months, he wasn’t sure anymore if he could trust anybody. Everyone seemed to turn on everyone.

Jon shook his head, trying to make his mind clear. All that didn’t matter. “We know who the real enemy is, Ser Davos. It’s not the Boltons, or the Lannisters, or the Freys. The dead are marching on the Wall. The Lady Melisandre is right about this one thing. We will need the forces of the south to face them. Did you speak of them to Lord Tyrion?”

“I did. He gave me this.” The Onion Knight produced a letter with the sigil of House Lannister. Jon read it.

Glad to see that you didn’t die at the Wall in my absence, bastard.

Coming from someone else, Jon would have taken it for an insult, but Jon knew better when it came from the little lord. He resumed to read.

Your sister Sansa is well and safe at White Harbor. The Manderlys are allies, they will take care of her. We have enough forces to take back Winterfell together, and then to face the other enemy. If you say they are back, I believe you. I will bring my men to fight them, you can be sure of that. Ramsay won’t be able to style himself as King in the North for long.

I hope you like the present I allowed Ser Davos to bring back to you.

Tyrion Lannister

“Did he allow you to bring Arya with you?” Jon asked.

“Aye, he did.”

Maybe they could trust Tyrion Lannister after all, if he allowed Arya to come here. That meant she wasn’t held prisoner, and if Arya was no prisoner, then surely Sansa wasn’t either.

“Do you think we can take Winterfell with the Lannister’s help?” Jon asked his advisor.

“We can, surely. However…”

“Then that’s enough. Thank you for your report, Ser Davos. One last thing. You really didn’t see Sansa?”

“No. I’m afraid I am in no position to give you any news about her.” Jon closed his eyes. He wished he had been able to hear more about his sister. He was glad to see Arya again, but he wanted to know how Sansa was faring. “If you want to know more about your sister, then you should ask the Lady Arya, or Lady Mira.”

Jon frowned. “Lady Mira?”

“Mira Hightower, or Forrester. She is the sister Lord Asher has who was in the south when the war
started. She was married into House Hightower not long ago and she brought a contingent of soldiers from the Reach with her husband. We met in the Lannister camp, and she came back with us to see her family.”

“What would she know about Sansa?”

“She was her handmaiden for some time in King’s Landing, and a friend too. If someone knows about Lady Sansa’s time in the south, that’s her.”

Ser Davos left. Jon vaguely remembered Ryon running into a young woman Jon never saw when Ser Davos came back. It had to be this Lady Mira. Jon would have to ask her a few questions, but later. He supposed she wanted to spend some time with her family. He couldn’t blame her for that. Jon wanted the same thing. He walked outside his pavilion. He needed to ask a few questions around to locate the place. He hadn’t asked Ser Davos where he settled her, but he still found her in the end. She jumped from her chair when he came in, and Jon ruffled her hair like he used to do years ago. She was taller than before, but she remained his little sister all the same.

“You’ve grown up,” he said.

“You don’t look as tall as before,” she replied. They both chuckled.

“That’s because you grew up while I didn’t. Did Sansa grow up? Did she change?”

Arya’s smile left her face when he asked her. “She’s more beautiful than ever. No wonder the Imp loves her, but I wonder how she fell in love with him.” There was a pause. “What have you done with the witch?”

“I didn’t kill her, Arya.”

“Why?” she asked angrily.

“Because she saved my life.”

The expression on Arya’s face was one of utter surprise and confusion. “She saved you?”

Jon took a great inspiration. “I died, Arya.”

“What?” Her expression was even more confused than before.

“I died. I was murdered.” Jon untied his doublet to reveal his chest, where the marks of the daggers were still visible. Arya’s eyes widened at the sight. “My sworn brothers. They did this to me at Castleblack.”

She looked at him with round eyes. “But… how?”

“I don’t know.” He closed back his doublet and put back the furs into place. “She just made some ritual. One moment I was dead, and the next one I was alive.”

Arya kept looking at him with an incredulous expression. After a moment, she stammered. “I… I met a man, in the Riverlands, Beric Dondarrion. I saw him die… And there was a Red Priest with him, Thoros of Myr. I saw him bring him back to life after he was killed.”

So, Jon wasn’t the only one who came back. “Well, I went through something similar. Melisandre brought me back, just like Thoros of Myr did for this man.”

“But she’s evil. You can’t keep her.”
“I have to, Arya. She saved my life. How can I send her away after that? And we may need her, some time in the near future.”

Arya didn’t agree. “I don’t trust her, and I don’t trust the Lannisters, or the Imp. I don’t even trust Sansa. They all seem to believe that Rickon is already dead.”

Jon wished they could stop to talk about this for a moment. There was a way to be sure Rickon would live when they took Winterfell. “Listen, Arya. We need the Lannisters to defeat the Boltons. When we take Winterfell, I’ll make sure our men are the first to enter the castle. We will find Rickon, and bring him out of reach of the Lannisters. They won’t be able to kill him if we find him first.”

“Are you sure?”

“Aye, I am. The Lannisters won’t risk killing Rickon in plain sight, even if that’s their intention to let him live. This would turn the entire North against them. Tyrion Lannister is not stupid. They could kill him while the battle is raging and make it look like the Boltons did it, but if we find Rickon first, they won’t be able to do so.”

“So, we’re going to save Rickon?” she asked, her voice full of hope.

“Aye. I’ll do everything to save him.”

He wouldn’t abandon their brother. They wouldn’t lose anyone else.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
Sansa XXVII

Chapter Notes

Today, "A Shadow and a Wolf" reached its 100th bookmark. Thank you everyone who added this story to their bookmarks, and also to everyone who left comments and kudos, and of course to everyone who read it. I wouldn't have enough motivation to write if no one read it.

I loved to write this chapter with everything that happened in it and I hope you'll love it too, though some may be disappointed by the way some things will turn out.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

SANSA XXVII

“Do I need to tell you that this is high treason?” Sansa asked.

“My child…”

“I am not a child, Lady Waynwood.” The old woman backed down. “I am Sansa Lannister of House Stark, I am the daughter of Eddard Stark and Catelyn Tully, Lady of the Westerlands by rights of marriage, and Lady of Winterfell and Wardeness of the North by blood right. You are on my lands, and as a traitor, I could sentence you to death.”

She could see the fear in the old lady’s eyes, though she tried to conceal it. “I tried to save her. Many other lords wanted to send her to King’s Landing, or even to execute her. I argued that we should keep her.”

“And yet you handed her to a monster who sold her to another monster?!”

“We couldn’t know he would do that.”

“Are you going to tell me you trusted Littlefinger? If you did, then you’re a fool.”

The Lady of Ironoaks hesitated before she answered. “I had doubts.”

“Then you’re almost a fool.” Sansa didn’t allow the woman to say more. “My men will escort you to Lord Manderly’s solar. You’ll wait here for him. I don’t want you to cause any trouble. If you do, remember that I have full authority to deal with you as it pleases me.”

Sansa turned on her heels while three of her men surrounded Lady Anya Waynwood. Aside from Littlefinger, she was the only highborn person from the Vale to stay in White Harbor after the army marched north last week. Harrold Arryn had left, promising to give Winterfell back to her. She doubted he would arrive at Winterfell before Jon and Tyrion took it by themselves. Sansa left the lady’s room, followed by Brienne who was closer to her than she ever was since Littlefinger arrived in the North. They followed the way to Sansa’s personal rooms in silence. Sansa walked quite quickly. When they were not far away from their destination, she had to put a hand on the wall. She felt a sudden pain in her belly. It wasn’t the first time it happened. She had one similar in the morning.
“My lady, are you all right?” Brienne asked her, concerned.

“I’m alright, Brienne. Don’t worry,” she said.

“I can fetch the maester, if you want.”

“No. I’m alright. It’s gone.”

Sansa resumed her way, breathing deeply. Once in her rooms, she dropped herself into a cushioned chair. She had felt increasingly tired lately, and her child moved more than ever. His movements were more painful to her than before. She looked around in the room. Everything was perfect. To occupy her time, Sansa took a heavy volume she had found in the library of White Harbor. When you could almost not move, you couldn’t make much of your days, except needlework or reading. She understood now why Tyrion read so much when he was young. That was the only thing he could do, being denied the usual education young men received from a master-at-arms. She thought with sadness about Bran, who lost the use of his legs after he fell. Sansa opened the book at the page where she stopped reading yesterday. She was reading a long passage about the reign of Aerys the Second when she happened on a passage that retained her attention.

At the great Anniversary Tourney of 272 AC, held to commemorate Aerys’s tenth year upon the Iron Throne, Joanna Lannister brought her four-years-old twins Jaime and Cersei from Casterly Rock to present before the court. The king (very much in his cups) asked her if giving suck to them had “ruined your breasts, which were so high and proud”. The question greatly amused Lord Tywin’s rivals, who were always pleased to see the Hand slighted or made mock of, but Lady Joanna was humiliated. Tywin Lannister attempted to return his chain of office the next morning, but the king refused to accept his resignation.

Sansa remembered a conversation she had with Cerenna in Casterly Rock, about the Mad King saying something improper about Tyrion’s mother when she visited the capital. Sansa supposed that was it. She could sympathize with this woman, after the humiliation she endured from Joffrey. From what she read about the Mad King in this book, Joffrey looked like a copy of Aerys II Targaryen. Maybe it had something to see with the fact they were both born of incest, or maybe because they spent their childhood knowing they would be king one day and have the right to do whatever they wanted. Sansa resumed her reading.

Aerys II could, of course, have dismissed Tywin Lannister at any time and named his own man as Hand of the King, but instead, for whatever reason, the king chose to keep his boyhood friend close by him, laboring on his behalf, even as he began to undermine him in ways both great and small. Slights and gibes became ever more numerous; courtiers hoping for advancement soon learned that the quickest way to catch the king’s eyes was by making mock of his solemn, humorless Hand. Yet through all this, Tywin Lannister suffered in silence.

Wine poured over his hair. Ordered to act as the king’s cupbearer. The images of Joffrey’s wedding came back to her mind. How he humiliated the man she loved. That was the last time he degraded someone in public. Sansa remembered the long days and nights Tyrion spent working on the Crown’s finances for a king and a father who despised and mocked him at every turn.

In 273 AC, however, Lady Joanna was taken to childbed once again at Casterly Rock, where she died delivering Lord Tywin’s second son. Tyrion, as the babe was named, was a malformed, dwarfish babe born with stunted legs, an oversized head, and mismatched, demonic eyes (some reports also suggested he had a tail, which was lopped off at his father’s comment). Lord Tywin’s Doom, the smallfolk called this ill-made creature, and Lord Tywin’s Bane. Upon hearing of his birth, King Aerys infamously said, “The gods cannot abide such arrogance. They have plucked a fair flower from his hand and given him a monster in her place, to teach him some humility at last.”
Sansa shut the book very hard. That was the first time Tyrion was mentioned in Maester Yandel’s work, and it was only to be called a monster and an ill-made creature with a tail, all the while incensing the man who ordered her family’s slaughter. When she would be back at Casterly Rock, she would order a new history book that would detail all the atrocities committed by Tywin Lannister, and all the efforts his son did to mend his father’s crimes. The people would know the true face of Tywin Lannister. They would know who was the real monster. She would make sure that Joffrey, Cersei, Janos Slynt, Ser Meryn and Ser Boros were described for who they really were as well.

She remained in her seat, waiting. It wouldn’t be long. Still, it looked like an eternity for her, and the pain she felt didn’t make it easier. She wouldn’t show it. She wouldn’t show weakness, not before him. Finally, someone knocked on the door and Sansa heard Willia’s voice from the other side.

“Lady Lannister, Lord Baelish to see you.”

“Let him come in,” Sansa replied.

The former Master of Coin had not made a few steps inside the room, his false smile on his face like always, that someone grabbed his arm and twisted it behind his back. For the first time, Sansa saw terror in Littlefinger’s eyes. His assurance was all gone, and he had all reasons to be terrified. Brienne was holding him with all her strength, gagging his mouth with her hand, placing a dagger on his throat. He looked all around him, and he seemed to realize that Sansa was far from alone in her chambers. A dozen men, Lannister and Tully soldiers, were there as well. They surrounded him. These were the men Sansa trusted the most in her guard.

“If you try to call for help, Lord Baelish, you die,” said Brienne, her voice threatening. Sansa knew she would have no hesitation to kill him, not after everything he did.

The man seemed to realize that it was in his best interest to stay quiet. He made no sound. He only looked at Sansa, obviously not understanding the situation. The last time he saw her, she was a frightened child. Things had changed. She was a married woman now, a lady, the mother of the future Lord of Casterly Rock, and he was nothing more than a brothelkeeper, all in her power. She could order him to be killed right now. She would like that. He deserved to die. Brienne would do it. But Sansa didn’t give the order. Instead, she mischievously smiled.

“I suppose this reminds you something, Lord Baelish. One moment you think you are safe, surrounded by allies, protection, privilege, people you believe you can trust, and the next you find yourself at someone else’s mercy, a dagger at your throat, surrounded by enemies. Doesn’t it ring any bell to you?” she asked, her face growing hard as she spoke.

Brienne withdrew her hand from Littlefinger’s mouth, allowing him to answer, but kept the dagger firmly on his throat. One swift move, and the man who caused so much harm to Sansa’s family would die.

“Sansa, I don’t know what you may have heard, but whatever it is that you were told, remember what I told you. We are all liars in King’s Landing,” he said, still terrified. His life was at stake.

“Indeed, you are right. Everyone is a liar in the capital, and you were the best of them. I believed you when you told me you were my friend.”

“And you were right to believe me. I am your friend. Everything I did, from the beginning of this war and even before, it was for you. Because you are Cat’s daughter. Ever since the moment I saw you, I did everything for you.”
There was something mad in his eyes. Sansa didn’t like it. He didn’t stop looking at her, waiting for her to reply. “I suppose this is why you tried to kidnap me. For myself?”

“I tried to save from you from the Lannisters.”

“You sent a man who threatened to cut my throat when I refused to follow him!” she shouted.

He stood there, motionless. Now he was the one with a dagger on his throat. “I didn’t know. I sent the man who wouldn’t be noticed by anyone. No one gives any attention to fools. No one would have suspected Ser Dontos. I’m sorry. I made a mistake.”

If his voice looked sorry, his eyes didn’t. “I suppose selling my sister to the Boltons was a mistake as well.”

He was taken aback by this. He didn’t expect she would know that. Sansa looked at him, anger building up in her. She thought she could feel her child’s anger too. “I didn’t give your sister to the Boltons.”

“You did. She was at the Eyrie. I know it. Lady Waynwood confessed everything, and I’m quite sure that if I asked the other lords of the Vale, they would say the same. They entrusted Arya to your care, and instead of protecting her you brought her to Winterfell and gave her to the Boltons.”

“I didn’t.”

“You did. Arya is in Winterfell.”

“I didn’t bring her to Winterfell. This is the truth.”

“Then how did she happen there? She disappeared in a puff of smoke, I suppose, while you were not looking?”

“We were ambushed by the Boltons, on our way to the Fingers,” he offered as an explanation. He really was a liar.

“I doubt the Boltons would send men in the Vale and be able to kidnap the daughter of Eddard Stark without anyone stopping them, unless someone called them and gave them Arya.”

“I didn’t deliver your sister to the Boltons.”

“Maybe not. Maybe she escaped before you could, when you were at Moat Cailin.”

Again, utter surprise could be seen in his eyes, but then he smiled. “So, Arya Stark is alive, and safe.”

“She is. The same cannot be said about you. I could have you killed any time.”

“I didn’t hand your sister to the Boltons.”

“No, but you wanted to do it. I doubt that people will believe a brothelkeeper over the daughter of Eddard Stark.”

“Not when your sister already confessed she murdered your aunt. The lords of the Vale will believe the husband of their lady before her murderer.”

“Not when they learn that this husband betrayed Eddard Stark and sold him to Cersei Lannister.”
He chuckled. “I did no such thing.”

“You did. My father asked you to bribe the gold cloaks on his side when he tried to arrest Joffrey, and instead you paid Janos Slynt to fight for Cersei. You had a dagger on my father’s throat just like Brienne has one on yours right now.”

“Who told you this? The Imp?” He seemed to gain some confidence again. “I wouldn’t trust everything he says if I were you. He is a Lannister.”

“So am I.” He grinned for a time, but before her serious expression, he seemed to grow concerned for a moment. “Tyrion wasn’t there when my father was killed. You were. What did you do when Joffrey ordered to bring my father's head? Nothing. You stood there, and did nothing. You watched my father die, and you didn’t try to save him, after he trusted you.”

“I wanted to help him, Sansa, but I couldn’t. If I had tried to save him, I would be dead, and I wouldn’t have been able to help you afterwards.”

“You did nothing. Varys, the Grand Maester, even Cersei tried to stop Joffrey from killing him, but you did nothing. And how did you help me afterwards? You sent me a fool who tried to murder me!”

“I was the only one to try to get you out of King’s Landing.”

“And if you had succeeded, I suppose I would be at Winterfell instead of Arya, married to Ramsay? Or worse? You promised to my mother, to my parents, you would help them, and you betrayed my father. You had him killed. You made my mother believe that Tyrion tried to murder Bran, and this started the war that destroyed my family. My parents, Robb, Bran, Rickon, they’re all dead! Because of you!”

“I tried to help your father. I wanted to help him, but he refused my help.”

“Seeing how the people you help end, who could blame him?”

“I can help you, Sansa. You have rights upon the North through your father, rights upon the Westerlands through your child, and you could have the Vale if you married Harrold Arryn. You could have the Seven Kingdoms. I can help you to get them all. I can help you to rule all Westeros. With my help, you could.”

Sansa laughed. That was so stupid. She, Sansa Stark, ruling the Seven Kingdoms?! “I’m not a child anymore, Lord Baelish. I don’t dream of being queen. The last time I dreamed of it, my father was killed by my betrothed. I’m married to a good man now, someone brave, and gentle, and strong. He will give me back my home, and what’s left of my family that didn’t yet die because of you. I don’t need you. The only man I need is my husband, Tyrion Lannister. I don’t need the help of a brothelkeeper.”

“You’re making a terrible mistake. Remember what he did to his wife…”

“You lied. You always lied to me. You lied to everyone. No one believes you here. We’re not in a brothel. We are at White Harbor, in the North. You are in my lands, and I’m the one to decide here. I’m the one to declare someone guilty or not guilty of any crime, and I say this. Lord Petyr Baelish, you are guilty of starting the War of the Five Kings with the lies you told to my lady mother, Catelyn Stark. You are guilty of high treason against my father, Lord Eddard Stark. You are guilty of attempts of murder against me, the Wardeness of the North, and you are guilty of imprisoning and sequestering my sister, the Lady Arya Stark, and of attempting to give her to traitors. Do you have
anything to say?”

He remained silent for a time. The he spoke. “You shouldn’t trust the Imp. He may seem kind to you, but he’s a very good liar. I lied to you, it's true, but I care about you. I want to help you. All Tyrion Lannister wants from you is your claim, and children so he may hold the North and Casterly Rock. Once he’s got a son or two from you, maybe three, he’ll get rid of you, the same way he got rid of the poor girl he married a long time ago.”

A moment went on after he finished to speak. Sansa slowly stood up, and then walked to him. She slapped him even harder than she slapped Black Walder. Brienne’s dagger sank into his throat, and a thread of blood became visible. Baelish looked at her, but differently. It was as if he never saw her before. Indeed, he certainly never saw her like this before. All he ever knew her for was a child who loved knights and princes.

“I’m not going to kill you. Not here,” Sansa said, trying to sound calm, but anger pierced her voice in a very clear way. “You are under the protection of guest rights, and I’m not Walder Frey. There is a ship in the harbor. You’ll be on it when it leaves. My men will make sure you don’t escape. Don’t try to bribe them, I already promised them the double of any amount you would offer. I’m richer than you now. Farewell, Lord Baelish. This is the last time we see each other.”

Sansa backed away, and Brienne released Littlefinger, only for him to be seized by her guards who gagged him, put a bag on his head and tied his hands. They brought him outside, and Sansa had the satisfaction to see the last of Littlefinger. The ship would leave in an hour for King’s Landing. She had given her men a letter for the queen, with a list of accusations and all the details on everything this man had done against the Crown. Margaery would see that he was executed. Considering the role Sansa suspected Littlefinger to have played in Joffrey’s death, she doubted Margaery would relinquish to execute the only man who may reveal the truth about the death of her second husband. She advised Margaery to not let Baelish speak during the trial, and to have him beheaded as quickly as possible. The sooner they got rid of him the better.

Sansa dropped herself in her chair again. She was exhausted. She never felt so exhausted in her life. She cursed Septa Mordane in silence for never telling her about the difficulties of carrying a child. She was never taught about politics or ruling either. What a useless education she received at Winterfell. Singing and threading and playing the harp didn’t prepare you for the true life you would have when you would be married. Of all the things Sansa learned, only riding, sums and writing were really useful. Of the three, there was only in writing that she was better than Arya, and she used writing for poetry and letters telling her family that her father was a traitor. Well, the letters she wrote for Margaery and Lord Manderly today would avenge her father. The man who betrayed him would die soon. She winced as another pain came.

“My lady, are you sure I shouldn’t call the maester?”

“No. I must go to see Lord Manderly.” Sansa forced herself to stand up and refused Brienne's help. It became very difficult to even walk with her swelling belly. “I need to talk with him.”

Very carefully, Sansa walked to the solar of the Lord of White Harbor. Her handmaiden, Brienne and a few other guards followed her. Willia helped her to progress through the castle. She needed twice more time to travel it than when she arrived. Willia seemed to worry about her just like Brienne did, and Sansa thought she saw concern among her guards as well, but she didn’t care about it. She had to speak with the Lord of White Harbor.

The squire before the solar let her in after he announced her presence. Sansa went alone. She found the Lord of White Harbor behind his desk, reading the letter she sent him hours ago. She had told Willia to place it on Lord Manderly’s desk, so he might find it when he would come to work. Lady
Waynwood was sitting in front of the desk. She looked at Sansa when she entered, but Lord Manderly’s eyes were locked on Sansa’s letter. He didn’t detach his gaze from it.

“My lady,” said the Lady of Ironoaks, making a curtesy. The Lord of White Harbor did nothing. He was still looking at the letter.

“Lord Manderly?” asked Sansa.

He slowly lifted his eyes. “Is it true, my lady? Is all of this accurate?” he asked.

“It is.” Her words explained in detail all the crimes committed by Petyr Baelish, and also revealed the truth about Arya’s real location.

The Lord of White Harbor looked blankly for a moment right before him, then he slowly crumpled the letter, and threw it on the surface of his desk. “Damn it! I knew I should never have trusted him.”

"Who should you never have trusted?"

"Baelish."

This alarmed Sansa. “You trusted Littlefinger? What did you trust him about?”

He didn’t answer. Lady Waynwood replied in his stead. “It seems that Petyr Baelish convinced Lord Manderly to join a conspiracy to bring back the Starks to power at Winterfell.”

A conspiracy to bring the Starks back to power? “That’s what we’re already doing. We have an army heading for Winterfell, to bring down the Boltons and reinstate my house.”

“To place a grandson of Tywin Lannister at the head of the North, you mean,” countered the fat lord quite sharply.

“My son is going to have the Stark name. I am a Stark. He will be a Stark.”

“He will still be the grandson of Tywin Lannister, the man behind the Red Wedding. And please forgive me, my lady, but I don’t trust the Imp. You may trust him, but I don’t, and no one does in the North.”

A long silence. Then Sansa asked very slowly. “What were you planning with Littlefinger?”

The lord sighed. “The plan was to bring the Knights of the Vale in the North and to join them with the northern forces still loyal to the Starks, and maybe with the lords of the Riverlands. We were supposed to let the Lannisters fight the Boltons and to turn on both during the battle, thus defeating them and giving back the North to its people.”

Sansa couldn’t believe it. She knew the Northerners didn’t trust Tyrion, but this… This was treason! “You wanted to betray Lord Tyrion? All this time you were planning to betray us? To betray me? To kill us?”

“We would never have hurt you, my lady, nor your child. He may be the grandchild of Tywin Lannister and the child of the Imp, but he’s also the grandchild of Eddard Stark. We would never have caused you any harm.”

“But you planned to kill my husband? You planned to murder the father of my son?”

“The father of your son, like you call him, my lady, is a Lannister. The Lannisters killed our liege lord, and slaughtered his lady wife and their eldest son, our king, breaking the sacred laws of guest
right. They killed my own son, Wendel. They spoiled the Riverlands and ravaged it for years, and now they come in our lands, seeking to take them for themselves, trying to steal them from us, claiming they come here as liberators, taking the place the Boltons occupy. What did you expect? That I would gladly bend the knee to the Imp after Wendel died?"

“He gave you back your other son, Wylis. He’s back thanks to him.”

“Aye. And I lost Wylis for years because the Lannisters kept him from me. I wasn’t going to let the son of Tywin Lannister take the North and give us one of his sons to replace our king.”

Lord Manderly was unyielding. He really hated the Lannisters. Sansa should have expected that, and truth be told she expected it, but she never thought the Manderlys would attempt to betray them, not when they were trying to save Arya and Rickon.

“So you chose to trust a brothelkeeper?” Sansa asked him.

Rebuffed, Wyman Manderly didn’t look so proud of himself now. “We needed more men to defeat the Lannisters. The Knights of the Vale were the only option available.”

“Littlefinger will tell you what you want to hear. Just a few minutes ago, he was telling me he would help me to rule the Seven Kingdoms one day. I wouldn’t be surprised he’s been sending letters to Cersei Lannister as he brought the Knights of the Vale in the North, promising her he would help to recover her lost powers. He’s manipulating everyone. He did so with my father, and look at what happened to him.”

Another sigh escaped the throat of the fat lord. “I should never have listened to him. Are the Knights of the Vale going to turn against us as we turn against the Lannisters now?”

“No, Lord Arryn would never do that,” intervened Lady Waynwood. “He wouldn’t see it… fair. He is a knight. He wouldn’t stab in the back someone in this way.”

“Maybe not, but that is Littlefinger’s style, and if he had Harrold Arryn’s ear, who knows what he could convince him to do,” Sansa countered. She looked back at the Lord of White Harbor. “You betrayed me, Lord Manderly.”

“My loyalty goes to House Stark, my lady. Not to Tyrion Lannister,” he said gravely.

“And I am a Stark. I am the Lady of Winterfell.”

“Rickon Stark IS the Lord of Winterfell, my lady.”

“My brother is dead. Bran and Rickon died three years ago when Theon Greyjoy killed them. He butchered them. They were burned. They’re dead. You know the truth about my sister now. Littlefinger tried to sell her to the Boltons, but she escaped and was hidden by Lord Reed all this time. The Boltons are lying to us. They lied about Arya, and they’re lying about Rickon too. My brother is dead.”

Rickon was dead. Bran was dead. Robb was dead. Her father and her mother were dead. Even her uncle Benjen was dead. Sansa, Arya and Jon were the only ones left. Hoping that someone else had survived was foolish, because there was no chance for it to be true.

The expression on Lord Manderly’s face softened. “My lady,” he started, “Rickon Stark is still alive.”

“He’s not. He’s dead, and hoping for him to be still alive will not…”
“My lady, please listen. Your brothers didn’t die at Winterfell. The people there believed they were killed, it’s true, but they weren’t. They escaped in the night. Theon Greyjoy was furious, and to not let anyone believe he lost the Stark boys, he had two boys he found somewhere burned, and put on them your brothers’ clothes. Everyone in Winterfell believed they were your brothers, but Brandon and Rickon Stark were away. They didn’t die. Rickon Stark arrived at the Last Hearth not long after the Red Wedding, and Jon Umber took him under his protection. Only, when he died, his son, the Smalljon, decided he didn’t care anymore about his family’s loyalty to the Starks, and he decided to ally with the Boltons. Your brother Rickon is alive, my lady, and unfortunately, he is at Winterfell.”

Sansa couldn’t talk for some time. “And Bran?” she croaked after a moment.

“We know nothing of Brandon Stark’s whereabouts. He didn’t go to the Last Hearth like his brother.”

Her two brothers weren’t dead. Theon hadn’t killed them. Sansa had thought all this time they were dead, just like she thought Arya was dead, but they weren’t. She looked at the fat lord once more. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because we couldn’t take the risk. I couldn’t give the information that Rickon Stark was still alive, or else the Lannisters may have tried to kill him.”

Something dawned on Sansa. “You’ve known for a long time.”

“The Greatjon wrote to me not long after your brother came to him. For some time, we thought about rising in rebellion against Roose Bolton and to proclaim Rickon Stark King in the North, but we couldn’t rely on the Karstarks after your brother executed their lord, and we didn’t have enough men to hope to defeat them by ourselves. We had lost too many in the war. Together, the Boltons and the Karstarks couldn’t be defeated. Our plan was to wait for the next summer, to recover from our losses and to use winter to make alliances with the other minor houses, then to rise against the Boltons when summer would come back with our full forces. But when we heard that your sister Arya may be at Winterfell, I decided we had to act quickly. We couldn’t let Ramsay Bolton get her with child, or else we could lose everything. So I relayed the information to Lord Tyrion, and he marched on the North. With his forces, we would have enough to take back Winterfell.”

“But you didn’t trust him. You said it yourself. You didn’t believe he would acknowledge Rickon as Lord of Winterfell.” A silence followed, and Sansa realized what it was. “This is a trap, isn’t it? You wanted to turn on him once Winterfell was free. You’ve been planning this since the beginning.”

“We did. That was our plan. When we heard the Blackfish was coming with you, we knew that we could have enough forces with the rest of the North to overrun the Lannisters eventually, and when Lord Baelish contacted us, we were sure to have more men than the Lannisters. Of course, now, we don’t know if we can trust the Knights of the Vale.”

“Your men, what are they supposed to do?” Sansa asked.

“What I told you. Betray the Lannisters when the time is right. They have orders to enlist the river lords they can trust.”

“They won’t have any chance on that.”

“Why? The Riverlands lost a lot…”

“My granduncle, Ser Brynden Tully, trusts my husband, to the opposite of you. He won’t let his men turn on him. The moment he hears about their plan, he will put an end to it. Tyrion gave my mother’s
family their lands, their titles and everything he could give them back. They won’t betray him, and if you allowed him a chance, you would see just like my mother’s uncle that Tyrion really wants to give Winterfell back to my family, to the Starks.”

“I doubt the Blackfish would trust a Lannister,” commented Anya Waynwood.

“Well, he does, and don’t expect him to stand idle while your men try to betray and kill Lord Tyrion. Because he won’t.” A new pain went through Sansa’s belly. Couldn’t it stop for a moment. It wasn’t the time.

Lord Manderly seemed to think about all this for a moment. He sighed angrily at the end. “I don’t want to trust a Lannister, but I don’t want to trust Petyr Baelish either. I will send riders to my men, telling them to forget about the plan.”

“Very well. And I’ll send a raven to my husband.”

Sansa turned on her heels. She winced a little. “My lady…” began to protest the Lord of White Harbor.

“I will tell him everything. You tried to betray me. Rickon may be still alive, but he is a prisoner, and we don’t know where Bran is. Until further notice, I am the Wardeness of the North, and you plotted against me. You plotted against House Stark. I won’t forget that, Lord Manderly. The North remembers.”

Sansa proceeded to walk to the rookery. Maester Theomore was a Lannister. He wouldn’t disobey her. She had to warn Tyrion as quickly as possible. Castle Cerwyn had fallen not long ago. If she sent a raven… the pain intensified. She stopped. The pain was heavy in her belly. She winced once more.

“My dear, what’s going on?” asked Lady Waynwood. She had risen up and stood next to Sansa now. The pain lasted for some time, more intense than before. Then it faded, like before.

“I’m well,” Sansa said, trying to catch her breath.

“You are with child. How long have been pregnant? You must be quite advanced now.”

“I’m telling that I’m well. I must see…”

Sansa didn’t complete her sentence. She felt something run on her legs. Something liquid. She didn’t think she made water. What was it? Lady Waynwood looked at her queerly. What was Sansa supposed to do? What was she supposed to say?

“I… I…” She stammered. What was going on?

“Your water broke?” Lady Waynwood asked. Sansa remembered hearing a servant ask something like that to her mother once. That was back when she had been pregnant with Rickon, or so she thought. “We must get you to bed immediately. Lord Manderly, fetch the maester right away.”

Unable to say anything, Sansa was almost dragged out of the solar by Lady Waynwood.

Chapter End Notes
Sorry for everyone who hoped we would see the baby. Don't worry, we'll get to see him or her in the next Sansa chapter, though I'm afraid it will take some time before it is uploaded. We have many chapters taking place near Winterfell that are coming, and stuff will be happening in Meereen too.

Please review

Next chapter: Cersei
Cersei IV

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry I didn't update twice last week like I should have. I decided to publish one more chapter in my other fic "A Rose and a Lion". Please read the chapter carefully.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

CERSEI VI

“I hope our guest is satisfied with his new accommodations,” Cersei said.

“I think he is satisfied enough for now,” Qyburn confirmed. A muffled sigh came from the torture room. “He’s sleeping right now. I gave him some potion so he could rest, but the mixture in question will also have the benefit to make his pain stronger when he will wake up.”

“Could you get anything from him up to now?”

“Not as much as I would like, and not what your Grace is looking for. He confessed he slept with several women while he was studying at the Citadel, which is quite common among novices, and that he visited a brothel once since he arrived in the capital, but he refused to say that he slept with Lady Margaery.”

Cersei had given the order to Qyburn to not call Margaery a queen in any circumstance when they were alone. She was glad he obeyed her orders. She liked this man more and more every day. Finally someone who knew where his loyalties should stand.

“Make sure he confesses.”

“If I may say, your Grace, we already have two bards and another servant who confessed they slept with Margaery Tyrell and that she laid with her handmaidens. We even have one who claimed that she shared the same bed with Tyrion Lannister and Sansa Stark.”

“I would rather prefer we have as many witnesses who can testify about this when the time comes. Try to get more confessions from the other prisoners and some that incriminate that little whore from the maester.”

“As you wish, your Grace.”

“Anyway, that’s not as if we had need of Vallis anymore. You perform the duties of Grand Maester better than anyone.”

"I'm not a maester, your Grace, but I'm happy to serve."

Qyburn bowed and left to resume his interrogations. Cersei walked up from the dungeons to the upper levels of the Red Keep, escorted by Ser Boros. The knight had all reasons to remain at her side if he had any hope to remain in the Kingsguard in the future. Cersei had nothing in particular against Maester Vallis, but he was from the Reach. When he sent a missive to alert Randyll Tarly about Margaery’s imprisonment, she had no choice but to leave him to the cares of Qyburn. If the Citadel ever sent them a new Grand Maester, she would make sure he had no ties with Highgarden or the
Vallis’s raven posed a problem. Randyll Tarly would receive it sooner or later, and when he would learn that Margaery and her brother were kept prisoners by the Faith, he would turn away from Dorne and come back to the capital immediately. Cersei had Qyburn write an order to Lord Tarly, signed by Tommen’s hand, that ordered him to keep marching on Dorne and that assured him that Margaery would soon be freed when the charges against her would prove to be false. She had no wish to see the Lord of Horn Hill back in the capital. A woman’s war is in the birthing bed. Your wars are over. If he ever showed himself in front of the city, Cersei would show him that her wars were far from over, and that they were far from being limited to the birthing bed. He would be in for a great surprise if he ever approached the city.

If only Cersei had come back sooner. She had returned to the capital two days after being forced into leaving it. The Tyrell guards had run back to the capital when they heard their precious rose was arrested, leaving Cersei with Lannister men only, and they hadn't objected for long when she decided to come back to King's Landing. However, she had needed to be sure first that Margaery and her brother would be well under arrest, which delayed her. Her son didn’t stop her from settling again in the Red Keep. He needed someone at his side, and this someone was Cersei. Sadly, Vallis, who replaced Pycelle while the Citadel was deciding who would become the new Grand Maester, had already sent his raven to Lord Tarly. He wouldn’t do anything else now, but the damage was done. Cersei doubted the Lord of Horn Hill would follow Tommen’s order to keep marching on Dorne. He was a Tyrell bannerman after all. His loyalty was to Highgarden, not to King's Landing. Let him come. He’ll see the lioness has claws.

Cersei walked to the royal apartments. She wanted to spend some time with her son. Tommen may lack the will and the force to be king, but he was her last son. Gold will be their crowns. Gold their shrouds. She wouldn’t let that happen. Margaery was confined somewhere under the Great Sept of Baelor. She wouldn’t take her last son away from his mother.

She found Tommen sitting at his table before full plates of food. He hadn’t touched anything. He didn’t eat anything these times. Cersei didn’t understand. He needed to eat. He wouldn’t save his wife by starving himself to death. When Jaime was captured, or that she was hiding in Maegor’s Holdfast during the Battle of Blackwater, or that she was confined in her rooms by Joffrey or Kevan, she kept drinking and eating. To do otherwise wouldn’t have made her feel better.

"Hello, my love."

She sat in front of him. He said nothing, as if he didn't notice her presence. He was staring at his plate with empty eyes.

"Tommen?" she asked, trying to get his attention. He didn't move. He did nothing. He just sat there, looking to his feet. He had been in this state ever since Cersei came back. It annoyed her. "Starving yourself won't make things any better for her, my love."

Tommenn stood up at this moment. "She's in a prison cell and there is nothing I can do. I am the king! The queen is in prison and there is nothing I can do!"

He walked to the window. That was the first time Cersei ever saw her youngest son get angry, but that was nothing when compared to Joffrey's anger. Joffrey had been strong enough and had the right temper to be king, despite all his other flaws, but Tommen had nothing of the essential to be king. He was too sweet, too kind. A good king couldn't allow himself such weaknesses. Cersei also found it stupider than any of the reasons why Joffrey had ever been angry that Tommen would feel outraged because Margaery was in prison. He should be happy about it. She managed to rid himself of a woman who tried to usurp his power.
She walked to him and took his hands in hers. "No matter who you are, no matter how strong you are, sooner or later, you'll face circumstances beyond your control. Events you couldn't possibly have anticipated or prevented even if you had. You cannot blame yourself for fate. Your father, your brother, your grandfather… I was Queen of the Seven Kingdoms and what could I do? Hold them as they left this world. Kiss their heads after they'd gone."

Tommen had to let go Margaery. He had to, just like Cersei let her father and her two other children go. Gold will be their crowns. Gold their shrouds. They couldn't prevent fate from happening. She wasn't responsible for Myrcella's and Joffrey's death. Tyrion had killed them. She wouldn't let that happen to her last son. She would prevent fate from becoming true.

"I'll call in the army," declared Tommen. "I'll take back the sept and kill every last one of them." Her son might try to look decisive, but his eyes betrayed his uncertainty. "I'll start a war if I have to."

"You know as well as I do who the first casualty of that war would be."

This argument broke Tommen's resolve in an instant. Joffrey would never have surrendered. He would have attacked the sept without caring for his wife, more sensible to the offence the Faith had done against him. If his wife had died in the battle, he would simply have taken another one, better than the former. Cersei would have made sure of it, and she would make sure Tommen would have a better wife once Margaery was dealt with.

"I love her." That stung. Cersei could keep her face impassive, but the fact remained that it stung. "I love her." He said it again, and that stung harder. You'll be queen. For a time. Then comes another, younger, more beautiful, to cast you down and take all you hold dear. No, this couldn't be happening. Tommen didn't know what he was saying, that was all. "And I can't help her."

He walked away to the place where Cersei sat before. He didn't look at her. That was as if she didn't exist for him. She was losing him. Cersei realized that Tommen had the same disease than Tyrion. Love was a poison. A sweet poison, yes, but it killed everyone who had it all the same. No, she couldn't allow that to happen to Tommen. He was all she had left. Joffrey and Myrcella were dead. He was all she had now. She couldn't lose him too. She approached and knelt at his side, taking his hands into hers. She wouldn't let him go.

"We must be strong for those we love," she began. She had to be strong for her son. "We cannot give in to despair." She couldn't despair. If she despaired, then she had lost. Her father wasn't there to help her anymore. She could only rely on herself.

"I will speak with the High Sparrow," her son declared. "There must be something he…"

"Let me talk to him in your behalf. The king cannot sully himself negotiating with an unwashed fanatic."

"You will try to help her?"

"I'll do everything I can to win her freedom and her brother's. Your happiness is all I want in this world."

"I know." He was crying.

"No, you don't. You can't possibly. Not until you have children of your own. I would do anything for you. Anything to keep you from harm. I would burn cities to the ground. You are all that matters. From the moment you came into this world. My boy. My only boy."

As she hugged him, Cersei felt tears rolling on her cheeks, and for a moment, a very short moment,
she thought she would actually do everything to save Margaery, only to see her son happy.

Later, she went back to see Qyburn who told her that Vallis confessed to laying with Margaery and her brother, both of them. She also asked him if they received any word from the Arbor, Casterly Rock or Tarly's army. Of course, they had none. It hadn't been long enough since they sent the messages. Cersei had used the last two weeks to strengthen her position in the Red Keep. The Tyrell guards couldn't send her out since the king forbade them to do so and the Lannister guards in the city were on her side. As for the City Watch, they were no threat with the Faith Militia patrolling everywhere and powerless to stop the High Septon. She had all the cards in her hand, at least inside the city. Outside was another story.

She had ordered the Redwyne fleet to turn around and to sail for Planky Town instead of the Iron Islands. The Greyjoys were no threat for now, with their king dead and a new one, an exiled brother, who just arrived. They were disorganized and in civil war. Cersei felt some sympathy for Balon's daughter, whose claim upon the Iron Islands had been discarded by her uncle, just like Cersei's claim on Casterly Rock had been set aside for Tyrion, all that because she was a woman. She wouldn't let the Redwynes approach Casterly Rock.

She also sent another message to Casterly Rock, this time written and signed by her. Those she sent to Tarly and Lord Redwyne were signed by Tommen, who signed everything that was presented to him without a glare like he always did. She asked Genna to send her as many men as she could in the capital. She needed an army at hands for when Tarly would come back, and to face Tyrion eventually. She hadn't forgotten her wretched little brother. She would never forget him, less than ever now that his wife was about to have a child. She would have to deal with them. She would kill Tyrion. She would kill Sansa. She would kill their child. She wouldn't let a child of this creature live so he could try to murder her later. She was the daughter of Tywin Lannister. She would crush her enemies under the ground.

Cersei gave a list of people she wanted on the small council to Qyburn. In the king's absence, she took back the power. She decided to keep Harys Swyft as Master of Coin and to acknowledge Selwyn Tarth as Master of Laws. He was still on his way to the capital. His nomination may keep the Stormlands on their side and the office wasn't very important anyway. Qyburn didn't show much surprise when he saw she named him Master of Whisperers. She also decided to name Aurane Waters, a bastard of House Velaryon, as new Master of Ships in replacement of Lord Paxter Redwyne. Finally, she decided to let Randyll Tarly keep the position of Hand of the King for the duration of the war with Dorne. When it would be over and the Martells were dead, she would reward him with some lands in Dorne along with the charge of governing it and give the badge of Hand to Jaime. Hopefully, the people of Dorne would kill Tarly like they did with a Tyrell whose name she didn't remember.

Cersei felt very happy by the end of the day. She was back in command, ruling like she should always have, and this time no one could stop her. Her father, Kevan, Tyrion, Margaery, Robert… None of them could stop her. She was the queen. It was with these thoughts that she went to see Margaery like she said she would to Tommen. There would be no way for her to get out of it. Not only could she face judgment for perjury, but also for fornication and all the so-called sexual crimes she and the High Sparrow could think about. Cersei had more than enough proofs against her, and by forcing a few of her handmaidens and cousins to confess in order to avoid public humiliation, like Megga Tyrell or the handmaiden, that Sara Mirwell, there would be no way for Margaery to get out of it. She would make sure that other people would follow her in her downfall.

Cersei was escorted to the Great Sept of Baelor by her own guards. Before that, she went to see Tommen once more, to see if he would eat something, but again he didn't. She left after her first attempt. They were welcomed by a band of stinking Sparrows who ordered her men to stay behind.
Before their stubborness, Cersei gave in and told her guards to wait for her. She would need to have a word with the new High Septon about this. However, when she asked to be led to him, the Faith Militia told her he was praying. She could meet him after his prayers were over. Cersei needed to have many good words with the High Sparrow. She couldn't let him believe that prayers had the priority on the queen. Still, she bit her lip. She had to see Margaery first.

A stoic Sparrow led her to the cell. Cersei was glad for his silence. She had nothing to say to beggars. He opened a door for her after looking inside. The things Cersei saw inside were at the same time disgustful and delightful. The little rose turned her head as soon as she entered. She wore nothing but a grey woolen tunic. No jewel, nothing in her hair, no silk or finery, no shoes. Nothing at all. The little whore had found her rightful place. Dirt incrusted every part of her, from her fingernails to her hair. Tommen wouldn't want her back in his bed if he saw her like that. All her beauty was gone. Cersei had never found her pretty. Her beauty was mostly youth and gowns and jewels. Without all that attire, she was nothing. Anyone could have mistaken her for a whore in Flea Bottom. The more beautiful queen was gone. Only men like Robert or Tyrion would want such a woman now, since they wanted every woman.

"This is horrible. Unacceptable. Are they feeding you enough at least?" Cersei asked, faking concern. "I brought you this. Venison. It's quite good. I had it myself at supper only last night." Tommen had asked to bring her some food, so Cersei obliged. She laid the bowl right next to Margaery, who stared away. "We did everything we could from the moment they took your brother. Tommen even went to the sept himself to confront the High Sparrow. But I fear the Faith has left reason behind."

"I know you did this." These were the first words she pronounced. Cersei denied her affirmation.

"We are making every effort on your behalf. I swear to you by all the seven gods."

"Lies come easily to you. Everyone knows that. But innocence, decency, concern, you're not very good at those, I'm afraid. Perhaps that's why your son was so eager to cast you aside for me."

How did she dare? She was locked up in a cell, and she dared to say such things? She knew nothing. Tommen was her son. I love her. I'll start a war if I have to. Tommen was her son.

"You're upset. You're not thinking clearly. I'll visit again when you've had a chance to calm down," said Cersei. If Margaery wanted to stay alone, then she would stay alone, isolated, without any good food, and that would make her even more miserable.

"I don't want to see you again."

Cersei kept the facade. She kept some of it. "I do hope you change your mind about that. I've been told men often go mad in the black bells beneath the Red Keep. Though I suppose your isolation will end when your trial begins."

"You will face trial you too, soon. Leave." She was rambling now.

"Yes. I'm afraid I must. My son needs me now more than ever."

"GET OUT, YOU HATEFUL BITCH!" She threw the bowl on the wall and looked at Cersei directly into the eyes. "YOU WILL PAY FOR THIS! THE LANNISTERS ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES TO PAY THEIR DEBTS!"

Cersei didn't expect this reaction, but she was glad to see it. Someone unlocked the door behind her. She wished a good sleep to her sister before she left. Behind the door was a septa instead of a
Sparrow now. She closed the door behind Cersei.

"The High Septon is ready to receive you, your Grace," she said with an accent.

She led Cersei through the corridors. Cersei would remember this conversation with Margaery for a very long time. She was willing to forget about the lack of respect the High Sparrow showed her if he ensured Margaery would be dealt with. Now, she was the queen, the true queen.

The septa brought her to a small room with a very small altar. The High Septon was sitting. He didn't kneel, nor raised, nor even bowed before her. Once this business with Margaery and her brother would be concluded, she would have to remind him of who he stood before.

"Thank you, Septa Yeten."

The septa closed the door behind her, leaving Cersei alone with the High Sparrow.

"You saw her?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And?"

"Her accommodations seem sufficient. What happens to her now?"

"Well, she and her brother are both being held under fair suspicion. A trial will be held for each of them to determine if they're guilty of any acts that might constitute a violation of the tenets of the faith."

"Who will stand judge?"

"Seven septons as it was in all trials before the Targaryens."

"Will you be one of them?"

"I will." He smiled when she asked. She couldn't stop smiling as well.

"If one or both of them were to confess before the trial…"

"Then they will be shown the Mother's mercy."

"And what does the Mother's mercy entail?"

"It depends upon the situation. The acts themselves, the degree of contrition."

"Thank you, High Septon, for bringing them whatever justice they deserve… in the eyes of the Seven," she added after a time. "I led my own inquiries in the Red Keep and found several people who confessed crimes and sins in which Queen Margaery and her brother took part, and who identified other people who took part to these sinful actions. Highborn people, powerful people, protected by privilege as well. I'm afraid some of them are members of my own family."

"Well, in this case, they should come here and confess their crimes to the Seven. This way their souls will be cleaned."

"And they could be asked as witnesses for the trial."

"Eventually."
"Thank you. I'll tell them to come for you, so they can confess and wash themselves from their sins."

Cersei started to walk away. Soon, the Imp and his little bitch of a wife would have the Faith against them. She would have more than enough reason to deprive them of any title or power they had.

"Did you know this chapel is one of the oldest structures in King's Landing?"

Cersei stopped. She had never heard of this. "I think I may have heard at one point."

"Baelor built his sept around it. But men worshipped here long before him. Who carved this altar? Do you know?"

"I'm afraid I don't." Cersei was beginning to get bored. She wasn't in need of a history lesson.

"No one does. There's no name on it or anywhere else in the chapel. No, the people who built this place didn't inflict their vanity on those who came after them the way Baelor did with that great gilded monstrosity up there. Their faith was clean. Strip away the gold and the ornaments, knock down the statues on the pillars, and this is what remains. Something simple and solid and true." He wandered his hand on the rudely made altar. Cersei never saw someone give so much importance to something that had none. "The Tyrell's finery will be stripped away. Their lies knocked down. Their true hearts laid bare for all to see. And so it will be for all of us. High and low alike. What will we find when we strip away your finery?"

He looked straight at her now. Did Cersei hear well? Was he threatening her? He couldn't. Everything he had, he had it thanks to her. He owed his power to her. Everything he had came from her and she could take it away from him whenever it pleased her. He was a beggar, nothing more.

He resumed to speak. "On my way to King's Landing, I met a young man. He was going to join a community on an island. We talked together. He was broken, both in body and spirit. He had so much to strip away. So much weighing him down. But piece by piece, he unburdened himself. I helped him to do so, to find forgiveness and enlightenment. He let go of vanity, pride, sin. I saw him again not long ago. Now his soul is so light, he will float through the Seven Heavens like a bird. He also had much to say about you, and he told us everything."

A door opened in the corner. She heard footsteps. He came in her field of view and stood next to the High Sparrow. His eyes were cast down. He wore a ragged tunic made of wool, just like Margaery. He didn't lift his eyes, but Cersei recognized him. He was just like he was during the trial. He was the man Sansa Stark brought to destroy her. Lancel Lannister. The High Sparrow was looking at her with harshness. It was time to leave.

Cersei turned on her heels and walked to the door. It opened to reveal a septa. She wasn't the one who led Cersei here. She looked straight in front of her, not looking at Cersei. She blocked the way.

"Move." She looked at Cersei on the order she gave. She tried to get past her, but couldn't. "Let me go immediately," Cersei ordered again. Cersei tried to struggle to pass, but instead the septa grabbed her by the arms. "You will order her to let me go. I am the queen! I am the queen! Have you lost your mind? Let me go! Get your filthy hands out of me! Have you lost your mind? I am the queen! Let me go!"

She kept shouting and struggling as she was brought out. She almost managed to escape once, but other septas came to help the other one. They kept bringing her forward, opened a door and threw her inside.

She called after the septa who seized her. "Look at me. Look at my face. It's the last thing you'll see
before you die."

The septa's face betrayed no emotion. She closed the door and Cersei heard the locks outside. She was trapped.

Later, four septas came inside her cell and tore her clothes out from her. Cersei resisted, but they prevailed and only left her a tunic of wool, like the one Margaery had before. In a fit of rage, Cersei tore the tunic. They tore her clothes, she would tear their own. She even tore the veil from one of them before they left.

Cersei realized quickly that it had been a mistake. It was very cold down here. Winter was close. She had nothing to wear. She stayed there, shivering, for hours. Finally, the door opened and the septa who showed her the way to the High Sparrow not long before came in, another tunic under her arm, a piece of black bread and a bowl of water in her hands.

"How is my son?" Cersei asked, trying to inspire some pity in the woman. She wasn't with the ones who brought her here or stripped her from her clothes, as far as she knew. She ignored Cersei, dropped the tunic next to her and laid the bread and water on the floor. Her hand toppled the cup of water as she laid the bread and all its content poured on the floor.

"How is my son?" Cersei repeated. "Let me speak to the High Septon."

She looked at Cersei then and smiled. She had the impression she saw it before.

"You will face trial you too, soon. You will pay for your crimes and your sins. The Lannisters are not the only ones to pay their debts."

She grinned at Cersei. She had barely whispered it. Only Cersei could have heard this. She left without any other word. The door closed behind her, leaving Cersei to slowly realize where this accent came from.

Chapter End Notes

Like always, Cersei's schemes work out very well (sarcasm). Now Tommen really has no one at his side. What's the worst? To have only Cersei at your side, or to have no one at all at your side?

Please review

Next chapter: Trystane
There were some mysteries in the previous chapters. To tease you one more time, a few of them will be enlightened in this chapter... only to be replaced by other mysteries.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"The repairs on the walls are complete. We managed to pay all the workers, something we wouldn't have been able to do a few months ago, and now the construction of the new dromonds is begun. It will take time to build them. The first will be ready in two months, at best."

"I know," Trystane replied to Branfield.

They would never be able to entirely replace the fleet of Meereen, but it would be better to have a few ships than to have none at all, and they needed to go back to Westeros as soon as the Queen would come back. News had arrived from the Seven Kingdoms recently and they weren't good. Ser Kevan Lannister, the Hand of the King, and the Grand Maester Pycelle had been found assassinated inside the Red Keep. The Crown had accused Dorne of the murders. Trystane found it unlikely that his father was behind this. He wanted to delay the war, not precipitate it. However, he had no difficulty to believe that Nymeria was behind this and that she acted of her own will, against his father's orders. He knew she and Tyene were in the capital. He hoped they got killed there. He also hoped Obara died at Oldtown, though she had lesser chance to be found there. As for Sarella... She had no part in the murder. She didn't deserve to die. Trystane hoped she was well.

"Any murder these last days?" he asked.

"None that were the doing of the Sons of the Harpy," replied Branfield with a smile.

"Why are you so happy?" Trystane asked him. Malcolm was more cheerful than usual recently. He hadn't looked that happy when Meereen started to recover and to come back to life.

"Nothing. Only, I got news yesterday, from Oldtown. I have a niece. She was in the south when the war started. She wasn't at Ironrath when it was destroyed. I just learnt she got married." His face saddened a little. "I wish I had been there to assist the ceremony. She's my last niece, and I'm all the family she's got now."

"I'm sorry."

"It's been years since I last saw her. She was still a child when she left Ironrath. She must be a woman now. I wonder how she looks like. She was quite pretty the last time I saw her. She must have grown quite beautiful."

"I'm sure the queen will let you see her when we go back to Westeros."

"Let's hope then she will come back soon. We have no news from Ser Jorah and Daario Naharis."

"She will come back. She must come back."
She really had to. If Daenerys Targaryen didn't come back immediately, House Martell was doomed. His father told him before he left that they didn't have the means to fight the Lannisters and the Tyrells at the same time. They needed Daenerys and her dragons, and her Unsullied, and her mercenaries. They needed everything she could bring them.

"Let's have a drink," declared Malcolm Branfield. "Meereen was about to devour itself not long ago. Now it's like a man reborn. It deserves a toast, and my niece's wedding as well, even if it's months late."

They drank to Meereen and his niece. They were in Trystane's apartments. The pact with the masters of Astapor, Yunkai and Volantis had proved to be a good thing finally. The Sons of the Harpy had stopped killing, and former slaves had stopped killing former masters. Trade had resumed, people were gathering in the streets and the markets. The people were behind Daenerys Targaryen again. It seemed things had worked out well. Trystane drank, though he didn't taste the wine very much. His family was still in danger and they had no word from the queen. Then again, he missed Myrcella. He managed to rule a city without her, but he missed her all the same. A dragon queen wouldn't replace her.

"I do hope me too that the queen will return soon," said Malcolm. "I don't want to linger here longer than necessary and I always feel out of place when I walk in the streets, especially with all these priests preaching everywhere that our queen is the Lord's Chosen One, Azor Ahai reborn and a thousand other things. She already has more than enough titles. There's no need to add more," he said with a nervous chuckle.

"We don't have to introduce her with these in the future," replied Trystane.

"Really? I doubt it."

"What do you mean?"

"The red priests are becoming powerful. They have influence all over the city and this influence keeps growing. The people are listening to them. They could be a threat."

"The High Priestess and her order have helped us so far."

"Yes, so far, but who's telling that they won't turn against us sooner or later?"

"I don't believe they will turn on us, not if they believe that Daenerys is the Prince that was promised."

"Well, that's the problem. Their loyalty is based on their faith. They follow Daenerys because they believe she is their savior. What if they no longer believe she is the savior?"

Trystane laid his cup on the table. "Without Kinvara, Meereen could still be in chaos. She helped us to make peace with the other cities, restored the faith of the people in our queen and helped us chase down the Sons of the Harpy. Thanks to her, we even have eyes in the other cities."

"I don't trust her," declared Malcolm. "She has her own agenda. Have you seen what happened to Stannis Baratheon? He's dead, and he followed a red priestess."

"We're not following her. We're only using her help, and that's not as if she asked us for the other religions to be banned from the city or for the heretics to burn. We've seen nothing of it."

"Still, she has her own goals."
"She says she wants to help Daenerys."

"Then let's hope that for her, help doesn't mean advising to make the Red God the only god in Westeros."

"Do you think our queen would listen to that kind of advice?" Trystane asked. He had no idea what kind of decision Daenerys Targaryen would take.

"I never saw her pray. From what I know, she's not a great believer. I don't think she will let that woman convince her with speeches that she is the Prince that was promised, but still. Her priests are at the source of all the trust the people put in us. They rented and even bought houses for their followers. The last time I saw the High Priestess, she was talking with one of her men about the possibility to build a temple, like the one in Volantis, and recently she went to see the dragons."

"What?!" Trystane couldn't have been more surprised.

"Yes. She entered their cave, stayed there some time, then left. I don't know what she did, but I don't like it. No one has approached the dragons for months, not ever since the queen left. They wouldn't eat anything. But she went in and out, without a scratch."

"Why didn't we tell me?"

"Apparently, the Unsullied in post only reported it much later. They didn't think it was worthy of reporting."

"Not worthy of reporting?!!"

"Some have joined the faith in the Lord of Light. It's not only the people who are gathering around the priests. It's the soldiers too, now."

That was preoccupying. Trystane had welcomed the help that Kinvara provided, but he never thought that the Unsullied would start taking her side. Of course, she was at the origin of most of the peace Meereen knew, but Daenerys was still the queen and she and her clergy always told everyone to serve the Mother of Dragons. However, if soldiers failed to report things like that… They couldn't let anybody go and see the dragons like that.

"We'll have to address this matter soon," Trystane only said.

Once they had reviewed the financial and security matters, Malcolm Branfield left and Trystane found himself alone again. He couldn't support to stay alone. Whenever he was alone, his thoughts would turn to Myrcella or to his family in danger. He needed to go on. Work was the only way he had found to not think about the people he loved and who he lost, or who he may lose. He ordered an Unsullied to summon the High Priestess.

Half an hour later, Kinvara entered Trystane's rooms, all wrapped in her heavy gown. He wondered how she managed to wear it all day without showing any sign of sweat or heat or tiredness.

"You asked for me, Prince Trystane?" she asked.

"Yes. Please, sit." She did so. "I've heard that you paid a visit to the queen's dragons not long ago."

"I did." She didn't seem surprised that he knew it.

"High Priestess, I must order you to not approach the dragons without our consent. No one but the queen approached them before she left and I know she wouldn't want everyone to get near them. We
"I meant no harm to the dragons, and I mean no harm for them in the future," Kinvara interrupted. "I was merely curious. Dragons are fire made flesh and they are Daenerys Stormborn's children. You need not fear when I'm with them."

"No one can approach them," Trystane stated.

"Why?" she asked, still looking as calm as if they were having a glass of wine.

"Because they belong to the queen and we cannot allow…"

"Nothing happened to them, Prince Trystane. I agree the dragons must be protected from the Sons of the Harpy, but they have nothing to fear from me. I serve the queen, and the queen is their mother. In fact, if the dragons were to be protected from someone, it should be from you."

Trystane was quite taken aback by this statement. "What do you mean?"

"You come from a foreign land, Prince Trystane, and yet you rule this city. You never met Daenerys Stormborn, and yet you assume government in her absence. Your people in Westeros have been the staunchest opponents to the Targaryens when they came to this country, and yet you claim you want to help them. You are supposed to marry Daenerys, but we all know your heart belongs to someone else."

Trystane couldn't answer for a time. She kept looking at him, calm. Her face didn't show anger. She almost looked sad. Trystane always felt strange in her presence. Uneasiness always fought serenity when Kinvara was around.

"We both serve Daenerys Stormborn," she said. "As long as you serve her, you can count on my help, but don't presume to tell me everything I should do. Daenerys Targaryen is Queen of Meereen, and neither you or me has any legitimacy in ruling this place since she didn't choose us to rule in her absence. However, if we don't work together, this city will fall before the queen returns. So don't pretend you're capable of giving orders to me. My loyalty is to Daenerys, not to her possible future husband."

She kept talking in a very calm, but also firm voice. There was no place left for discussion about it. *The red priests are becoming powerful. They have influence all over the city. The people are listening to them. They could be a threat.* Trystane remembered that right before he left, there were rumors of religious fanatics causing trouble in King's Landing. Malcolm Branfield may be right after all. They had to be careful with the followers of the Lord of Light. However, it was obvious he couldn't force Kinvara to not visit the dragons. Still, there was something else he could do.

"May I know what you did in the dragon's cave, at least?" he asked.

Before Kinvara could answer, Bhakaz came inside. "Prince Trystane, there's a man who says he needs to speak to you in the audience chamber. He says it's urgent and needs to speak with you immediately."

"What does he want to speak to me about?" Trystane asked.

"He says the survival of Meereen may depend upon you hearing what he has to say. He says the city is in danger."

"Very well. I'm coming."
Trystane rose and walked to the hall. The High Priestess followed him. He didn't see how he could get rid of her. That wasn't as if he could order the Unsullied to throw her outside. As they entered the audience chamber at the top of the stairs, Trystane saw the man waiting for them. He was plump. He wore a cloak commonly used by travellers and it was obvious he had travelled a long time to come here. He wasn't dressed like people from Slaver's Bay. Trystane would say his garb was more pentoshi or lyseni. He had a very round face and a bald head. He bowed to Trystane when he entered.

"Prince Trystane, it is a pleasure, an honor, and a relief to meet you here," he said.

"Who do I have the honor to speak to?" Trystane asked, skeptical.

"You probably heard about me, my prince. My name is Varys. I am also known as the Spider, and some call me the Eunuch."

Trystane went numb immediately. Lord Varys, the Spider, was the Master of Whisperers, the man who knew everything about everyone in Westeros according to some people. He had worked for the Mad King, then for Robert Baratheon and his two sons after him. Well, he knew they weren't his sons now. He had worked for the children of Cersei and Jaime Lannister. And now here he was, standing before him. His father told Trystane before he left that the Spider gave him information about the Crown and the true parentage of Cersei's children. This man told his lord father that Myrcella was a bastard born of incest. For a moment, Trystane wanted to punch him in the face and break all his teeth. Myrcella wasn't born of incest.

"What are you doing here?" Trystane found himself asking, his voice hard without thinking.

"I have important information for you. Though, before I tell you about it, may I know who is this lady with you?"

Trystane turned to his right. He had almost forgotten that Kinvara was present. "This is the Lady Kinvara. She is the High Priestess of the Red Temple of Volantis."

The plump man looked at the High Priestess with something that looked between fear and hatred. "I will only speak to you, Prince Trystane."

"Why is that, Lord Varys?" the High Priestess asked.

"Forgive me, my lady, but I do not trust fanatics. They always believe they are right. That is the point with being a fanatic. You can never be wrong."

"I am no lady, Lord Varys. No more than you are a lord, in fact. However, if someone was to not be trusted here, it would be you. You served four kings up to now. One of them was the man who killed our queen's brother, and two others were the grandsons of the man who ordered the slaughter of her niece and nephew and the sons of the man who murdered her father. Why should we believe what you say?"

"I will only answer to the queen and to her representative, that is, Prince Trystane of Dorne."

"You will say what you have to say in my presence and in the presence of the High Priestess, or you will say nothing."

Trystane was surprised by his own words. Perhaps it was because he despised Varys for telling his father about his betrothed's origins, perhaps because he trusted Kinvara more than everyone else in this city, but he said it. The eunuch looked taken aback by his words. He hesitated for a moment, then he bowed slightly.
"As you wish, my prince. May we find a more private place, where we could sit. I'm afraid I'm quite tired after the long trip I made."

Trystane agreed. He sent people to fetch Malcolm Branfield and Grey Worm. They needed to be there for this too. An hour later, after Lord Varys had the time to rest a little, they were all in Trystane's quarters. The eunuch deeply drank from a cup of wine.

"Thank you, my prince. This is much appreciated after a long journey," he said.

"Tell us why you're here," said Trystane, his voice still hard. He didn't want to waste his time with this man.

"Oh, yes, you're right. We have no time to lose. Here is why I'm here. Volantis is preparing an attack against Meereen."

It was as if he cast a spell on the room. Everyone went silent, even Kinvara. "Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. In fact, their fleet is approaching. The ship I used to come here wasn't far before their armada. They are only a few days away from the city now."

Trystane couldn't believe it. "Why would they do such a thing? We made peace!"

"I warned you, Prince Trystane. The masters are not going to give up on slavery," Kinvara said.

Trystane turned to her. "Your men in Volantis, have they heard anything about this?"

"As I told you some time ago, a great fleet left the city. The triarchs said it was going to side with Myr against the city of Lys and my men in Volantis didn't find anything that denied this version, but it is possible the fleet is in fact meant to attack Meereen. They may have hidden the true destination to the soldiers. It is quite possible that only the superior officers are aware of their true objective."

"The masters are afraid of the regained prosperity of Meereen," Lord Varys resumed. "They don't want a city without slaves to succeed, or else this will be the end of their power."

Trystane couldn't believe it. He had done everything he could. He made peace with the masters, allowed them to keep their riches and their power, and even allowed them to abolish slavery progressively instead of immediately, and yet they decided to wage war against them. They made a pact, and they decided to ignore it. What were they going to do? They didn't have enough forces to fight Volantis. They just repaired the walls and they had no fleet at all to face the triarchs. And Daenerys was yet to be seen. It was a catastrophe.

"Did they send an army by land?" asked Grey Worm from afar.

"As far as I know, all their forces were sent by sea," replied the eunuch.

"No, they couldn't send soldiers through the land. Everyone in Volantis would have seen it. My order would have warned me," said Kinvara.

"Wait. How can we know this man is telling the truth?" asked Branfield. "He worked for Robert Baratheon, and then for Joffrey and Tommen Baratheon. How do we know this is not a ruse?"

"Why would I lie to you about it, Lord…?" asked the eunuch.

"Malcolm Branfield."

"Well, my lord, why would I lie? What interest would I have in it? Why would I come here myself
and risk my head only to warn you about a false attack?"

"Indeed, why? Why would you want to help us?"

"Because Lord Varys is a Targaryen supporter," declared Kinvara. Everyone looked at her. "He's been working for twenty years now to bring back the Targaryens on the Iron Throne. He has several allies in the Free Cities, especially in Pentos. One of his associates, Illyrio Mopatis, organized the marriage between Daenerys Stormborn and Khal Drogo."

Lord Varys seemed quite surprised by this. "I see you are well informed, High Priestess," he said. "Information has made you powerful, Lord Varys, but there's still so much you don't know. Even I, an honest servant of the Lord of Light, don't know everything. But I'm quite sure you must know who killed the Hand of the King and the Grand Maester in King's Landing. After all, you disappeared not long afterwards."

"I know that well enough. Because I'm the one who killed Ser Kevan."

Trystane's eyes widened. "You killed the Hand of the King?"

"I did."

"So it is true," stated Kinvara, her voice sounding harder than usual.

"I regret it, but I had to kill him. I used the help of Prince Trystane's cousin, Lady Nymeria Sand. I made her use secret passages to kill Pycelle, and then I killed Ser Kevan with a bolt in the heart and my little birds did the rest. Lady Nymeria is now safe, on her way back to Dorne. I made sure the murder would look suspicious and that the Tyrells and the Lannisters would suspect each other."

"They didn't," said Trystane, angry. "They declared war against my family. My father was trying to gain time, to let Daenerys come to Westeros before he went to war. Your actions triggered a war my family could lose."

"Well, I knew the Crown would declare war against Dorne, but that is a good thing in the end. Most of the Lannister forces are in the North and will remain there for a long time. Lord Tywin, Ser Kevan and Lord Tyrion were the only people in this family who could lead it well. The first two are dead and the third is far away in the North, fighting for his wife's home. He won't be able to come back in the south before long. The Lannisters are without capable leadership. The Crown relies entirely on the power of the Reach."

"Well, the Reach has declared war against Dorne."

"Dorne should keep them at bay for a time. The kingdom is not easy to conquer. The Targaryens themselves experienced it during Aegon's Conquest. They will hold the Tyrell army long enough to let the necessary events happen in the capital."

"What do you mean?"

"Nymeria Sand is not the only Sand Snake I was in contact with. I also had contacts with Tyene Sand, who just happens to have infiltrated the Sparrows, a group of religious fanatics who worship the Seven." He looked at Kinvara as he said the latter sentence. "The Sparrows have limited their activities recently, giving the impression they had been defeated or that they were gone, but in fact they're waiting for the right moment. Randyll Tarly was named Hand of the King after Ser Kevan died and he left the capital with most of his men. In the Red Keep, the only people left are King Tommen, Queen Margaery Tyrell and Cersei Lannister. The king is a sweet boy who's unable to
take decisions, and his wife and mother are fighting to get his attention. Lady Tyene is supposed to make sure the Sparrows start again their uprising once the forces of the Reach are far away. While the Reach is trying to invade Dorne, the Sparrows will take control of the city. The queen and the Queen Mother won't be able to face them. They will lose their time fighting each other. Chaos will reign in the city, and when Daenerys Stormborn comes with her dragons and her army to defeat the Sparrows, deposit the bastard king and bring back peace, the people will side with her. Cersei Lannister will have ruined the alliance between the Lannisters and the Tyrells in the meantime. Once she has succeeded, the Tyrells will have no choice but to side with our queen when she crosses the Narrow Sea, and then it will be the end of the Lannisters. Without allies, they won't stand a chance."

Trystane didn't know if he should find this plan stupid, brilliant or horrible. The eunuch was planning to let religious fanatics take over the city of King's Landing, and his cousin Tyene, who had killed Myrcella, would help them. The fact that Varys cooperated with his two cousins didn't make him more sympathetic in Trystane's eyes. The plan relied on several precise circumstances. They had to hope that Cersei Lannister and Margaery Tyrell would fight each other, that King Tommen couldn't take a decision, that the Sparrows' uprising would work, that his father's army would hold in the Dornish Marches… It depended on so much. There was also one big problem.

"Daenerys Targaryen is not in Meereen," Trystane revealed. "She disappeared on the back of her dragon months ago and we don't know where she is."

"Well, in this case, let's hope she returns quickly. She'll come back. She has to. My heart's been broken too many times already. In all cases, if Meereen falls, I don't give much chance to our queen to ever sail for Westeros."

Another long silence followed as everyone processed the information they just heard. Meereen was in danger.

"I'm still not sure we can trust him," finally said Malcolm.

"He has no reason to lie. He has nothing to gain from it," said Kinvara. "I say we should keep him inside the Great Pyramid under guard. If the Volantenese fleet attack, we'll know he was telling the truth. In the meantime, we should prepare for a siege."

She turned to Trystane. He needed some time before he realized they had to do something. "Yes, we must prepare for their arrival." He nodded to Grey Worm who called two of his men inside the room. They escorted Lord Varys outside and Trystane resumed to speak. "We should double the guard on the battlements and the patrol in the streets, especially at night. The Sons of the Harpy may start again to be active. Do we have any ship to patrol the sea for us?"

"Not yet. The construction just began," answered Malcolm Branfield. "We should take the former masters of the city hostage inside the pyramids. This might make the Sons of the Harpy think twice before they start to murder again."

"The Sons of the Harpy are no longer between the hands of the Great Masters," countered Kinvara. "They will attack no matter what happens to them. However, some former masters could supply information if they are informers for Volantis. I will reveal the coming attack to the people and call them to arms. They will fight for their freedom. The fear of the freedmen should make some masters think twice if we offer them protection for their family against information about the attack."

"I'm not sure it's a good thing to warn the people," said Trystane, uncertain. "We don't know for sure…"

"Lord Varys is saying the truth. He has nothing to gain from this. My priests will warn the people.
We will also bring the children and women to safety. My order had shelters prepared all over the city for this eventuality. We should start preparing for the assault right now."

Trystane was defeated. There was nothing he could do. They needed the people more than ever, and they needed Kinvara to have the people on their side. He wasn't persuaded that it was a good idea to inform the people, in case Varys lied, but if what he said was true, then it would be useful to have the full city ready to fight against the masters of Volantis.

They all spent the next three days in preparation for the upcoming assault. They reinforced the walls, manned the gates and the battlements, increased the patrols and sent fishing ships as far as they could to see if there was any sign of the Volantenese fleet. People started to patrol in the streets in bands as well.

Kinvara had informed the people through her priests. This had the benefit to make the former slaves more willing to help against the coming attack, but this also brought its own set of problems. The former slaves started to sack houses that belonged to families of former masters and to kill their inhabitants. No one from the ancient families dared to leave the pyramids where they lived. Without the Fiery Hand, the city would have fallen into chaos. Kinvara had started to create an elite group of warriors devoted to the Lord of Light, hence under her direct command, on the model of the Fiery Hand that defended the Red Temple of Volantis. While they were a thousand slaves in Volantis to serve in this elite force, she only had time to recruit half of them in Meereen, and here they were free men. The twenty guards from this Fiery Hand in Volantis who had joined their High Priestess in Meereen had trained the members of the new Fiery Hand. Their training was basic, but they were trained to fight in the streets, which made them quite dangerous and efficient. They helped the Unsullied to maintain peace.

Many former masters turned in the Great Pyramid, claiming to have information about the assault or about the Sons of the Harpy. Trystane found out that many of them had no valuable information and were only looking for protection. Some, however, really provided useful details. One in particular had been involved in the attack of Daznak's Pit. He gave many names of people who participated to this. There were people from Meereen, Astapor, Yunkai, Volantis, and even a few masters from other cities like New Ghis and Myr. The ambassadors of Yunkai and Volantis who came two months ago to negotiate were among the organizers. He confirmed Kinvara's information that many Meereenese masters who helped to organize this slaughter died that day, betrayed by their allies from the other cities. Most of the people who came with information had nothing of value. Some only heard rumors, and many invented stories.

On the third night, twelve Unsullied and seven former slaves were assassinated. Everyone concluded this was the work of the Sons of the Harpy. Trystane found out that many of them had no valuable information and were only looking for protection. Some, however, really provided useful details. One in particular had been involved in the attack of Daznak's Pit. He gave many names of people who participated to this. There were people from Meereen, Astapor, Yunkai, Volantis, and even a few masters from other cities like New Ghis and Myr. The ambassadors of Yunkai and Volantis who came two months ago to negotiate were among the organizers. He confirmed Kinvara's information that many Meereenese masters who helped to organize this slaughter died that day, betrayed by their allies from the other cities. Most of the people who came with information had nothing of value. Some only heard rumors, and many invented stories.

As the ships were pelting the city with their projectiles, the Sons of the Harpy made their appearance in numbers. Bands of freedmen and Unsullied fought them in close quarters, and the new Fiery Hand fought them too. They lost many men. By the night, the situation was desperate. The ships kept raining fire on them and the streets were in chaos. They met in the council room, Trystane, Varys, Grey Worm, Kinvara and Malcolm Branfield. They accepted the Master of Whisperers since he told them the truth about the attack.
"We took heavy losses in the streets," exposed Grey Worm. "Our men on the battlements are cut from us and under the fire of the enemy."

"It was a trap," observed the Spider.

"I think we already figured it out," retorted Branfield.

"Perhaps if we try to make a breakthrough through the Sons of the Harpy with a strong squad…" began Trystane.

"No more talking from you. Your talking gave us this," cut Grey Worm. The Commander of the Unsullied wasn't happy. Trystane didn't believe he would stay at the head of Meereen for long.

"The masters would have attacked one day or another, anyway," said Kinvara. "It's not the time to find out who's responsible for this."

"She's right," approved Trystane, happy that she was here again. "We must repel the invaders. We must clear the way to the battlements."

"You're trying to tell me what the army should do. You do not know what the army should do," stated Grey Worm.

Trystane had nothing to reply to his. He had no experience in battle, it was true. He was trained by a master-at-arms, but he had no experience of real battle, nor as a general nor as a soldier.

"All right," conceded the Prince of Dorne. "What should the army do?" he asked around. The question was mostly for Grey Worm and Branfield. They were the only ones with military experience here.

"We won't send men to the battlements," decided Grey Worm. "We would lose more of them and the masters could try to take the pyramids then. The pyramids are the only places in the city we can defend. We stay here. We wait for them to come to us, then we fight them."

"The Unsullied should stay on the pyramids," agreed Branfield. "They're not trained or armed to fight in the streets. However, we should send the Second Sons and the bands of freedmen to try to make a breach from the battlements to the closest pyramids. They are better to fight in streets against assassins than the Unsullied. Let's send them to make a safe corridor though the western part of the city. We would need the men of the High Priestess as well."

"The Fiery Hand is busy helping the people escape the western part of Meereen for the eastern one, far from the docks and the battlements giving on the bay. I'll send a hundred of them with you and they'll help the refugees to escape," said the High Priestess.

"So we wait," said Trystane.

"Too bad we don't have pigshit for the fleet," said Varys with a smile.

"Pigshit?"

"That's how Lord Tyrion Lannister used to call wildfire, while he prepared King's Landing for the attack of Stannis Baratheon. I regret we don't have wildfire here, or him. The little lord could be of help. I wish I had been able to bring him on our queen's side."

"A Lannister? On the side of a Targaryen? His nephew is sitting on the Iron Throne."
"There are many things you don't know about Tyrion Lannister, my prince. You would be surprised. And weren't you betrothed to the king's sister not long ago?"

Trystane had nothing to say to that. The thought of Myrcella was still painful. "How strange you speak so highly of a Lannister, and yet you killed his uncle in cold blood," declared Kinvara.

"I regret that I had to kill Ser Kevan," said Varys. "He was a good man, but he was standing in the way between Daenerys Targaryen and the Iron Throne. I did what was needed to be done."

"How many good men are you ready to kill because they stand in the way between our queen and her throne?"

The Spider didn't have time to answer the question from the priestess. A loud sound was heard, coming from the apex of the pyramid. The floor and the walls shook. The Unsullied took place on Grey Worm's silent command. Trystane and Malcolm Branfield unsheathed their swords. The only time Trystane had ever used his sword in a real fight was when he and Myrcella were attacked by his cousins. He hadn't succeeded to protect her. He had failed her. Did he fail to defend the city as well? Did he fail to save his family? Would his father and his younger cousins die? Loreza, who everyone called Loree, was only seven. Would she end like his aunt's children?

Varys went to hide behind a column. As for Kinvara, she didn't react first. She looked at the ceiling, as if she was examining something. She didn't try to take cover. She had no weapon. Then, an Unsullied opened the door and went outside on the balcony. Kinvara's eyes grew and she fell on her knees, faced turned to the opened door.

"Kinvara, what are you doing?" asked Trystane. Was she hoping to surrender to whoever was on the roof?

Then, all the Unsullied fell on their knees as well. Trystane looked around. Malcolm Branfield, right behind him, had a stunned look. He went on his knees too. Trystane looked at the door again to see a young woman with blond hair and a necklace with something that looked like a bone around her throat, standing there. He never saw blond hair like this. It was blonder than those of Myrcella. He realized everyone was one his knees. She looked at him, and then Trystane understood. He heard a screech far away.

He fell on his knees, the last of all of them, and only found two words to say. "Your Grace."

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Chapter End Notes

Daenerys is back! It will still be a few chapters before she gets a new POV (there's a great bunch of chapters coming in the North), but she's back in the story after a long absence.

Please review

Next chapter: a northern lady
Mira VIII

Chapter Notes

The northern lady was Mira. Sorry for everyone who hoped they would see Sansa's baby. It will have to wait. But the battles are coming!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

MIRA VIII

She woke up, all alone. She dreamed of playing in the grove behind Ironrath. They were all here with her, all her brothers and Talia, and their parents too, looking at them. Even Ryon was there, though he had been too young to play with them back Mira still lived at home. That was only a dream. However, the dream was far more pleasant than it would have been a month ago. Mira stretched her legs and her arms, then removed the furs. The cold air made her shiver and she was quick to dress. Sansa wasn't the only one who had to get used again to the northern climate. Her tent was simple, but there was a bed with furs at least. It didn't bother her. She may have lived in the south among luxuries for a very long time, but she wasn't about to complain about a lifestyle close to the one she had in Ironrath, back when she was a child.

She covered herself well and went out. Men were already going all around to their occupations. She saw the sparring ground not far away and went there. People were already training. She saw Asher teaching Ryon how to fight. Mira smiled while she looked from a distance at her little brother trying to hold a sword straight. She still couldn't believe they were alive, Asher, Talia and Ryon. She had been sure for so long that they were dead. She should have known it wouldn't be that easy to destroy House Forrester. She was a living proof of that, and her brothers and Talia were Forresters just like her. Ryon had grown up. He was barely a baby when she left. Now he learned how to fight and squired for Jon Snow. She would never forget how he ran towards her when he saw her arrive in the camp. Gwyn had then brought her to the place where the Forrester forces were installed. She never thought she would see the white tree on a black field again. She hadn't recognized most of the men there, but when Gwyn had led her to a tent and brought her inside… Asher was just like she remembered him. He was sharpening his sword when she entered and looked up. There had been an awkward moment, but then after a few seconds he had opened his mouth and his sword had fallen on the ground. Talia was there as well, taller than in Mira's memories, and had a similar reaction, her mouth and eyes wide open. Then they ran to each other and hugged together in an embrace without end. There had been a long time afterwards when they had talked of everything that had happened, how they were all sure that Mira was dead while Mira thought the same about them. They had laughed, cried, and even drunk together. This had been the most wonderful day in her life.

Mira had quickly realized that there were other people around them and that Asher, Talia and Ryon almost considered like family. Of course, there was Gwyn, now Asher's wife. Mira still wasn't sure what to think of it. She found it incredible that Gwyn and Asher got married after everything that happened between their families. Mira didn't hate Gwyn, but she was a Whitehill. Her father and brothers destroyed her family. She seemed genuinely sorry about everything that happened, and Asher obviously loved her just like he did years ago, but still. How could they trust a Whitehill? Mira could only keep her doubts for herself. Talia and Ryon shared the opinion that Gwyn was trustworthy. There was also another woman, Beskha, an Essossi sellsword who was Asher's friend. Ryon seemed to like her very much. She supposed Asher made curious friends in a place as strange
as Essos. There were also all these foreign mercenaries who who were under Asher's orders and followed him.

Mira had seen that Asher was a leader, just like Rodrik had been one. He inspired respect and trust to his men, even if they were only with him for money. Some of his men were farmers or hunters, and only a few were soldiers who survived the Battle of Ironrath. Mira recognized only one of them who called after her one afternoon.

"Mira, how are you?" she heard her sister ask on her right. Mira turned to look at Talia.

"I'm right, thank you. And you?"

"I'm fine."

They both smiled at each other. Talia was actually standing right before her. She looked at her two brothers again. "I still can't believe what I see. Even after days, it looks like a dream. You're all here, alive and well."

"Yes. I'm glad you're here too. Though I wish the others were here as well." Talia looked down.

"I'm sorry, Talia, really. For Ethan."

They looked at Asher and Ryon sparring for a time, in silence. They both grieved their brother, but Mira knew it had to be especially difficult for her sister. Ethan was her twin brother, after all. Mira remembered how he played the music well. He was such a sweet boy. It was so unfair.

"You know Mira, there is something else I still have difficulty to believe after all these days."

"What is it?"

"Are you really, really married?"

Mira smiled. "I am, Talia. This is the truth."

Talia laughed a little. "It still seems so absurd to me. One moment we thought you were dead, and the next you appear to us, saying that now you are Mira Hightower." Mira turned the head while smiling. "How did you manage to do it? How did you do to marry a Hightower? They are one of the richest houses in the Reach."

"Queen Margaery interceded for me. Her mother is a Hightower."

"And she could convince them? Only because she was the queen? She convinced the Hightowers to accept you among them only because you were her friend?"

Mira sighed. She had tried to avoid the subject ever since they were reunited, but she knew that sooner or later, she would have to tell them. "Margaery convinced them because they all believed I was the last Forrester alive."

Talia looked strangely at Mira. "They wanted Ironrath. They wanted your claim."

"Yes." There was nothing more to say.

"What will happen now?"

"Once Winterfell is free, we'll ride together to Ironrath, take it back, and then I'll go back to Oldtown."
Talia looked at her, her mouth half-opened. "But you just arrived."

Mira looked at her young sister with sorry eyes. "My place is no longer at Ironrath, Talia. Asher is the lord now, and I'm married to Gerold. My place is by his side. I may stay for a time after we've taken back our home, but once this is all over, I'll have to ride south."

It wouldn't be easy for Mira to leave her home again, when she would have just come back, but she would have to. She expected that going back to the HighTower wouldn't be easy for Gerold either.

"What will your husband's family think? How will they react? And what about him?"

That was something Mira didn't like to think about. "They'll have to live with that. There's nothing they can do about it. I may not stay at the HighTower. I could convince Margaery to take me back as a lady-in-waiting. There are married women who've been waiting on queens before. I'm sure Margaery would like to have me back. I could convince her to include Gerold in her household in King's Landing too. Or I could convince Sansa to take me back at her service once this is all over."

"So, I'll have a sister attending the Queen of the Seven Kingdoms." Talia had a smile on the corner of her lips that Mira returned. It was good to see her. "That's something we'll have to remind everyone in our family for generations. A Forrester waiting after the queen herself."

"There isn't so much in that, Talia. That's not as if I was the queen herself."

"Well, that would be unforgettable for a thousand years." They remained silent for a moment, looking at their brothers sparring. "How is it?"

"What are you talking about?"

"To be married."

"Well, mostly, your life goes on as it always went on. Only, you must share it with someone else. And one day, you find yourself with child."

Talia's eyes widened. "You're pregnant?!"

Mira laughed. "No, Talia, I'm not. Not yet. But one day, I will be. Maybe it will be soon."

"I wonder who I'll be wed to."

"I'm sure Asher will find you a good husband when the time is right."

Talia nodded. "But first, we must take back our home. Here, he comes."

Their brothers had stopped practicing when Jon Snow walked into the practice grounds and spoke to them. Mira and her sister were too far to hear what they said, but they abandoned their practice swords and walked away.

"It seems it's time," Talia observed. Indeed, it was. Jon Snow looked in their direction, then walked towards them.

"My lady, my lady," he said. "We're leaving in an hour. Lady Mira, I suppose you're coming with us."

"Yes, I am."

They were going to the Lannister camp. Mira had followed Jon Snow's army during the last days
and both armies were now close to Winterfell. It was time for the commanders to meet and prepare plans for battle, and also to parley with the enemy together.

"Good. May I escort you back to your tent?" he asked.

"Of course." Mira looked at her sister. "We'll meet again soon. Be calm while I'm away," she said teasing Talia.

"I'm always calm. It's Asher who's not."

Talia walked away on these words and Mira followed Jon Snow in the direction of her personal pavilion. "You must be looking forward to present your husband to your siblings," he said.

"Yes, I am."

Mira and Jon Snow had managed to know each other during the last days. The son of Eddard Stark wanted to know more about Sansa and everything that happened to her in the south, and Mira was the one best placed to answer his questions. She remembered how Sansa's half-brother looked stunned and dumbfounded as she told him the details of her sister's life. He asked her a lot of questions about her marriage, and Mira had told him everything she knew. She would never forget his expression when she reported him the discussion she had with Sansa concerning the first kiss she shared with her husband. Sera and Elys would have liked to be there. In return, she told Jon Snow about her own family and how she came in the North, married to a grandson of Lord Hightower. They became friends through all their discussions. Jon Snow may look dull, but you gained a lot by knowing him, and he was very honorable. She could see the similarities between him and his father when he visited Ironrath, long ago.

"My lady," he started, "I'm not a fool and most of the people here are not. Many are of the opinion that you and your husband came here to take Ironrath for yourselves."

"We thought I was the last Forrester alive. I was sure until very recently that all my family was dead."

"I thought the same of my own."

"You still had Sansa."

"Aye, but now the Northerners believe your husband came here to take their seat to the Forresters. They think the same about Lord Tyrion for Winterfell."

Mira knew that only too well. "My husband will never do anything to take Ironrath from my brother. Not as long as I forbid him to."

"He will renounce Ironrath if you tell him, like that?" he asked.

"He would open his veins for me, so… I think he can give up a castle."

Jon Snow smiled. "He would really open his veins for you?"

"Yes, he would." Mira knew he would. Gerold was always ready to do everything for her. The only reason why he didn't make stupid things for her was that she never asked it of him. "And Lord Tyrion would do the same for your sister. You can rest, he won't seize Winterfell for himself."

They had arrived before her tent. "I would have a question for you, my lady. Is Sansa really in love with Lord Tyrion?"
He was very serious. "Yes, she is," she answered.

He nodded, his eyes on the ground, then looked up at her. "Thank you. I'll see you in an hour."

He left and Mira went to prepare herself. She hadn't brought much with her and was ready very quickly. She would follow Jon Snow and his lieutenants to Lord Tyrion's army. She was eager and afraid to see Gerold again. Asher and Gwyn were coming with them. Ryon and Talia would stay behind. There had been no problem when Gwyn had met Gerold, but she was unsure concerning the meeting with Asher.

Her brother was already preparing his mount when she arrived. Mira and Asher had always gotten along quite well. She still had the coin he sent to her from Essos. However, Mira always had a tendency to sermon Asher on his rash and unthought actions. That was the kind of behavior that got him banished. Of course, Mira knew that Asher was not the only responsible in all this. His only mistake had been to fall in love with the wrong woman. Now this same woman was mounting the horse next to his and she was his wife. Mira never had anything against Gwyn truth be told. She hadn't wanted to speak with her when they met in their army's camp at first, but that was because of what her family had done. Before that, on the rare occasions she saw her, she hadn't disliked her. She had much more sense than Asher. In the end, their marriage might be a good thing and soften Asher's temper. If she had really tried to help them, then there was nothing Mira could say against this marriage.

"So, I am to meet the man who wed my sister soon?" he asked to her, in his usual crude way.

"Yes, you are."

"You've lost your accent, Mira. You'll need to get it back."

Mira hadn't lost her accent entirely. In the south, many people could still hear the northern tone in her voice. Now that she was back in the North, people heard the southern tone she had partially adopted through her time in Highgarden, King's Landing and Oldtown.

"Just promise me to be nice with him, Asher," she said. Gerold didn't take japes about him well, except when they came from her.

"I will be, if he can prove he didn't mistreat my little sister in any way."

He made a rough laugh. His sellsword friends spoke the same way that he did. Asher would never have survived in a place like the south, among courts, intrigues, courtesies, and mundane conversations. She could see that Gwyn disapproved from the top of her mare. They exchanged a look. They agreed. Mira prepared her own horse and when Jon Snow arrived with Ser Davos and his sister Arya, they were all ready. One of the wildling chiefs, a Norrey and Lyanna Mormont came with them too.

The camps were at a certain distance, so they needed about fifteen minutes to reach the camp of the Lannisters, the Tullys and the Hightowers. Mira found that the camp was much smaller than it was when she left. She felt somewhat out of place among all these people. She wore warm clothes with furs that were obviously made in the Reach and had nothing to do with the garment of the Northerners. She had taken the simplest clothes she could have at Oldtown, but even those she chose were luxurious for most regions in the North. She really had the looks of a southern lady and it was made more obvious with Arya Stark, Lyanna Mormont and Gwyn not far from her. She understood how Sansa could no longer feel like a Northerner. Mira, on her side, knew who she was. She was a Forrester of Ironrath, the daughter of Lord Gregor. She was born in the North, grew up in the north, and would remain a child of the North forever. She was a Forrester, and would always be a
They arrived at the camp and advanced slowly through it. In the center of it, before a great red pavilion, were waiting the commanders of the great army Tyrion Lannister had gathered around him. Lord Tyron was there, a step before all of them, with Ser Brynden Tully at his side. This army was theirs before it was everyone else. Behind stood Ser Daven Lannister, Ser Perwyn Frey, Lord Smallwood, Lord Reed, Lady Dustin, and finally, Mira's husband, Gerold Hightower. He smiled at her when he saw her and she returned it. She looked nervously at Asher then. Jon Snow dismounted his horse and the others did the same. He walked to Lord Tyron who made a few steps forward. They stood there, a few feet from each other, both eyeing the other.

"Bastard." That was the word to come out of Lord Tyron's mouth. Mira knew the Lord of Casterly Rock had a sharp tongue, she had experienced it herself, but this…

"Dwarf." Jon Snow's reply surprised her even more. A tense moment passed, and then Lord Tyron laughed and Jon Snow joined him. They clasped hands like old friends.

"Well, that's quite an army you assembled on such short notice."

"Smaller than yours, though I expected it would be larger."

"Never rely on appearances, Jon Snow." Lord Tyron looked behind him. "This is Ser Brynden Tully, the Blackfish. Sounds better than the Imp or the Bastard."

Ser Brynden stepped forward to welcome Jon Snow. He offered his hand after he had a closer look to him. "So you're Jon Snow. Welcome."

"Ser, it's an honor," replied Jon, shaking his hand.

Jon introduced the other members of his delegation, beginning with Ser Davos who everyone already knew, the leader of the wildlings called Tormund Giantsbane, Lady Lyanna of House Mormont, Lord Brandon of House Norrey, Gwyn and Asher. Mira looked at her husband while Jon Snow presented her brother. She didn't know how to interpret his expression when he set eyes on Asher. If Asher had been dead like they thought, Mira would be Lady of Ironrath and Gerold would be its lord as a consequence.

Once the presentations were over, they all entered the huge red pavilion before them. Gerold went into it without waiting for her, so Mira stayed close to Gwyn and Asher. Normally, her husband would have waited for her. They crowded around the table. They barely had enough space for all to stand around it. Lord Tyron, Ser Brynden, Jon Snow and Ser Davos Seaworth took place at its head. They were the ones presiding the war council. Ser Bronn and Arya Stark stood in retreat from the table.

"Very well everyone," started the Blackfish. "You all know why we're here. We have a castle to take, and a Bolton who styles himself King in the North to kill."

There were roars of approval among the Northerners and the river lords. Jon Snow stepped into the conversation. "We need to join our forces. We've decided that the command of our combined forces on the battlefield will be left to Ser Brynden Tully, since he's the one here with the most experience in battle."

This was followed with approving nods and mumbling. Ser Brynden was obviously the best choice, not only because he was a seasoned warrior and general, but also because he was the one everyone would trust and respect. The men from the south would reluctantly follow Jon Snow, who was a
Though many would doubt Ser Davos's aptitudes and loyalty because of his former allegiance to Stannis and his reputation as a smuggler, and no Northerner would ever accept to be led by the son of Tywin Lannister. The dwarf was the one to speak next.

"Before we fight, we have to negotiate with the bastard of the Dreadfort. We have a parley with him in two hours. I don't intend to give him terms of surrender. He's too dangerous to be left alive. We cannot let him escape, we cannot give him the choice to go to the Wall, we cannot exile him. He has to die." No one protested. "I intend to offer terms to his allies. We'll offer them a pardon if they give us Ramsay in chains. Then we will only have to execute him. If they refuse, well, there will be no mercy for them. One way or another, Winterfell will belong to the Starks again and go back into the fold."

Again, no one disapproved the words. The Boltons were despised so much that their allies were no better in the eyes of the other Northerners, especially the Umbers who handed Rickon Stark over to Ramsay.

"Will it?" Everyone turned to the Lady of Bear Island who spoke with her usual strong voice. It was strange for Mira to see someone who inspired so much authority at the age of ten. She was all the opposite of Joffrey or Tommen.

"My lady?" asked the Blackfish.

"Will Winterfell really go to the Starks? Because actually, I have the feeling that it's going to be given to Sansa Lannister, if we must rely on the decree that the bastard boy sitting on the Iron Throne released."

A long silence followed, then Lord Norrey agreed with his booming voice. "Winterfell belongs to Rickon Stark, the son of the Ned."

Lord Tyrion seemed to be fuming. Mira knew he heard very often up to now that Sansa wasn't the Lady of Winterfell and that he was fed up with it. He tried to be very calm when he spoke. "We don't know for sure if Rickon Stark is alive, but if he is…"

"Rickon Stark is alive, and he's the prisoner of Ramsay Bolton. Bear Island is loyal to House Stark, not to House Lannister. We are fighting to free Rickon Stark, not to give Winterfell to the Lannisters," strongly stated the lady.

There were approvals among the Northerners, and Mira thought she saw approving nods among the river lords. Lord Tyrion turned to Jon Snow. "Do your men know about your sister?" His half-brother-in-law nodded. "Well, in this case, it's better to say the truth." The Lord of Casterly Rock made a sign towards Ser Bronn who came to the table with Arya Stark. "My lords, my ladies, I present you Arya Stark."

There was a moment of shock. The men with Jon Snow already knew it, but except for Ser Brynden and a few other ones, everyone thought Arya Stark was at Winterfell in this army. Ser Brynden, Lord Tyrion, Lady Arya and Lord Reed explained together how the Lannisters received wrong information that Arya Stark was in Winterfell, only to find out at Moat Cailin that she had been hiding at Greywater Watch for months after escaping Petyr Baelish, who effectively planned to sell her to the Boltons so she could marry Ramsay, but whose plans were destroyed when the young Stark escaped him. The marriage between Ramsay Bolton and Arya Stark was a lie and an invention that the Boltons probably made in the hope to gain support in the North. Jon Snow produced afterwards a letter from the bastard who promised to commit atrocities to all the Starks if he didn't surrender. This only inflamed all the people even more. Then Lord Tyrion revealed that spies he had inside Winterfell and the Winter Town told him that Ramsay very likely killed his father Roose..."
Bolton and that Walda Bolton and her son were last seen entering the kennels where Ramsay Snow kept his dogs. The bastard left the kennels afterwards, but his half-brother and step-mother didn't. Elmar Frey, Roose Bolton's squire, hadn't been seen since the murder of the Lord of Dreadfort either.

All these revelations turned everyone's hatred against the bastard. The Freys for the butchering of Elmar, Walda and her son, the Lannisters for the threat against Sansa who they had come to respect, even more since she got pregnant, the river lords and the Northerners for the crimes of the Boltons at the Red Wedding. The river lords also didn't appreciate that the children of Catelyn Tully were being tortured or threatened. Even Gerold hit the table with his fist in rage. Even if he had no link with anyone the bastard killed, except for Ethan but he never knew Mira's brother, the dog's actions were enough for even the High Septon to shout he would skin him alive.

"Now, let's put something clear," said Lord Tyrion loudly. "The Boltons lied about Arya Stark. They may be lying about Rickon Stark as well, or they may not. Brandon Stark may be alive. If he is alive, he's the Lord of Winterfell. If he's dead, then Rickon Stark could be alive inside Winterfell. If he's alive, he's the Lord of Winterfell. However, if the two are dead, Lady Sansa Lannister of House Stark is the Lady of Winterfell and the Wardeness of the North. But right now, Ramsay Bolton holds Winterfell. We should focus on getting him out of it, and once it's done, we can look for the Stark boys. If one is alive, Lady Sansa will acknowledge him as Warden of the North, and I will follow."

"How can we be sure about that? Why would you give up the North, Lannister?" asked Lyanna Mormont. She hadn't been carried away so easily by the revelations of the bastard's atrocities.

"Because if Brandon or Rickon Stark are alive, they stand before my wife as Lords of Winterfell. My father may have done horrible things, but there's one thing he taught me, it's that family is all that matters. Rickon Stark's sister is my wife. I think this makes him family for me."

Lyanna Mormont didn't seem convinced, but she said nothing more. The council didn't last long afterwards and people scattered before the parley took place. Gerold didn't wait for her again. Mira excused herself to Asher and his wife and went after her husband. She only caught him up when he was in their tent and she entered it without ceremony.

"I thought you would welcome me differently," she told him.

He turned to look at her. He stammered all of a sudden. "I'm... I'm sorry. I... I'm glad to see you back." Awkwardly, he walked to her and kissed her on the lips, though it lacked the warmth it usually had. Mira looked at him straight in the eyes.

"What is it? I'm not stupid, Gerold. I know you. I know you're upset. It's about my brother, isn't it? You're not happy to see him."

He looked at her for a moment, then turned away slowly and sat on their bed. He took his hair in his hand for a time, then took it away. He looked on the ground. "You must think I'm selfish." He scoffed without humor. "We discover that your family is still alive and I can't manage to be happy for you."

Mira said nothing. Of course, she wanted her husband to be happy for her, but on the other hand, she knew very well why she was married to him. Margaery had convinced the Hightowers to make her one of them for the prospect to have Ironrath one day. The odds for this to happen were quite lessened with Asher and Ryon still alive. Gerold hadn't seemed to know how to react when Gwyn had told them everything. In the end, he had managed to look happy for her, as much as he could, and they had made love that night. Mira hadn't wanted to do it, but a few minutes after they got into bed, her husband had just kissed her like that and started to remove her nightclothes. Even if they said they shouldn't do it before Winterfell was retaken, to not risk she would end with child at an
inappropriate time, Mira hadn't protested. After all, they were close to take it and she was in the mood for celebrations. Gerold had whispered her name more than usual this night. In the morning, she had had many difficulties to leave their bed. He didn't want to let her go. In the end, he let her go and was there when she left with Ser Davos and Gwyn for Jon Snow's camp. He kissed her for a long time before she left, so long that Arya had cleared her throat quite loudly. Then she left and they had looked at each other while she rode away.

Mira sat at his side. "I didn't know they were alive. I was sure they were dead. I didn't lie to you."

"I never thought you lied to me," he replied, still looking ahead, not glancing at her.

"You won't have Ironrath, Gerold, but Asher won't forget that you helped us. We won't go back to Oldtown empty-handed."

"It's not that. It's just… I thought I was fighting to give you back your home, and now… I'm not eager to face my family. What will Father and Grandfather say when I come back with their men with the news that Ironrath doesn't belong to you. And Altos…"

He said the name of his eldest brother with hatred. Mira didn't think it would be good if the two brothers found themselves alone and that Altos mocked Gerold for going in the North for naught.

"You'll be able to tell him that you won a war, at least," she said.

He faced her. "I want to be happy for you. I am. It's just… I didn't expect that." He kept looking at her. "I love you, Mira, you know."

"I know."

She rested her head on his shoulder. He put an arm around her shoulders, then started to rub her cheek and to pass his hand through her hair. She sighed in relief, a sensation of warmth gaining her. In Oldtown, he used to rub her arm and her shoulder as well, but here in the North, her gowns didn't allow her arms to remain bare. His mouth came to the top of her head and his breath went through her hair. She felt well. A smile came upon her lips.

"I love you."

He said it once more as he began to lower his mouth to her forehead, then her nose, until he reached her lips. This kiss wasn't forced like the one he gave when she entered. His arms entwined around her waist as he guided her on her back. Their tongues met inside their mouths, then he went to kiss her neck. Mira moaned. It felt good. It felt very good.

"Do as if I wasn't there."

Mira turned her head to the right to see her brother standing in the flap of the tent.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: a new POV, Asher
Chapter Notes

Since this chapter follows immediately the previous and it is quite short, I decided to upload it now.

ASHER I

He couldn't stop himself from smiling. Of all the siblings Asher Forrester had, his sister Mira was the last one he expected to find in a situation like this. Mira had always behaved like a perfect lady back when they lived together at Ironrath. She wasn't the type to have anything with someone in bushes or to invite a boy to meet her in secret. He remembered how she lectured him about his secret meetings with Gwyn from time to time. He almost wanted to burst into laugh at the sight of his sister blushing and straightening up in the bed, trying to arrange her hair and take back an appearance of dignity. That had nothing to do with the sister who spent time reading and learning with Maester Ortengryn.

Half of Asher wanted to laugh, but the other one had wanted to break all of Gerold Hightower's teeth. The man had said nothing during all the war council and it was difficult for Asher to have an opinion of him, but it didn't start well. It was his old reflex of brother that made him want to defend anyone from touching his sister that surfaced. He looked at his brother-in-law. *Be careful around my sister.*

"You could have knocked before coming in," Mira said, reproachful.

"It's difficult to knock on a tent. We're in a war camp, remember."

He could see Mira wasn't happy to be contradicted. It was just like in the old times, when he used to tease her. He liked that.

"Why are you here?" She had gotten on her feet, but her hair was still a little messy.

"Nothing special. Just wanted a word or two with my new brother-in-law." He looked at her sister's husband to emphasize his meaning.

Mira looked at her husband, then to him. "I suppose I am to be excluded from this conversation."

Asher looked in the corner of the tent, as if he was thinking for a moment, then shrugged. "Well, to put it bluntly, yes."

Mira rolled her eyes, but he could see a smile on the corner of her lips. Mira didn't enjoy all his teasing and banter, but she looked past it. They both knew he was only teasing her and that he meant no offence and no insult.

"May I have one minute alone with you before?" she asked him.

"Of course."
Mira cast a look at her husband. Asher thought he saw a reassuring smile on her lips, then she walked out of the tent with him. Mira immediately turned to face him outside.

"Don't be too harsh with him."

"Don't worry, I won't break anything," he replied, still grinning. The image of his sister snuggling with her husband couldn't leave his mind.

"He's been very kind with me, Asher. So please, be gentle with him."

Her expression displayed a mix of order and plea, and it was also a little patronizing, just like she used to be when they were young. Asher had always found it unsettling how Mira remembered him of their father. His father always gave commands like her in this way, gentle but firm. If you added to this the green eyes, the black hair and the ears, Mira was a feminine replication of Lord Gregor Forrester. There was only her jaw who was less prominent than his. It was strange to think how close Mira was to their mother, despite being the one who shared the most physical traits with their father. Only Ethan competed with her for the resemblance, with black hair and green eyes as well. Asher had his father's eyes, but inherited from their mother when it came to his hair.

"Very well, sister." As long as I'm sure he never mistreated you.

Mira kissed him on the cheek and walked away. Before she was too far, Asher added something.

"Mira, I'm not going to forget what I just saw between you and your husband."

He had the satisfaction to see his sister roll her eyes again as she kept going forward. Asher returned to the tent to face his new brother.

"So, here is Ser Gerold Hightower, the man who married my sister Mira."

The man in question had waited standing and looked at Asher with an uncertain gaze. "Lord Asher," he finally said after a moment.

Asher emitted a dry laugh. He would never get used to being called that way. "Call me simply Asher. I don't really like the title with my name next to it, and anyway we're brothers. You're married with Mira."

He walked slowly towards the Hightower as he spoke and eyed him closely. Gerold Hightower was a bit smaller than him, had blue eyes and short brown hair. He wore the armor of his house on him, with the sigil of the tower with fire atop of it. He held Asher's gaze, but he could see that his brother-in-law wasn't comfortable with the situation. Asher didn't have anything negative to tell from his appearance, but neither did he have much positive to say. He had never been sure what kind of husband Mira wanted, but she seemed happy enough with him. It took something to have his sister moan after all. He remembered a few times when they discussed about her husband before, between brothers and sisters, when Mira blushed. Did she redden from shyness or from something else?

Asher raised his arm.

"Glad to meet you, Gerold."

The knight shook his hand. "Glad to meet you... Asher."

Asher did two steps backwards to place some distance between them. "Well, let's forget that you were almost banging my sister a moment ago..."

"I wasn't banging her," the Hightower protested.
"Well, for me, kissing and being about to disrobe someone is banging."

He was agape for a moment. "Oh. You meant… Sorry."

Asher laughed out loud. "What? You thought I meant you were about to hit her, or strike her, or beat her? That's not what I meant." Asher took a more serious expression. "Though I do hope that you never think about doing so."

Gerold Hightower looked at him strongly at the mention of it, then he stepped forward to Asher, closing the distance he just put between them. "I would never ever think about that."

Asher shrugged. "That's a good thing to hear."

"I would never harm her, or let someone else harm her."

He was looking at Asher with intensity. That didn't look like the man he saw before. "Well, I'm pleased to hear it. I would never forgive you if you let something happen to her."

"I don't care if you would forgive me or not. I would never forgive myself if something happened to her. Never."

He didn't look like he was lying. Asher held the gaze of the Hightower, and this time the knight didn't flinch a bit. His attitude reminded him of men and women he met when they fought to the death.

Asher walked away to face him again from a distance. "Now that we know each other better, maybe you could tell me how you ended married to my sister."

His brother-in-law relaxed. "My father and my grandfather organized this. And the queen too."

"I see. You didn't know her before you married, did you?"

"No. We only met when she came to Oldtown, two weeks before our wedding."

"Did you marry her because you thought this would give you Ironrath?"

The knight looked surprised by the question. Asher was always direct, and many people in the North were distraught by his straightforward ways, so he supposed people from the south, who learned courtesies and good manners in the cradle, were to be even more taken aback by this.

"No." That was all the answer he gave.

"No?"

"No."

"Then why did you marry her?"

"Because my family ordered me to."

"That's all? You were wed to her because your father and your mother told you to?"

"Yes." He looked on the ground. Asher found himself sympathizing with his brother-in-law. They could never choose who they married. "But today, I would marry her any time, even if my family was against it. Even if I was to discover tomorrow that she's a peasant girl, I wouldn't care. I wouldn't marry anyone else in the world."
That surprised Asher. Was it...? "Is it a declaration of love?"

Gerold looked uncertain once more. "You can see it that way, yes."

Asher smiled shortly. "Well, in that case... I want to thank you, for taking care of my sister all this time."

"I did my best."

"More than your best. She told me you disfigured your brother for her."

"He slapped her." His face had gone angry again.

"Good doing. I would have done the same in your stead."

After a moment, Ser Gerold smiled back. "I have to admit, I had wanted to do that for a very long time."

They laughed together. "I think we'll get along quite well, Gerold. Just remember. If I ever find out that you mistreated Mira in any way, I'll gut you, I'll kill you and I'll skin you alive. Maybe not in that order, but I'll do it."

"I wouldn't expect less."

They exchanged a last shake of hands and then Asher was gone. He walked through the camp mostly made of red tents. He didn't like the look of it. Mira could say that the Imp was only trying to give Winterfell back to Sansa Stark, he didn't trust the Lannisters. He would sooner have Jon Snow as Lord of Winterfell if Rickon Stark was dead. The bastard knew how to fight and men followed him. Everyone said he looked like his father.

He found the tent he and Gwyn had been given. It was among the small detachment from the Riverlands, though far away from the Freys. Asher was of a mind to thrust his sword through a few Frey hearts, like they did for his father and his brother at the Red Wedding. He didn't understand how Jon Snow could like the Lord of Casterly Rock. That was a complete mystery for him.

He found his wife discussing with his sister when he opened the flap. Mira looked at him with severity.

"Don't worry, little sister. He's whole. You can go back and resume what you were doing before I interrupted."

As expected, Mira didn't appreciate. She stood up and left. "Thank you, Asher."

He was now all alone with his wife. "You shouldn't be so cruel with her," Gwyn told him.

"Why not ask the wolf to spare the chicken while you're at it?"

Gwyn smiled without a sound. "I had forgotten how it was between you and her. She disagreed with our meetings, but she kept our secret well hidden all the same."

"Aye." He sat by her side, on another chair, and took her hand.

"Gerold Hightower seems nice enough."

"He is, though I can't find anything special about him. Except for the fact that he seems genuinely in love with Mira. I suppose that's a good thing."
A memory came to his mind, of a young squire who only had eyes for her when they were at Ironrath. The poor lad never had his chance. Mira never returned his interest. Judging by what he just witnessed, he supposed this was different with her husband. That brought another smile to Asher. He would definitely never forget that sight.

"Do you think he's after Ironrath?" Gwyn asked him.

"He doesn't seem to be, though we should remain careful. When we asked Mira, we couldn't get a clear answer."

"True. It would be better to keep an eye on him."

Asher nodded. He looked at Gwyn's hand, then to her eyes. She was his wife now. He had dreamed of it for so long. Even during his exile in Essos, he could never forget her. There had been times when he still dreamed he could go back to Westeros one day, take her away from her family and ride with her somewhere where they could live together, even if he knew these were foolish thoughts. Still, he kept them. They were the same than those he had that first night.

He had met Gwyn at Ironrath, when they were both about fourteen. Her father had reluctantly come to Ironrath to renew the treaty of peace between the Whitehills and the Forresters. Asher had been standing on the dais with his brothers and sisters and their parents. Ludd Whitehill was already fat at the time, and he had brought all his children with him. He had introduced them, but only his daughter caught Asher's attention. She was beautiful, and breathtaking. Asher would never forget the first time he saw her. Later, at the feast that was thrown, Gwyn had danced with Rodrik as a formality, just like their mother danced with Lord Whitehill. Their father would have danced with Lady Whitehill if she had been alive. There was also Lord Whitehill's eldest son, Torrhen, who danced with Mira. Torrhen. The name filled Asher's heart with rage.

It was obvious that Lord Whitehill took no pleasure in being present. He only did what was required of him to not start a war, but nothing more. Still, Asher had gone to him and asked for the honor to dance with his daughter. Lord Whitehill had been about to burst in outrage, but Gwyn had calmed him and graciously accepted his request. They had danced. The dance they were supposed to have turned into six dances. Later that evening, Asher had brought her to visit the ironwood grove behind the keep. They spent hours talking together, until finally Whitehill's men came to bring Gwyn back to her rooms. They had left early in the morning. Asher didn't see Gwyn for two months, until they met by chance near a small market, in the only village on the Forrester lands. They had spent hours together again. Asher had found her more beautiful than the first time they met. From this time, they had met regularly, lying to both their families about the times they spent outside their homes. With time, some people started to wonder about the real reasons of their prolonged absence. Mira was the first one to discover it. She tried to convince him to stop, and failed. She said nothing to anyone for months. Perhaps she hoped that he would stop on his own will. If she did, she was wrong. Asher and Gwyn kept seeing each other for almost a year. In the end, someone else discovered the truth.

One day, he and Gwyn met again, but this time someone had followed her. Torrhen Whitehill, heir to Highpoint, came out from bushes and accused Asher of luring her sister out of the safety of their keep to take advantage on her. They started to fight and Asher got the upper hand. Gwyn stopped him from killing her brother. He would have killed him if she hadn't been there. Still, Torrhen Whitehill was badly injured. Asher had pierced his right arm and his left leg.

This had been the last time he ever saw Gwyn. Lord Whitehill asked for his head. Asher's father decided to exile him instead to face a war and to not execute his son. Asher still held some grudge against his father for this, even if he knew deep inside that it was the right thing to do. A war may not
have allowed him to marry Gwyn anyway. Asher packed his things and sailed for Essos.

He had spent the following years fighting as a sellsword, trying to forget about Gwyn, and failing to do so. He met Beskha during some war around Volantis when she saved his life and they became friends. It never went farther. Despite all this time, Asher could never forget Gwyn. He visited brothels and had many whores during his time in the east, but Gwyn remained in his head and his heart all the time. He and Beskha even laid together one night, when they were dead drunk. He thought one of them, he didn't remember who, vomited in the act, or maybe they both did. It had no long-term consequences. He and Beskha were friends, and neither of them wanted this to go anywhere else. There was only one time afterwards when they talked of this, and it was when Beskha told him he still loved Gwyn because he said her name while they were making love.

Now he was back. He and Gwyn were wed. Sometimes he wondered how she could accept when he proposed to her. He killed her brother, and tried to kill her father. If he had a chance, he would kill Ludd and Torrhen without a single hesitation, and she knew it. Still, she had saved him with Talia's help when they found him at the farm after the battle, gravely injured, and she had accepted to be his wife. Asher didn't know how she could still love him sometimes. Though, when he thought about this, Gwyn's family had killed his parents and two of his brothers, not to mention that they destroyed his home, and he never held her responsible in any way for this. He couldn't hate her for her family's crimes, whatever they were. Maybe it was the same in her eyes. However, she didn't hate Asher's family. Maybe Asher just lost much more than her. She said she loved him and that she knew he tried to stop the madness at the wedding, but failed, and at the end it had been him or Gryff.

Asher kept looking into Gwyn's eyes. There was no trace of hatred or anger in them. Still, he wished things had been different. I saw what you were trying to do. They wouldn't listen to reason... We will overcome this. The words she said when she found him near dead resonated in his head. He wondered if they could still overcome this, after all that happened between their families. He knew that Gwyn still loved her father and her brother.

"We should prepare," she said. "The parley is soon."

Asher agreed. They walked out together to the small group of people who would soon negotiate with the bastard who killed Ethan. Asher looked forward to this. He hoped that Ramsay would give him a reason to kill him during the meeting.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion (and the parley)
Tyrion XXIV

Chapter Notes

One of the chapters I loved to write the most in a while. Tyrion speaks with many people he never got to meet in the show so far, right before the Second Battle of Winterfell. And he meets Ramsay.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

TYRION XXIV

There was smoke far away, before Winterfell, or maybe it was only fog. Tyrion couldn't know for sure. It should be fog, but something told him it could be fire. They were all waiting in the no man's land between Winterfell and the Wolfswood. Tyrion was on his own horse with Ser Brynden Tully, Jon Snow and Ser Davos Seaworth by his side. Behind them were many other knights, lords and ladies, all representing the might of the North, the Riverlands, the Westerlands and the Reach combined. For the North, there was Lady Lyanna Mormont of Bear Island, Ser Jocelyn Waterfell from White Harbor, Lady Barbrey Dustin of Barrowton, Lord Asher Forrester of Ironrath, Lady Gwyn Whitehill of Highpoint and Lord Howland Reed of Greywater Watch. Ser Perwyn Frey of the Twins, Lord Karyl Vance of Wayfarer's Rest and Lord Clement Piper of Pinkmaiden were there for the Riverlands. For the Westerlands, Daven and Ser Forley Prester were present. There were also Ser Gerold of House Hightower and his wife, Lady Mira Hightower of House Forrester, who were there as the sole representatives of the Reach. There was also this Tormund Giantsbane who was here for the wildlings, or the Free Folk like they called themselves, and also someone else at Lord Reed's side.

They were quite a great number of people. If Ramsay wanted to defeat them, he could try to kill them all here, depriving their army of the most part of their commanders, and probably the best, but they were all on horse and Tyrion had positioned men nearby to intervene if the bastard of the Dreadfort or any Northerner tried anything. Tyrion was eager to be done with this parley. These talks were crucial, but he wouldn't mind once they were over. There was no sign of Ramsay Bolton and his men so far.

"How long is he going to make us wait yet? We've been here for half an hour," complained the Blackfish.

"He thinks he's a king now. I suppose he wants to make us feel that he's important," Tyrion offered as an explanation.

Ser Brynden Tully spat. "King in the North? King of Winterfell, yes. His petty kingdom is limited to the castle. Almost all the North rebelled against him."

"The North didn't only try to rebel against him," Tyrion remarked.

The knight sighed. "No."

"Don't be too harsh on them. Many lost kin during the war against the Lannisters, not to mention the Twins," said Jon Snow.
"I'm not stupid, Jon Snow. I knew very well I wouldn't be welcomed in the North. I thought the first Northerner to cross my path there would try to kill me, and I was right. Too bad Sansa is the one who paid the price."

Jon Snow looked behind him after Tyrion's words. "I'm sure she's fine."

"She will be," assured the Blackfish. "Cat bore five healthy children without problem. There's no reason her daughter cannot do it as well."

"Maybe, but my mother died when I was born. We don't have the good odds from my family's side,“ Tyrion countered on a dark tone.

That was one of Tyrion's greatest worries right now. He didn't even worry about the battle to come, about Ramsay Bolton and his allies, or even about the fragile alliance they had with the other northern houses. The alliance had been close to blow up recently. Tyrion was afraid for Sansa. He thought about her all the time. Not only he missed her, but he wondered what could happen to her at White Harbor. Was she really safe there? Tyrion knew the northern lords couldn't be entirely trusted, nor were the river lords, or the Freys. It was a chance he earned the trust and the respect of some of their commanders, but their officers and their men were another story.

"Here they are," said Ser Davos.

Indeed, they were. It was a small group, smaller than the one they had, bearing the flayed man of House Bolton. Tyrion had always hated this sigil.

"Be careful. I don't trust this bastard," said the Blackfish once more.

"Whoever trusts him is a fool," stated Tyrion. "Or he hopes to gain something from him. But he's still a fool then," he added after a moment.

Tyrion highly doubted the lords who followed Ramsay did it because they actually wanted him as their king. The Ryswells and the Dustins had deserted after Roose Bolton died. Ramsay Bolton only had his bannermen left, and the troops of House Umber and House Karstark. These houses probably chose to support him because they thought the Lannisters were worse... just like the Mormonts, the Manderlys, the Cerwyns and all the other northern houses who sided with them thought the Lannisters were a lesser evil when compared to Ramsay. All these houses, whichever side they picked, would probably turn against them the moment they felt was right.

The delegation stopped at a good distance, then three men came forward on their horses. The one at the center had a crown on his head, made of bronze. He smiled widely when he came closer. He looked like a child about to play.

"Imp," he said.

If he hoped this would affect Tyrion, he was in for a great disappointment. "Who are you?" Tyrion asked.

The huge grin disappeared. A man Tyrion supposed was Harald Karstark spoke up. "This is Ramsay Bolton, the Lord of Winterfell and the King in the North."

"Oh, yes." Tyrion faked surprise. "You're the son of the miller's wife that Roose Bolton raped during a hunting trip because he was bored." The grin that had resurfaced on Ramsay's face faded again.

"What? You thought no one knew it? I'm afraid you were wrong, bastard. There are many people around you who are ready to tell all sorts of secrets about you for the right price, or only because they hate you. Just like they told me how you murdered your father, how you fed Walda Bolton and
"We didn't come to listen to your empty threats, bastard," interrupted Ser Brynden. "We're giving you a chance. Get off your horse, drop this stupid crown you have on your head and kneel, confess all your crimes, give us Rickon and Arya Stark, surrender Winterfell and you'll be granted a clean and swift death in the old way. Refuse this chance," the Tully knight took from his bag the letter Ramsay wrote to Jon Snow, "and everything you described in this, we'll do it to you, from the skinning to feeding you to your own dogs. That's your call, bastard."

"I'm afraid I must decline."

"You're surrounded. The North has rebelled against you. Robb Stark was called the King who lost the North, but none of his bannermen ever betrayed him, except your father. All the North rose against you. I would say you lost the North before you even had it. The King who never had the North. You can't hope for any help from the outside. You're no better than Theon Greyjoy when he styled himself the Prince of Winterfell. Your petty kingdom is limited to this castle, just like his."

"I have the Umbers, and the Karstarks at my side, and my own bannermen. They are loyal, to the opposite of those who follow you. I'll give you a chance. Dismount and kneel before me, surrender your army and proclaim me the true Lord of Winterfell and King in the North. I will pardon all of you for invading our homeland. I will pardon the bastard for deserting the Night's Watch. I will pardon the treasonous lords who betrayed my house. Kneel, all of you. Why lead poor souls into slaughter? There's no need for a battle. Thousands don't need to die. Get off your horse, and kneel."

"Are you really as mad as they say? You don't have the men. You don't have the horses."

"I have Winterfell. The castle can hold against tens of thousands with only three hundred men. And I have six thousand. I know you have more, but not that much. Most of your men must have died of the cold and disease. You can't afford a siege. So kneel, and I'll let you go back to where you came from."

Tyrion smiled to himself before he spoke. "You're right, bastard. Winterfell can hold against tens of thousands, but only if the people inside are united. Do you really trust the people with you? How do you think I got all this information about you?"

He saw doubts in the bastard's eyes. It was good. Very good. "Anyway," Tyrion resumed, "we didn't come here to listen to you. We want nothing with mad dogs. We came here to offer you a chance for a painless death, and you refused it. Now, we will speak with lords. Lord Umber, Lord Karstark, do you have anything to say?"

"You will not take the North, Lord Tyrion," declared Lord Karstark. "Winterfell belongs to the Northerners. The North belongs to the Northerners. You won't take it."

"It does, but it doesn't belong to Ramsay," said Jon. "You don't have to follow him. Put him in chains, give him to us, free my brother and my sister, swear loyalty to the Starks as your liege lords again, and you'll be forgiven. You'll keep your lands, your titles, your honor. All you have to do is to give us Ramsay and to make sure that Rickon and Arya are safe."

"We're not going to follow wildling lovers," replied Jon Umber. Proud, but without honor, and
without brain. No sane man would side with the bastard of the Dreadfort.

"Or Lannisters," Lord Karstark added, spiteful.

"No, instead you follow a bastard and you turn against your own kin. House Karstark shares blood with the Starks," the Blackfish pointed out.

"The Starks lost my house the day Robb Stark killed my father."

"Your father murdered children."

"Robb Stark refused him his revenge. My father took what was his by right. We have the right to avenge our family."

"Do you have the right to commit murders? Do you consider yourselves over the law?"

"What about you, Blackfish? Don't you consider yourself over the law? The sacred law of guest right? You ride with those behind the Red Wedding."

"And you ride with a kinslayer whose father murdered his own king," Tyrion replied.

A moment of silence followed while Harald Karstark looked at Tyrion with hatred. "You're going to die."

"I suppose this is a refusal then. Very well."

"We offer you life and honor, and you choose death and dishonor?" asked Jon Snow, unbelieving.

"Tell me, will you let your little brother die because you're too proud to surrender? Would you let your sister die as well? Wouldn't you say this is dishonorable?" Ramsay asked to Jon Snow.

"How do we know you have Rickon and Arya? I don't see them," Tyrion asked.

Ramsay whistled, a huge grin on his face. A young woman around the same age as him rode forward. She had a similar grin to the one the mad dog displayed. Tyrion supposed it could be the kennelmaster's daughter, Myranda. She was Ramsay's lover according to some, and one of his favourite hunting partners. She took something in a bag next to her and dropped it on the ground separating them.

It was the head of a wolf, but bigger than a wolf's head should be. It was very similar to Ghost, Jon Snow's direwolf, but its fur was black instead of being white. Tyrion looked at Jon Snow, asking a silent question. Jon Snow nodded. This was his brother's direwolf's head.

Tyrion decided to grin back. "Is that all? A direwolf's head?"

"We have Rickon Stark. Surrender, and he'll live," Ramsay said.

"What's telling us you didn't kill him already? Or that you didn't torture him? I hear that's your favourite hobby. I don't see Rickon Stark. You bring us no proof, bastard. However, we do have our own proofs."

Tyrion looked at Jon who looked behind him and made a sign with his head. She left Lord Reed's side and brought her horse forward to stand between Jon and Tyrion. She wore furs to the Stark colors, no longer the rough garment of the crannogmen. She looked straight at Ramsay's face with hatred. Tyrion wouldn't want to be in the bastard's stead.
"Who's that?" Ramsay asked. He really never saw her before.

"Lord Karstark, Lord Umber, you visited Winterfell before. Surely one of you recognizes her," Jon Snow declared.

Tyrion saw the facial expression of both the lords following Ramsay change. They knew who she was, even though Ramsay didn't. It was Jon Umber who spoke up first and looked angrily at the bastard.

"You told us that Arya Stark was in that tower!" he roared.

"She is," replied the girl who brought the direwolf's head. She hadn't gone back behind. "I visited her before we came. I told her her family was coming to rescue her, but she didn't seem to believe it. I'm afraid she becomes boring." Umber and Karstark didn't seem to appreciate her presence. She was no highborn lady, only Ramsay's mistress.

"I doubt it. Because I am Arya Stark."

It was the first time she spoke. Ramsay looked at her for a moment, an uncertain expression on his face. Then he burst into laughs. "Anyone could come up with a random girl and pretend this is Arya Stark."

"Maybe," said Tyrion, "but your men know who she is, Ramsay. They know you're a liar. You don't have Arya Stark. You never had her. Maybe you have Rickon Stark. Maybe you don't have him…"

Tyrion couldn't end his sentence as Arya Stark interrupted him to speak her own mind. "If you have him, if you killed him or harmed him in any way, I'll do the same thing to you, and worse."

Tyrion definitely wouldn't want to be in Ramsay's shoes, but the bastard only smiled like a child once more. "She's fierce. I like her. Maybe I'll take her to my bed, just to be sure. Myranda is right, my wife became quite boring lately."

"You're going to die tomorrow. Sleep well."

On these words, Arya Stark rode away with one last hateful glance at the bastard of the Dreadfort. Ramsay should be better to not end in Arya's Stark way, though Tyrion feared something bad might happen to Sansa's sister if she tried to kill Ramsay Bolton with too much haste.

"Our offers still hold," resumed Ser Brynden Tully. "You only have to deliver us this mad dog or whatever this is in chains and to free Rickon Stark, and you'll be pardoned. You have until sunrise tomorrow to accept. If you don't, then expect no mercy from us during the battle."

"We'll see each other tomorrow then," said Ramsay, still smiling. He was mad, and probably very stupid. Any man with some brain would know he had no chance to win in open battle.

"Yes," added Tyrion. "if you dare to leave these walls. You're renowned for chasing fleeing enemies, but not much as a fighter, bastard."

"I wonder how long your men will fight for you when they see you don't fight for them," Jon Snow brought forward.

Ramsay obviously didn't like their comments. They were about to turn and ride away, but were stopped by a feminine voice.

"Wait." It was Gwyn Whitehill, Lady Mira's sister-in-law, and the Lady of Ironrath now through her
marriage with Asher Forrester. Tyrion expected her to be the Lady of Highpoint once this would all be over. Her family wasn't known for being reasonable and surrender when they were defeated. "I wish to speak to my brother."

For a moment, everything and everyone stood still. Then someone who remained behind on Ramsay's side rode forward on a white stallion. Tyrion looked at him and then to Gwyn Whitehill. They had some features in common.

"So, here you are, Gwyn. It's been a long time." His voice was warm and soft, even pleasant, with a certain sadness.

"Yes, a very long time," Torrhen's sister said.

"How things have changed since that time." His voice took a harder tone, though it still sounded sad. "I never thought you would turn on us."

"I never turned on you."

"And yet here you are, married to a Forrester." He almost spat the name.

"Aye, she is." Asher Forrester had come forward at his wife's side. "Torrhen."

"Asher." Both said their names with venom. There was no trace of kindness here.

"How are your leg and your arm?"

The Whitehill looked furious. "You won't get away with this."

"You failed. I married Gwyn in the end. Your house is about to disappear. I promised Gwyn that I would spare you and your father if you survived the fights, but if I ever meet you on the battlefield, I will kill you without a second thought."

Torrhen Whitehill looked at his sister. "Is that what you want? You want your family to die?"

"You could surrender," said Gwyn. "You'll be allowed to join the Night's Watch."

"Do you think I'm going to freeze myself to the Wall?"

"You would be alive."

"We won't crawl before the Forresters, like we did in the past. This time is over. Maybe it's different for you, since you're one of them now, but we won't kneel before them again. I never thought you would turn against your own blood, Gwyn. You shame our house."

"Do you think you shame our name less by siding with this bastard? He's mad. He's going to kill you for sport as soon as the envy takes him. You won't live long with him. You don't need me to dishonor our house. You, father and Gryff already dishonored our name more than enough."

"You dare to speak of honor? They tried to kill Father at the wedding you organized. They killed Gryff!"

"And we killed Rodrik. We killed Lady Elissa. We helped to kill Lord Gregor and Ethan, and we helped to the slaughter at the Twins. I tried to bring back peace. Lord Forrester did the same thing. He even exiled Asher to prevent a war. Can't you see, Torrhen? Your pride is leading you to your ruin."
"The Forresters took everything from us. Pride is all that's left to us."

"We took nothing from you," Asher retorted. "We shared with you, and you wasted what you had. Gwyn is right. You ruined yourself."

Torrhen Whitehill stared at the Lord of Ironrath. "I hear you have a sister. I'll wed her once this is all over. Since you don't seem to have mistreated Gwyn, I won't mistreat her, but that's all I will do for you, son of a whore. I'll kill all of you to the last, until there's no Forrester left. I'll be in the vanguard tomorrow. I'll be expecting you."

"I look forward to it."

Both men rode away with hateful glares to each other. Tyrion scowled. "Nice family reunion. Your bannermen's words should be More pride than honor. We'll see each other again tomorrow, bastard."

This time, Tyrion left for good with all the people who were present. They returned to the camp of the Lannister army and their allies. The camp of the Northerners under Jon Snow's command had been moved closer, but it was still separate from their own and its paths were very narrow, just like the ones in the other camp. They met in the command tent like they did this morning, only this time they wouldn't talk about negotiations, but about strategy for the upcoming battle.

"Ramsay chose battle," said the Blackfish. "Well, he's going to get one."

"What's telling us he will fight against us? The smarter thing to do is wait for us inside Winterfell. He was right on a few things. We don't have siege engines and it would take time to build them. And even then, he has more than enough men to hold the castle," the Lord of Greywater Watch pointed.

"How long could he last with all the food in Winterfell's storage?" The Blackfish addressed this question to Jon.

"Some time. Depends on how the pantries are filled and how many men he has. If he intends to feed the six thousand, he'll have a hard time. The supplies won't last long, even if the pantries are full."

"Some probably burned with Winterfell when the Ironborn lost it. They probably don't have much," said Tyrion.

"Winterfell can hold with only three hundred men to defend it, but with six thousand inside, the situation will become impossible to hold very quickly," analyzed the Blackfish. "I got rid of all the unnecessary mouths during the siege of Riverrun to hold as long as we could, and we only had enough to hold for two years. Ramsay has thirty time the number of men. I would be surprised if his supplies lasted for more than two months."

"He could try to let us starve outside all the same," said Barbrey Dustin. "Winter is coming. We don't have enough supplies on our own to engage a lasting siege. We may starve before he does."

"Maybe, but that's not his way," intervened Ser Davos. "He knows the North is watching. If he leaves the impression that we can keep him stuck inside a castle, the other houses who still fear him will lose this fear. He cannot allow that. Fear is his power. He'll come for us, give us battle in the field."

"In this case, we should be prepared to meet him in the field," Tyrion remarked.

"Very well. We will place our army at the edge of the Wolfswood. This way, he won't be able to attack us from behind if he tries."
"What about the sides," grumbled Tormund Giantsbane, the wildling chief. "I saw what mounted knights can do to us. You and Stannis cut through us like piss in the snow," he said while looking at Ser Davos.

"We could dig trenches along our flanks," said Jon.

"Bad idea," Tyrion reacted. "This would force our army to stay between them. We would be imprisoned between these trenches. Anyway, we have more horses than Ramsay. There will be squads of cavalry on each flank. If Ramsay tries to attack us there, the horsemen will be able to stop them."

"We can't limit our movements, not when we have the biggest army. Our capacity to adapt to different scenarios will be our force in this battle," approved the Blackfish.

"So, we have more men, more horses. We only have to attack him as soon as he gets through the gates of Winterfell," said Asher Forrester. "With your leave, my lords, I would like to be in the vanguard."

"I'm not a general," said Bronn all of a sudden. He wasn't present at the parley, but he invited himself to the war council. "However, I know one thing, there are many more people who die in an army that fights near an enemy fortress than in an open field battle."

"We will wait for the bastard to come to us," said Ser Brynden, unyielding. "The farther we'll get him from Winterfell, the easier it will be for us to cut him from it and to take the castle with minimal losses."

People listened to him. They didn't doubt his experience or his loyalty, to the opposite of Tyrion. The less the Lord of Casterly Rock spoke in this council, the better it would be.

"What about Rickon Stark?" asked the Norrey man.

"When we take Winterfell, we'll look for him. In the meantime, we must defeat Ramsay, if we are to hope to ever free Winterfell."

It seemed to satisfy the lords. Discussions followed afterwards that proved much more difficult. No one questioned the strategy of Ser Brynden Tully or the general position of the army on the field, but it was more difficult to decide where to place everyone. No one wanted someone they didn't trust behind them. This meant the Northerners didn't want to stand before the Freys or the wildlings or the Lannisters. Tyrion refused to have the great part of his men with Northerners at the back, not after the plot. Mostly, no one wanted the Freys behind them. Ser Perwyn Frey accepted to place his men in the vanguard in the end, saying he hoped this would prove that his house wanted to make amends. As for the Hightowers, they were placed in the rear. They were the only ones that no one hated here, and anyway they weren't enough to really pose a threat. After much discussion, the wildlings ended in the vanguard just like the Freys, including the giant Wun Wun. Tyrion hadn't seen him yet. He was very curious to see a giant for the first time. At one point, Tormund told them they were squabbling worse than the Free Folk in Mance Rayder's army.

Most of the Northerners, especially the Manderlys, the Cerwyns, the Ryswells, the Dustins and the Hornwoods, were positioned in the vanguard as well, but others like the Mormonts were left with the bulk of the army, which consisted essentially of Lannisters and Tullys. Detachments of these were also placed in the vanguard, but it was nothing compared to the size that occupied the bulk. They needed more than an hour to settle all this. Tyrion was very glad when it ended. He found himself alone in the command tent with Jon Snow, Ser Brynden, Ser Davos and Bronn.
"Well, that was something," said Bronn when the last lord had left. "Sure you wouldn’t have liked it if I broke someone's nose?"

"We don't need to make any more enemies, Bronn. Thank you," said Tyrion a warning plain in his voice. Bronn shrugged, as if nothing was amiss.

"I don't think this is right to force the Northerners to fight in the vanguard," said Jon.

"Would you want people in the same army to be behind you when they planned to turn against you in the middle of the battle?"

Jon Snow had nothing to reply to this. He had been dumbfounded when Tyrion and Ser Brynden told him about this a few hours ago. A few houses from the North had been planning to turn against the Lannisters while they fought the Boltons. They found out because Lord Vance was asked by Ser Waterfell to join the plot. They probably hoped that the river lords would be eager to betray the Lannisters and the Freys and to avenge the Red Wedding. However, the conspirators hadn't taken into consideration that Lord Vance was an old friend of Ser Brynden Tully. He had gone immediately to tell the Blackfish about this, and Ser Brynden talked about this with Tyrion.

Three days later, all the leaders of the conspiracy were brought in the command tent and surrounded by Lannister and Tully men. The Northerners had misjudged the hatred of the river lords for the Lannisters. Ser Brynden and Tyrion led the army together, taking their decisions in common, and the knight had come to appreciate him as Sansa's husband. Even some of the river lords began to show some respect for Tyrion, especially after so much time spent with him and Sansa in the Neck. The commanders who participated to the plot were warned and their tents were moved to a section of the camp where they could be watched by Lannister guardsmen all the time. They didn't have the luxury to execute them. They couldn't kill Northerners when their objective was to free the North. This wouldn't help Sansa in ruling, and turn a few houses against them. Instead, they watched closely the northern commanders from now on and gave them no opportunity to betray them. Placing them in the vanguard during the battle would make sure they wouldn't try to turn against the Lannisters, or else they would be stuck with Lannisters on one side and Boltons on the other side.

"Better get some rest," said Jon. "Tomorrow will be a long day."

"I agree. We must be rested for the battle," Ser Brynden approved.

"Well, I'll go and get myself a girl. Anyone's coming with me?" asked Bronn to everyone.

"I'm married now," Tyrion gave as an answer.

"So am I."

Tyrion sent a look to Bronn that gave no place to discussion. The Blackfish and Jon Snow were already gone. The sellsword looked at Ser Davos with questioning eyes.

"No, thank you," said the Onion Knight. Bronn shrugged again and left the tent. Tyrion was alone with Stannis's former Hand. Two former Hands. The Imp and the Onion Knight.

"Not going to sleep?" he asked.

"Eventually, but my sleep is shit," Tyrion answered.

He remembered the night before the Battle of Blackwater. He hadn't been able to sleep, despite the fact of having Shae with him. He told her she could run away, but she hadn't. She could abandon him, run somewhere to safety, but instead she stayed. She should have run away. When Tyrion had
fought during the battle, it hadn't been for family only. It had been for her. *This is your city Stannis means to sack. If he gets in, it will be your houses he burns, your gold he steals, your women he will rape.* Shae would have been raped. Tyrion knew she could defend herself, but it wouldn't have been enough. He had fought for her, among other things. Now he fought for Sansa.

"And you?" Tyrion asked to the knight.

"I can never sleep the night before a battle."

"Maybe we have more in common than we thought, then, Ser Davos." Half a smile appeared on the face of the man. "I'm sorry for your son. I'm sure he didn't deserve to die, but the people inside King's Landing didn't deserve to see their city sacked, to get raped and murdered. They deserved a better king than Joffrey, true, but not at this price."

Ser Davos nodded. "There were good men who died on both sides in this battle. We both served a terrible king at the time."

"And now they're both dead, and we fight on the same side to free Winterfell."

"Aye. A great turn of events, but then, stranger alliances have been made in the past and we both know what's coming for us. It's no more time to fight amongst ourselves."

Tyrion nodded. He liked Ser Davos, truth be told. The man was pragmatic, without arrogance or pride, and had an ability to say things plainly and simply. Tyrion understood why Stannis chose him as his Hand, over highborn lords and knights who thought themselves better than everyone else because they had a title and earned it at their birth.

"Do you want to avenge Stannis?" Tyrion asked him.

"The Boltons didn't defeat Stannis. Stannis defeated himself. I loved him. He lifted me up and made me something."

"After you saved him with a shipment of onions at Storm's End, hence your sigil."

"Aye, but Stannis had demons in his skull whispering foul things."

"Joffrey had much more of them, believe me. I'll never forget how he had Sansa beaten in front of the whole court, and believe me that wasn't the worst he did. He enjoyed these things. He enjoyed cruelty and viciousness, thought he could do as he liked because he was king."

"Stannis thought the same, but he didn't enjoy cruelty. He did cruel things, true, but he did it because he thought it was the only way for him to become king. He did them because he believed there was no other way."

"And because the red witch told him so."

"Aye."

"It still seems strange to me that the woman who burnt so many people alive brought Jon Snow back to life. I'm still not sure if I believe it."

"Well, I can do nothing else but believe it. He was dead right before me a moment, and the next he was breathing, talking and walking. And after everything I saw, and with the White Walkers coming, who knows what's possible and what's impossible."
Indeed, what was the limit between reality and tales now? White Walkers, dead brought back to life, shadows killing kings, dragons… The world wasn't going any logical way now, and Tyrion didn't like it. He would have settled for the dragons.

"I'll try to get some rest, though I doubt I'll get any," Tyrion finally said. "What about you?"

"I'll walk. I'll think and walk. Think and walk until I'm far away from camp that no one can hear me shitting my guts out."

"Well, happy shitting, Onion Knight."

"Happy restless night, Imp."

They left on the grins that followed. Tyrion ordered Podrick to wake him up at first light tomorrow. He undressed and got into bed. He told himself he didn't have to worry. They had more men, more horses, more allies than Ramsay. However, Barbrey Dustin hadn't been wrong when she said Ramsay could let them starve outside. He had done so with Stannis, and now the pretender was dead cold. Tyrion had done everything to provoke him, to instill doubt in his thoughts about his allies, and to make his allies doubt about Ramsay, but what if it failed? Ramsay Bolton was mad enough to murder thousands of people inside Winterfell to last through winter with the provisions inside. However, if he did this, Tyrion doubted his allies would remain on his side. No, this would create a huge battle inside Winterfell between the Karstarks, the Umbers, the Boltons and their bannermen. They would fight tomorrow. That was the only way out for everyone. None of them could wait. Tyrion had placed heavy guards around the camp to make sure the bastard couldn't repeat his feat of destroying Stannis's supplies and siege engines.

Still, Tyrion couldn't sleep. There was still the possibility of losing, and of course the possible betrayals they could face. Did he bring all these men in the North to see them die and kill each other? They were fighting for leftovers. The North had been ravaged by war, its population if not its territory, and they would have to fight dead men once Winterfell was taken back. Tyrion focused on Winterfell. For now, that was their objective. One battle at a time.

Tyrion missed Sansa. He feared for her, in White Harbor. He highly doubted that Ser Jocelyn Waterfell conspired against him without the approval of Lord Manderly. They had sent a raven with veiled threats, informing Lord Manderly of the attempt of betrayal from his men and warning him of the fate that would await anyone trying to betray their coalition. Another raven also warned Sansa about the failed conspiracy and the dangers she might be running in White Harbor. Theomore would make sure only she would see the message. This should keep the Manderlys quiet.

However, Tyrion missed Sansa's presence. He missed their nights together. Since she left, he had thought more than once to bring a camp follower into his tent, but he didn't in the end. Sansa was his wife now, and since his experience with Shae, he had lost a lot of interest in whores and camp followers. He missed her hair, her soft skin, her sweet smell. He missed the time they spent together at dinner, their discussions, their walks, all the time they spent together. Tyrion wondered if Sansa had delivered now. She had to be close to the end of her pregnancy. Tyrion regretted he couldn't be there for the birth of his first child. He wished he could have been there with Sansa, instead of leaving her alone with a bannerman whose loyalty that now they knew was questionable. He wouldn't see his first son or his first daughter come into the world.

Tyrion didn't know if his father had been present for his birth. He never talked about it, except when he reminded Tyrion of his role in his mother's death. Truth be told, Tyrion had never thought about the possibility of becoming a father one day. He never thought about what it implied. When he was young, all girls laughed at him, when he was lucky. He never thought he would marry. Then he had met Tysha and been happy with her for a fortnight. This hadn't been long enough to think about
starting a family. They never talked about it. He had just been happy to have someone who loved him. And then of course it had ended, and Tyrion hadn't thought about children furthermore.

Later, when his father told him he would marry Sansa, he said to Shae that he would make sure that their children would have everything they needed, only to be replied that they wouldn't have children if their grandfather would kill them if he ever learnt about their existence and that they could never see their father. Tyrion hadn't really thought about starting a family with Shae at the time. He had said that to reassure her, because he thought it could be a possibility in a far future, and also because he wanted Shae to know that they still had a future despite his marriage with Sansa. As for the children Tyrion thought he would eventually have with Sansa, he only saw it as a duty to his family. He never thought about what it actually meant to be a father. Now he was about to become one.

He wished so much that Sansa was present. They could talk about these things together, make plans for the future, maybe even think about how many children they wanted together. They never talked about these things. Their honey moon at Casterly Rock, after Sansa's name day, had been too short. There had been the false news about her sister, then the march through the Riverlands, the sieges of Riverrun and the Twins, the long months in the Neck, and then they were separated when Tyrion headed north while Sansa went east. They never took time, or had time, to discuss about it. Their thoughts were all focused on the war and freeing Winterfell. Tyrion wished there was a way for him to know how Sansa was. All he could do for her was to take back her home and give her back what was left of her family. If Rickon Stark was inside Winterfell, even though Tyrion still had doubts about it, he had to try to save him. Maybe the direwolf's head came from the time the Greyjoys burned the castle. The head could have been preserved with tar. And if Rickon Stark was in Winterfell, or had been there, then who knew what Ramsay could have done to him, or was doing to him right now?

Tyrion definitely couldn't sleep. He thought again about summoning a camp follower, and again he chased the idea from his head. He was married, to Sansa Stark none the less, and still he thought about bringing a whore into his bed, their bed, the one he shared with his wife so often, the one in which they conceived their child. Tyrion closed his eyes and thought about his wife. He could see her. She wore a red gown, like she often did lately. She was beautiful. So beautiful. Then the image blurred and he saw a great flame, and then a very long shadow. He was in the depths of Casterly Rock, where he used to make a fire and watch it for hours, imagining his father and his sister in it. He saw his father there, the great Tywin Lannister, burning. Then he heard a screech far away. Fire surrounded him. His father came out of the flames. "You disgraced the Lannister name for far too long," he said.

Guards appeared behind him. Tyrion recognized some of them. He could never forget them. A powerful voice rang into his ears, saying something in a language he never heard before. The guards began to scream, their arms and legs twisted, their armor sank into their flesh or melted on them. They fell all around and their bodies were consummated by fire. Tyrion's father stood before him, the face severe, and then something started to change in him. Cracks appeared all over his body, his tongue was out, his eyes were out of their orbits, and soon his body burst, throwing his organs everywhere. Tyrion saw the heart, still beating, eaten by the flames. He thought he heard something coming from it, a woman's voice, asking for something, a promise. Then his father's voice came out, but it was different from any way Tyrion ever heard his father talk. It only said two words. *I promise.*

The brain was being taken away by the flames as well, and his father's voice, sounding more like himself, came out of it. *It's the family name that lives on. It's all that lives on.* Tyrion watched his father's blood running on the floor, fire still all around. Tyrion realized at this moment that he held something into his hand. He held it so tight that blood began to came out from his palm as well. He opened his hand and looked at the jewel. It was so long ago. He thought he had forgotten it.
He woke up. It was useless. He wouldn't sleep this night. He got up and decided to follow Ser Davos's example and to walk. He brought four guards with him, just in case, and walked through the camp. He heard muffled noises coming out from many tents. This would be a profitable night for whores, if not a happy one. He knew there were women in the wildling army. Would the men of the North forget they were wildlings for a night? He left the Lannister-Tully camp to go the one Jon Snow erected for his own men. Maybe the bastard would still be awaken and they could talk more about everything that happened for each of them since they parted ways at the top of the Wall years ago.

Jon Snow's camp wasn't far away now. Only five minutes on feet were required to reach it. His war camp was more disorganized than the one where Tyrion's men were. It wasn't easy to make Freys, river lords, Northerners and Lannisters live together, but it seemed it was even worse when it came to do the same with Northerners and wildlings. Tyrion walked through the place, not really trying to find his half-brother-in-law. He only walked, just like Ser Davos said he would do himself. Until someone shouted at him with a booming voice.

"Didn't expect to see you here, Imp."

Tormund Giantsbane sat on a stump or something similar, his thick red beard looking brown in the night. "Can't sleep," Tyrion replied.

"You southerners cannot sleep before a battle."

"I could if I had my wife."

The sound the wildling made was somewhere between laughing and roaring. Maybe it was both. "Can't argue about that." He rose up from his stump and came to Tyrion, a clay cup in his hand. "Want some? Sour goat's milk. Better than any of that grape water you southern twats like sucking on."

Tyrion looked at the white liquid. He didn't think the wildling chief would try to poison him. In some way, he reminded Tyrion of Bronn. Tyrion seized the offered cup and drank carefully, to almost choke it out. Tormund made the same roaring laugh. Tyrion's throat was on fire. He had drunk a lot in his life, and many times he emptied strong wine jugs, but it seemed the wildlings defeated everyone in Westeros when it came to drinking.

"Even I couldn't sleep after this," Tyrion said.

"That's what I need to sleep before a battle. Can replace a girl very well." He took back the cup.

"Normally I drink before going to sleep, but before a battle I would rather keep my mind clear." Tyrion hadn't drunk before the Battle of Blackwater, and he didn't want to try the opposite for this one. "But without drink and without girls, I can't sleep."

"Finally, someone normal here." The wildling emptied the rest of the sour milk, then dropped the recipient on the ground. "Miss your wife?"

"I do."

He nodded. "Jon Snow told me she's kissed by fire."

"What?"

"Kissed by fire. Red hair."
"Oh, yes, she is." Tyrion understood what he meant now.

"Must be small, if you could keep her."

"We don't steal women south of the Wall." Not the way the wildlings does it. We have other methods, methods we believe to be more civilized, but in the end it's the same. We force them to marry us. "In fact, she's taller than her half-brother, and much taller than me."

Tormund looked at him very queerly. "You really have strange customs, you southerners." Tyrion could say the same about his people, but he kept it to himself. "Jon Snow had a girl, but didn't want to take her before she got naked before him. After that, he had her very often."

Tyrion frowned. "Jon Snow? He was with someone."

"While he was among us. Ygritte, that was her name. Kissed by fire. Redder than me. I would have taken her if I had been younger. Jon Snow captured the girl, then she escaped, but he ended with her nonetheless. Worried she would get pregnant or he would shame her, he said, and all other kind of stuff. All that stopped after they fucked the first time."

That was something Tyrion didn't expect. During his discussions with Jon Snow, he had come to realize that the boy was very shy around women and didn't want to take the risk of fathering bastards. That and the fact he was Ned Stark's son, Tyrion was quite ready to believe he would never lay with a woman, but it seemed he had been wrong. After all, Robb Stark failed a promise to marry a Frey girl for a woman from Essos. Sooner or later, every man fell in love, and when it happened, nor family, nor honor, nor promises, nor gods could stop him.

"Where is she now?" Maybe Jon Snow was with her, though he never mentioned her to Tyrion.

"Dead. Got an arrow through her heart at Castleblack. Jon Snow burned her body north of the Wall. That's where she belonged." He made a dry laugh. "She almost succeeded in making him one of us. I believed it myself. And he almost succeeded to make her betray us too. Neither of them succeeded in the end. She shot him three arrows in the back when he escaped us."

Well, that hadn't ended well. Tyrion thought about Shae who betrayed him at the trial. At least, she wasn't dead. "We always want the wrong woman," Tyrion said in a low voice. Tormund looked at him with a questioning gaze. "Nothing. I was looking for Jon Snow. Have any idea where he could be?"

"Last time I saw him, he was heading to visit the red witch."

"Well, I suppose I'll give her a visit too. Make sure you drink enough sour milk to gut every Bolton you come across tomorrow."

"With pleasure." The wildling said it while opening his arms and displaying a huge grin. It wasn't much more difficult to converse with these people than to converse with sellswords and drunk men. They were mostly the same.

It was only later, when Tormund Giantsbane was far away, that Tyrion realized he had no more idea about where the tent of the red priestess was than where Jon Snow's tent was. By chance, he ran into Lady Mira who came back from visiting her family and who indicated him where the tent in question was.

Tyrion found Jon Snow where Tormund said he would be. His back was turned to him and he talked with a woman with red hair who sat before a glass.
"Maybe he brought you here to die again," Tyrion heard the woman say as he came in. It didn't seem to be a very cheering conversation.

"What kind of god would do something like that?" Jon asked.

"The one we've got."

A long silence followed. Then Jon Snow turned to walk, only to face Tyrion. "I was never sure we had a god. Sorry to interrupt. I was told you were here," he said.

Jon Snow nodded. "Something important to tell me?" he asked.

"Not really. Only looking for company. I can't sleep, and I'm not the only one. Ser Davos and even your friend Tormund can't sleep. He's drinking sour milk."

"You drank some, didn't you?" asked Jon Snow, a smile at the corner of his lips.

"I did," Tyrion confessed. His expression surely betrayed him.

"I drank some, once, when I negotiated with Mance Rayder. He said it was a proper northern drink."

"If all wildlings only have that to drink, I understand why they want so much to get south of the Wall."

"A wise man would say we should try to get some sleep."

"Probably, but when have men ever been wise? We keep squabbling and fighting each other for crowns, for lands, for women, and in the end, no one wins. All the while, the dead wait for us to be weak enough to strike, and then we have nothing to oppose them."

"Maybe it's time to change that."

Tyrion couldn't agree more. If only the other northern lords thought the same. "Anyway, I can never sleep. I used to read and drink all night before, and to whore too, but I stopped when I married your sister. She also made me stop drinking. Almost."

Another grin. "Well, all the same, we should try to rest. When Winterfell is free, Sansa will come, and then we'll drink together. Good night, my friend."

On that, Jon Snow left. Tyrion realized the red priestess was looking at him. He had never met Melisandre of Asshai before, since she always stayed in Jon Snow's camp and seldom left her tent, but he knew more than enough about her. She had advised Stannis Baratheon, proclaimed him as the Lord's Chosen One, and burned people alive to have her god by Stannis's side. Judging from the results, both at Blackwater and at Winterfell, it hadn't worked out like she hoped. She wore a deep red gown, something Tyrion supposed was normal for someone serving the Lord of Light. Her face was pale, but gorgeous with generous lips. Her hair was so red that it almost seemed in fire. Sansa's hair looked pale in comparison. Tyrion would give her about forty years. She had to be about Cersei's age. His sister would be jealous before this woman. Some said she was Stannis's mistress. Remembering Selyse Baratheon, Tyrion couldn't blame the man.

The Red Woman kept staring at him and Tyrion grew uncomfortable. In other circumstances, he would have asked her question about Asshai and the other end of the world, since she came from there and that very few people ever visited it, but he didn't like the way she looked at him and he didn't really want to speak with a fanatic who burned people alive, even if she brought Jon Snow back to life. In fact, the latter didn't encourage him to speak with her. It scared him to know that this
woman could bring dead back to life.

"I'll take my leave, my lady." He walked away, but was stopped almost immediately.

"You cast a very long shadow for a small man, Tyrion Lannister," she said.

He turned towards her. "You're not the first one to tell me that. And the one who told me this before you was a man without a cock who despised your kind."

"Many people despise my kind."

"For good reasons."

She glanced aside. "I'm not looking for recognition, or love. I'm only trying to do the lord's will."

"What is the lord's will?"

"I don't know. Not for sure. I only try to do what seems to be his will."

"And you believed his will was that Stannis sits on the Iron Throne?"

"I thought Stannis was the savior. A prince born amidst salt and smoke, with the blood of the dragon. I was wrong. Maybe there is a savior. Maybe there isn't one and he is yet to come."

"For myself, I don't believe in saviors."

"What do you believe in then?"

Tyrion sighed. "Everyone's always asking me to believe in things. Family, gods, kings, myself. It was often tempting, even now it is tempting. We like to believe in things, and I wanted me too, until I saw where belief got people. So I said no, thank you to belief."

"We all believe in something."

"Not me."

"What do you think of Jon Snow?" she asked.

"Dull, a lot, but honorable, and we can always count on him. He's a lot like his father. I suppose I should thank you for bringing him back."

"I didn't bring him back. The Lord did this."

"Well, anyway." A moment passed. "I don't believe he's a savior, if that's what you're asking. He's not the only one who came back from the dead, if I'm to believe Thoros of Myr. I don't think a savior will come out from nowhere to save us. But I think men of talents, together, could find a way to defeat the White Walkers."

"So you believe in something."

Tyrion smirked after a moment. "On that, you got me. I'll be going."

"I don't know what are the plans of the Lord of Light for you, Lord Tyrion, but I believe you'll have an important role to play in the war to come. So don't lose tomorrow, and don't get yourself killed."

"I'm not about to wish to die."
He walked away for good this time. He couldn't die, not right now. He had Sansa, and their child, and the North to secure. He couldn't die right now when his life was finally beginning to mean something. He would give back her home to Sansa, and if Tyrion found out that Ramsay Bolton had hurt her brother in any way, even by only making a single scratch on his skin, he would find a way to make him suffer more than any way Cersei could think about.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry for all those who hoped this might be the Battle of Bastards. You know how I love to delay things just to spite you :D

There's only one chapter taking place in Meereen left before the battle, I promise.

Please review

Next chapter: Kinvara
Kinvara II

Chapter Notes

The Battle of Meereen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

KINVARA II

Boulders on fire fell everywhere around them. A great part of the city was burning. They tried to contain the fire to the eastern part, but when the nearest water point was the harbor, and that the harbor was closed and evacuated, it was a great challenge to find enough water to keep the fire at bay. Meereen was plagued with fire as much as she was by traitors, assassins and slavers. Evil had taken his hold on the city.

However, evil hadn't won yet. The people were fighting, against the fires if not against the fleet. The Unsullied kept defending the pyramids, from where they could launch attacks everywhere. The Seconds Sons and the Fiery Hand fought against the Sons of the Harpy and everyone helped to evacuate the population who lived in the eastern part of the city to the western part, where fire was kept away and that the projectiles the fleet threw couldn't reach.

Kinvara kept praying. She was in a house on the terrain where the future Red Temple of Meereen was in construction. For now, the construction had been stopped because of the attack, but it would start again once this was all over. A part of the city was afire, but fire was a gift from the Lord of Light. As long as there was fire, they couldn't be defeated. Boulders didn't hit the place where she was, although it wasn't far from the sea and the harbor. Fire didn't reach it either. Fire couldn't burn places dedicated to the Lord of Light. Daenerys Stormborn was back. The masters didn't know what was waiting for them. They couldn't defeat the servants of the Lord of Light alone. Fire only made them more powerful.

Kinvara wasn't accompanied by any priest. It was time. A great many years ago, to the day, she made her vows. She became a priestess of R'hllor. It seemed so far away, and yet, it was so close. She had to do it alone, and anyway the other priests were all required to rescue the people still near the harbor, to fight the Sons of the Harpy and help installing the refugees. She emptied her mind, only thinking about her Lord, closed her eyes, and began her prayer in High Valyrian.

R'hllor, Lord of Light, Heart of Fire, God of Flame and Shadow

The only true god, who was, who is, and who will ever be

Source of life, origin of joy, goodness itself

I am your servant, my life is yours, as is all life

I am nothing next to you.
I am your servant.

I am your voice.

I am your arm.

The prayer was long. It lasted for an hour. As she prayed, she had glimpses, signs and images that her Lord sent to her. She saw a ship afire. She saw a young woman with blond hair on the back of a dragon. She saw a body on marble. She saw a sword covered with blood, a golden hand next to it. She saw dragons flying over a great castle in a mountain. She saw a great wall made of ice and rock. She saw a shadow on the floor in a cavern. She heard the cries of a baby. She saw two knights with a three-headed dragon fighting half a dozen men near a tower in a country of sand. She saw a great battle in the snow. She had already seen much of it, but she didn't think about that. She let the images, the sounds, the smells pass through her mind, seeing them but not trying to keep them. R'hllor gave them to her, and it wasn't her place to decide if she should keep them longer than he wanted.

Once the prayer was over, she waited, her mind entirely set on R'hllor. She looked into the flames that appeared while she prayed, waiting for something to be seen into them. Shapes began to appear, but they weren't clear enough to have any meaning she could grab. She waited. She waited for a very long time. Precise forms began to pour into the fire. It was snowing. That was a great storm. She saw a long line of men riding in the snow. They were tired. That was the time. That was her vision.

She focused all her attention on it, trying to decipher as many details as she could. She could see the faces of the men riding. Her heart stopped for a moment. An arrow flew and a man died. She brought her attention back to all the line of men. Arrows flew everywhere and more people died. A body was in the snow pierced by half a dozen arrows, but it still moved. Horses attacked from both sides. Death was everywhere. It didn't last long. Everyone was killed. No one survived. No one but a man. He crawled away. The storm continued. He was half dead, and soon snow covered him. Life was leaving him, the heat abandoning his body, the fire fading. Everything went dark. A great shadow loomed over him. It was a very great shadow. It took him, bringing him away from the world of the living. She saw fire in the south.

Kinvara emerged from the vision, panting and sweating, though her magic hid the sweat. Even someone who would touch her wouldn't feel the sweat. It was always like that every year. The worst time had been the year after she said her vows. Or maybe it was two years ago. She was unable to say if this one was really worse, but she couldn't allow herself to think about it now. They were at war, and Daenerys Stormborn needed her.

There wasn't much in Kinvara's chamber, except for a bed, a chair close to the hearth, a desk with another chair in a corner, and a small altar with a recipient where fire took life when needed. That was before this altar that she made her prayer. She brought the altar to life again, summoning her powers to reach her fellow priests. One by one, their faces appeared before her, the flames taking their shape. Yonerro, with tanned skin and deep black eyes, who was in Yunkai right now, appeared first. Then came Tishae, her hair dyed in red, skin white as milk, a flat nose along with pale blue eyes. Native from Lorath, Kinvara had sent her to Astapor, the smallest city of all. Finally, Moqorro's black face, dark as pitch, with pure white hair like the mane of a lion, was the last to take place. They all bowed to her, though Kinvara noticed Moqorro's hesitation.

"How are things going for each of you?" she asked them.

"The western bank is entirely under our control, as is the Long Bridge," Moqorro said fiercely. "The fighting is going well on the eastern bank. All the districts of the west and half of those from the east
are in our hands now."

"What about the districts inside the Black Walls? And the harbor?"

"We haven't taken them yet. The Black Walls are almost impossible to take. The immediate districts around them escape our hold. We're focusing our energies on the docks."

"Keep focusing our forces there. If we take the harbor, we can control everything that leaves and enter the city. The masters and the triarchs mustn't be allowed to keep this part of the city, or else they could attack the western bank by sea and bring help from the other Free Cities."

"We're going to imprison them into their walls and starve them out," declared Morroqo.

"That will be impossible. They have enough food to last for years. A siege would be impossible to maintain for that much time. We must bring the masters to surrender."

"That's impossible without starving them. We cannot take the walls, and we have no traitor inside who could help us to open the gates. The only option is starvation."

Kinvara sighed inwardly. For once, she was glad to have Morroqo's military knowledge on her side, but the Lord of Light didn't give to a single man all its gifts. The Second Servant of the Lord of Light was no good when it came to politics.

"The people won't hold if they must starve the masters inside the Black Walls. Or else the slaves might starve as well, with a conflict without ending. Take the harbor and make sure the forces of the masters don't go too far from the walls."

"And then?"

"You wait." Morroqo was obviously displeased... and angry. "Daenerys Stormborn is back in Meereen, with her dragons."

The other priests all looked surprised, and overjoyed. All of them except Morroqo. "I foresaw it," he said.

"As did I."

They both looked at each other with a calm expression, but in fact both hated the other, and they knew it. Morroqo always said that Kinvara wasn't ready to do what was necessary for the Lord of Light. Morroqo believed the red priests should rule the cities and bring the people into the Lord's light this way. Kinvara didn't approve. The Lord of Light didn't want them to rule in his stead. He wanted them to guide the people, not to force them to follow him. At most, they had to help the rulers when their Lord wanted them to, but nothing more. She had been very reluctant to leave Volantis, because it meant Morroqo would lead the Red Temple in her absence. She had had no choice. As the Second Servant of the Lord of Light, it was to Morroqo that came the duty to lead the red priests in Volantis while the First Servant, Kinvara in that case, was away. The longer time she spent far from Volantis, the more dangerous Morroqo would become.

"How many masters did you execute since the rebellion started?" Kinvara asked to black skinned man.

"Most of those we captured were murdered by the crowd. We also sacrificed one each day in plain sight of the guards on the Black Walls."

Fury flared inside Kinvara. "No more sacrifices. And stop the people from slaughtering the masters."
We want those inside the Walls to surrender. If they think they will be murdered by their former slaves as soon as they leave the safety of their walls, they will never surrender."

"Do we really want them to surrender?"

"Yes. We want freedom for the people of Volantis, but it would be very regretful if there were only a few left to be free after all this."

"The masters and the triarchs will never surrender."

"Once we've destroyed their fleet in Meereen, yes, they will. Now go. I remind you of your orders. No sacrifice, no murder of masters, take the harbor. You're dismissed, Morroqo."

She said it firmly. Morroqo bowed his head after a moment. "Yes, First Servant."

His image disappeared. Kinvara closed her eyes. It was a relief for her to be rid of the tall priest. She looked at Yonerro.

"What about Yunkai?"

"There have been several riots and five masters have been murdered by their slaves. The Wise Masters have brought several companies of sellswords who patrol the streets of Yunkai and kill everyone they suspect. The city is falling into chaos, but the masters remain safe inside their houses. We couldn't organize a resistance against the sellswords. There aren't enough people who follow us. Two of my fellow priests have been killed. We must hide."

He said all of this with a very grave voice. His voice was always grave, but this time it was more than usual. Kinvara understood that things didn't go well at all. "Keep a low profile for some time. Don't try anything that could get you killed. I'll speak to you again when the situation in Meereen will have evolved. Just don't leave Yunkai at all cost." She turned to the last priest, the only one who was a woman. "And in Astapor?"

"The city is already ours. Many of the richest masters in Astapor came from Yunkai or Volantis. Daenerys Stormborn murdered most of the original Good Masters when she freed the Unsullied. The new masters are but little loved by the people in the city, both freedmen and slaves. We managed to rise the slaves against their masters again and most of the freedmen joined us. Right now, we organize a government ruled both by freedmen and former slaves. I'm going to have a seat on it."

"Good. When Yunkai hears about that, they might send companies of sellswords against you. Be prepared."

"There's already a company outside the walls, the Stormcrows, but for now they haven't tried anything."

"More might come. Be careful, Tishae." She looked at both of them. "Wait for the next time I summon you."

Their faces faded. Kinvara left her room. She had to go to the Great Pyramid and quickly. Two men of the Fiery Hand were waiting for her in the lobby and six more outside the house. Zanrush was waiting outside as well.

"High Priestess, we moved most of the people living near the zone of bombardment," he told her as they walked toward the Great Pyramid. Explosions were heard everywhere around them as projectiles fell on the city. It was obvious now why the Sons of the Harpy burned the fleet of Meereen. Without ships, they couldn't do anything against the fleet of Volantis. "We managed to
help some Unsullied to retreat from the walls as well."

"Very good."

"Why hasn't the queen done anything yet?"

"It could be dangerous to ride her dragons in the night. She will do something very soon, rest…"

Cries came from their right. A man with a golden mask attacked them from this direction, a dagger pointed toward her, but the guard next to her plunged his spear through him before he could get to her. The spear travelled from the right side to the left side of his body. The mask was made in the shape of a harpy. Others popped from all around, trying to get to her. Her guards, however, came from Volantis, and they were the elite of the Fiery Hand. At least ten Sons of the Harpy died trying to get to her, and not a single guard died. Zanrush unsheathed a sword he hid under his robes. He killed two men with it. However, that wasn't enough. More men hiding behind masks came. They didn't dare to attack them. They stayed at distance, blocking the street from both sides. There was a dozen of them before their group, and a dozen behind as well.

The Lord of Light didn't warn her about this. Was it her end? No, that couldn't be. She still had a part to play. The Lord wasn't done with her yet. If he didn't warn her, it was probably because he thought she didn't need to be warned. Kinvara summoned her powers. She created a link with all her men and with Zanrush, telling them to wait. Then she turned against the Sons of the Harpy waiting before them, all with daggers in hand. She created an illusion of twenty more guards of the Fiery Hand behind them, and made one of the false guard shout at them. They all turned. She gave the signal.

Six guards assaulted the twelve Sons of the Harpy who had turned their back to them. It was a slaughter. The others, behind them, decided to attack after a moment of hesitation caused by the surprise, but the two other guards who remained behind were enough to keep them at bay, and Kinvara blinded one of the assailants. It was only temporary, but it made the movements of the servants of the Great Other more difficult. Zanrush and the other guards had enough time to come back. The men who hid behind masks died for the most. Only one managed to escape. Kinvara summoned her powers one last time, even if it cost her a lot, and blinded him as well. He fell on the ground, incapable of seeing anything for a moment, as if the sun had appeared right before him. Zanrush ran to him and plunged his sword into his eye.

Kinvara sighed. She managed to not stumble from the great amount of energy she just used. She had entered the head of nine people at the same time, dazzled two men and created a huge illusion without anything to start with. It was easier to maintain an illusion for a long time when you placed it over something that was already there, like changing the appearance of a person. This time, she had to create something from nothing. Entering her guards' minds hadn't been too difficult, since she had done it before, but for Zanrush, it was the first time she did it. She closed her eyes and allowed herself one second to regain her senses.

"We should go. Before others try to attack us. May the Lord of Light watch over us," she said.

They were on their way without a word. Almost everyone in the Red Temple obeyed her. Morroqo was an exception, one of the few people who contested her decisions, though he never openly questioned her authority. Kinvara was under shock as they climbed the stairs to the top of the Great Pyramid. The Sons of the Harpy were growing bolder. They attacked a red priestess, and the High Priestess among all. Maybe this also showed they were desperate and now truly saw her as a threat. It was time for Daenerys Stormborn to put an end to the crimes of the masters and their mercenaries.

They arrived in the council room. Everyone else was already present. Grey Worm, Malcolm Branfield, Trystane Martell, and even Lord Varys. Of course, Daenerys Targaryen was there as well.
"You're late," she said.

Kinvara bowed to her. She never mastered the curtsy, and anyway it wasn't useful anywhere in Essos. "Forgive me, your Grace. We were attacked on our way by the Sons of the Harpy."

"You escaped them?"

"Yes, they're all dead. My guards and I took care of that."

"Good."

Kinvara could still barely believe it. Daenerys Stormborn, the Mother of Dragons, the Breaker of Chains, stood before her. She had this vision of a young woman with blond hair on a dragon for so long, and it was real. R'hllor kept his promise. He showed her the future. With Daenerys Targaryen back, they could really hope to defeat the masters and the other servants of the Great Other. She could feel the power inside her. She felt it before in some people, who probably had Valyrian blood, but nothing like this. Daenerys Stormborn's dragon blood was pure. Kinvara could feel its power before she saw the one who was promised. There was also something else in her that she had the impression to have felt or seen before.

"Now," began the Queen of Meereen, "Prince Trystane of House Martell, you're the one who ruled Meereen while I was away?"

"I did." The prince obviously didn't feel well.

"Grey Worm, Branfield, may I know how did it come to happen?"

Grey Worm was the one to answer after a moment. "The nobility of Meereen didn't manage to rule the city together. We thought Prince Trystane had more abilities to run it than everyone else here."

An inquisitive look from Daenerys to Malcolm Branfield brought a shrug from the man, meaning he had the same thoughts. "So, you gave the city to a foreigner whose loyalty you couldn't be sure of? Seeing how things are, I wouldn't say it was a good choice."

Kinvara pitied Trystane on that. "Your Grace, if I may, the masters would have attacked no matter what we did. It was their intent to take Meereen from the beginning. They burnt the fleet on purpose. This attack was planned a long time ago. No matter anything anyone would have done, we would be under attack right now. Meereen couldn't be abandoned by the Unsullied while they tried to retake Yunkai and Astapor, or else it could have fallen to the Sons of the Harpy."

Daenerys looked at her sharply. "I heard your men fought side by side with the Unsullied and the Second Sons."

"They are at your disposal, your Grace."

"Very well." She turned to the eunuch. "As for you, Lord Varys, I have no reason to trust you. You oversaw a campaign to have me killed for twenty years and worked for the usurper all this time. I let you live for now since you warned us about the coming fleet, but you'll have to explain yourself later." Varys respectfully bowed his head without saying a word.

Daenerys Stormborn looked at Trystane Martell once more. "But you, Prince Trystane, why should I trust you, seeing to what your rule led?"

"My aunt was married to your brother, your Grace," he began to explain. "She was savagely killed by the men of the usurper when the city was taken. My family never forgot. Ever since, my father
has been working to undermine Robert Baratheon and Tywin Lannister. He remained loyal to your house."

The queen considered the prince for a moment. "I read the contract your uncle and Ser Willem Darry made a long time ago. However, I never received any help from Dorne before. The last time I looked, Prince Doran made an alliance with the Lannisters. He even betrothed his son to the sister of the usurper. And you were the son who was betrothed."

The prince obviously had a hard time. It was always difficult for him to hear someone speak about Myrcella Baratheon. Kinvara had seen it over the previous months. "That was an act. My father never planned for me to marry the princess Myrcella. Anyway, she was assassinated not long ago in Dorne."

"On your father's orders?"

"No. But it doesn't matter. The Lannisters and the Tyrells have declared war upon us. We have enough men to defend our territory, but not to take the Iron Throne by ourselves. My father will give you the full strength of Dorne to take it back, but he needs you to come to Westeros to take it. As soon as you set foot on the land, he will support your claim officially."

"And I suppose he wants me to marry you instead of your dead brother."

Trystane nodded very timidly. "He sent me there to propose it to you, but when I arrived…"

"I wasn't there. We'll discuss about it later. For now, we have more pressing issues. We must deal with this invasion. I won't let the masters get away with that, this time. I gave them the choice to live into my new world or to die in their old world. It seems they chose the latter."

"We need to destroy the fleet, but we have no ships to oppose them," said Malcolm Branfield. "We need a plan, and soon."

"I have a plan," said the queen, very calmly. "I will crucify the masters, I will set their fleets afire, kill every last one of their soldiers, and return their cities to the dirt." A silence followed. "That is my plan."

The silence that followed her last sentence was thick. Kinvara didn't stop looking at the queen. She wasn't joking. That was her real plan. Kinvara wanted to see the masters die, it was true, as much as most of the slaves who suffered in their hands, but there were masters in Volantis who followed R’hllor, and even though they had slaves, some didn't mistreat them. There was another reason why she didn't agree with Daenerys Stormborn's plans.

The Mother of Dragons noticed that Kinvara was looking at her. While the others seemed afraid and looked away, she stared at Daenerys. "You don't approve?" she asked the priestess. Kinvara wouldn't look down. When she became a priestess, she stopped looking down when so called superior people looked at her like she was nothing.

"The men on these ships in the bay are slaves, for the most. The other soldiers in the armies of Volantis, Yunkai and Astapor are slaves as well. A large number of the people living in the Free Cities are slaves too. They are their cities, as much as they are the masters'. And even among the masters, there are some who don't deserve to die. Right now, masters are fighting alongside other freedmen and slaves in the other cities against your enemies, your Grace. They're not all against you. These are your allies you will crucify, these are slaves you will burn with these ships, these are slaves you will slaughter by killing the soldiers, and these are the homes of slaves you will burn when you will destroy the cities."
Daenerys Stormborn kept looking at her. Her face remained neutral. Kinvara saw no hint of hatred or anger, but nor of doubt or regret, or even of meditation. Kinvara held her gaze. She faced worse eyes than those of Daenerys Stormborn.

"Your Grace." Prince Trystane talked very carefully.

Daenerys Stormborn kept looking at Kinvara for a long time, not giving any attention to the prince of Dorne. She turned her head in the end, not without still looking at Kinvara from the corner of her eye while she turned it. She finally brought her attention to the prince.

"If I may, your Grace, when your ancestors invaded Westeros, all the kingdoms submitted to their rule. All but Dorne. My own ancestors fought against the Targaryens and resisted. They had less men, no dragons, and were less well armed than Aegon and his allies. Their castles were burned to the ground, their homes destroyed, the people were slaughtered. Still, they resisted. The First Dornish War cost the life to Rhaenys Targaryen, the sister of King Aegon. There were many other wars, and for two hundred years our ancestors fought, without results. You will only accomplish the same thing here if you simply destroy the cities. You will only create for yourself life long enemies. You'll have to fight them forever."

It was obvious now that everyone in the room disapproved the plan of the Dragon Queen. Trystane Martell may be of high birth, but in this case he had more savvy than many slaves, red priests or even freedmen who thought all masters should simply die and that every mean possible was good to reach that goal.

"I may have another solution. Something that wouldn't involve the death of hundreds of thousand people or the ruin of entire cities," Kinvara said.

They listened to her plan. When they all agreed, the queen sent a messenger to the fleet. Then they waited. Two hours later, they went to a large terrace where the emissaries would join them.

"I do hope your plan works out well, priestess," told her Daenerys Stormborn.

"If it doesn't work out well, you can still burn the fleet, Your Grace, but I doubt it will be necessary," she replied.

They waited there with a dozen of Unsullied. All members of the queen's council were there, except for Lord Varys who remained under watch in his chamber. The fights were still going on in the city and the ships kept throwing boulders on it. They wanted to destroy Meereen, not to take it. They wanted to prove that any city that would turn away from slavery was condemned to ruin. Kinvara wouldn't let that happen.

The same ambassadors who had negotiated with Trystane Martell and her months ago came. Yezzan zo Qaggaz, Razdal mo Eraz and Belicho Paenymion all had a satisfied smile on their faces. Their contempt was their weakness. It would always be their weakness. The triarch especially looked more arrogant than ever. He had that smile that Kinvara would never forget. She didn't hide her hatred to him., but he didn't flinch when their eyes met.

"We didn't expect you would want to talk. We expected you would rather die inside your pyramid, rather than face us," said Razdal to the queen without introduction. "Once before, I offered you peace. If you had not been so arrogant, you could have returned to your homeland with a fleet of ships. Instead, you will flee Slaver's Bay on foot like the beggar queen you are."

"You certainly love to listen to yourself, master, but we don't, and your men don't either," Kinvara said. She heard enough highborn people talking like they owned the world and as if everyone was
interested by what they said. 

"You're not in position to say anything, red woman," said Belicho with spite. He didn't shudder like he usually did in her presence. This would probably be the last time it ever happened. Kinvara held her head high and kept staring at him. He knew nothing.

"Our terms are simple," began the ambassador of Astapor. "You and your foreign friends will abandon the Great Pyramid and the city of Meereen. The Unsullied you stole from Kraznys mo Nakloz will remain to be sold again to the highest bidder. The dragons beneath the Great Pyramid will be slaughtered."

They were fools. If they ever approached the dragons, the beasts would burn them alive. Of course, the masters would send a thousand slaves to death to kill the dragons. As usual, they would use the people as arrow's fodder, dragon's fodder in this case.

"We obviously didn't communicate clearly. We're here to discuss your surrender, not mine," said the queen.

The three ambassadors looked at each other with huge grins, almost laughing. "I imagine it's difficult adjusting to the new reality," said Razdal.

"You couldn't say better," Kinvara interrupted. "You cannot adapt to the new reality. I warned you, the last time we met. I told you the slaves wouldn't abandon their liberty."

"We have nothing to hear from fanatics who make the people believe they have powers with powders and tricks," said the triarch with disdain.

"Then I suppose you don't want to hear that half of Volantis is now controlled by the red priests and your slaves. The masters and the other triarchs are hiding behind walls and are cut from their precious harbor. Without harbor, they have no money. Yunkai is in civil war, riots are breaking up everywhere in the city. And the slaves have taken the city of Astapor. You represent a government that doesn't exist anymore, merchant," she said to Yezzan zo Qaggaz.

"You're lying," said Belicho.

"I never lie," replied Kinvara. She felt the fire coming. It was close. She saw it.

"That's enough. Your reign is over," declared the emissary from Yunkai.

"My reign has just begun," said the queen.

They heard muffled screeches coming from right in front of them. The masters and some of their soldiers looked behind to see the source of that sound. Then it appeared out of nowhere. The black dragon. He flew around them, then landed before Daenerys Stormborn. The queen climbed on his back. Kinvara saw her giving kicks and the dragon took fly. Kinvara looked at it, marvelling at the sight. She saw the other two dragons before, but in the dark, and they were far less impressing than this one. She could feel the power emanating from it. It was the same magic she felt in their mother. Fire made flesh. The fire in the skies. Lightbringer.

She felt something else stirring, several floors under them. She felt them getting free and couldn't stop smiling. Two more dragons joined the biggest one. Trystane Martell would have to revise his opinion about her decision to visit the dragons. If she hadn't freed them, they wouldn't be flying, spreading fire. The ships were still firing. They wouldn't be the only ones soon. The three dragons stopped in the air over one of them, then unleashed their sacred fire. Kinvara felt their power as it was released. She also felt death. Lord of Light, guide them to you. Show them the way. She regretted they had to
kill slave soldiers who had no choice in being there, but sometimes sacrifices must be made to ensure victory. She wouldn't forget these men's deaths. She remembered a man she called Father once, speaking of how evil men set fire to their house and many others. The people who died weren't lost. She watched the dragons turn to a second ship and set it ablaze as well. It wouldn't be long before all the armada surrendered. Even from afar, she could glimpse the men jumping overboard.

She turned to the masters, displaying the same arrogant expression they had a minute ago and that was now gone from their face. "Once before, we offered you peace. If you had not been so arrogant, you could have kept your power, your armies, your ships, your riches, your influence, your titles and only lose your slaves. Instead, you will lose everything now," she declared, looking intently to Razdal. Then her gaze turned to Belicho.

"Your men have a choice," said Grey Worm in Low Valyrian. The masters understood it, even if they never used it, but most important, their men understood and used it daily. "Fight and die for masters who would never fight and die for you, or go home to your families."

The choice wasn't hard to make. The soldiers behind the three emissaries ran away, dropping their weapons. More lives that were spared. Kinvara thanked the Lord.

"Thank you for all the ships. They will make a fine replacement for the ones you burned, and that will spare me the trouble of rebuilding our fleet," declared Malcolm Branfield, not without a smile.

"My father once told me that he believed in second chances, but not in third chances," stated Prince Trystane. "Our queen gave you a chance when she took your cities. We gave you a second one when we spoke. We made a treaty of peace, and you just broke it. You declared war to Meereen. It so happens that our queen is of the same mind than my father. She is fond of mercy, but she doesn't believe in third chances either."

"Daenerys Stormborn, the Breaker of Chains and the Mother of Dragons, decided that one of you will die for your crimes against Meereen," said Kinvara. "The choice is yours. I suggest you to think very carefully when you decide who dies."

The three men were at loss. One moment they thought they were all powerful, and the next their fate laid in the hands of former slaves. Yezzan zo Qaggaz, who represented the now fallen government of the Good Masters of Astapor, and who just seemed to realize that it was the truth, stood between the other two. Razdal mo Eraz and Belicho Paenymion looked right there and pushed their colleague forward.

"Him. He should die. He's not one of us. He's an outsider, lowborn. He does not speak for us," said the Yunkaii.

"Yes, him. That's him you must kill," added the triarch of Volantis.

Grey Worm started to walk to them, but before he could make a few steps, Kinvara put a hand on his arm. The Unsullied looked at her strangely, but he stopped all the same. Kinvara was the one to advance. Yezzan was a merchant. He was born among the nobility, though not the highest one. He had made his own fortune in the trade of slaves. He was about to lose this trade now, and his life too. Fear was plain on his face, while fear and hope fought with the other's.

"Please. Please," asked the merchant, falling on his knees as Kinvara stood before him.

She looked down on him. How long did she have to lower her eyes and to kneel or crouch before men who said they were superior? Now it was the opposite. However, she wasn't satisfied. She looked at Razdal who still stood tall.
"On your knees. Bend them," she ordered him. Leftovers of pride made him hesitate, but he knelt.

She turned to Belicho, who knelt immediately. He was the most highborn and the most powerful of them all, and yet he was the one who fell the most easily because he feared for his life. She kept staring at him. Her medallion at her throat glowed and her true self appeared to the triarch of Volantis. He opened his mouth in surprise. Only him could see her as she truly was.

"You don't recognize me, don't you?"

She penetrated in his mind, asking him this question without moving her lips. No, he didn't recognize her. Even without her spells to hide her true self, he didn't remember her. However, she did remember him. She remembered him very well.

Quick as the lighting that produced fire, she took a dagger hidden inside her robes and planted it in the man's neck.

"You don't remember me, but I do remember you. All the girls you raped to test the merchandises before you sold them remember you, Belicho Paenymion. You enjoyed being inside of us. Now pay the price."

With a swift movement, she withdrew the blade from his throat and opened it. She sent her words to his mind as he died. Her words were all that occupied his mind as life left his body, as he choked in his own blood. She saw the man who raped her when she arrived in Volantis, just like he raped so many other young girls to be sure they were nice products, die, feeling great satisfaction. Revenge, at last. She cleaned the blade from the blood covering it. It was a sacred dagger, blessed by R'hllor, and she wouldn't soil it with a monster's blood longer than necessary.

She made a few steps behind and looked at the two remaining masters. "Now, decide which one of you will die," she said.

"But, you told us…" began Razdal.

"The queen asked that one of you dies for your crimes against Meereen. This man died for other crimes he committed. Now, choose which one of you will die for your common crimes against this city."

She looked at Grey Worm, who came at her side. Both the masters were pleading now. Yezzan was crouched on the ground, his head against the sand, while Razdal still knelt. Grey Worm unsheathed his knife and cut Razdal's throat. Kinvara approved the choice, though she didn't feel much pity for Yezzan either.

She looked down on him and put her hand on his shoulder. "You live by the grace of the queen. Tell everyone what you saw today. If anyone comes again with the idea of pulling back slaves into chains, to invade the great city of Meereen or to bring back the Free Cities to what they call glory, remind them what happened when Daenerys Stormborn and her dragons came to Meereen."

She spoke to him on a soft tone, to make him understand he had every interest to do so. She walked to the border of the terrace and looked at the bay. The dragons had stopped throwing their fire. Half a dozen ships were ablaze, and the others were intact and unmoving. They had their fleet. The Lord's Chosen One would have to sail for Westeros soon. The great war was coming.

Kinvara would have to follow her to Westeros. The first part of her mission was ended. The second part was about to begin. She looked at the three dragons, flying high over the fleet. They were beautiful. She smiled while looking at the Mother of Dragons riding her large black dragon. She had
foreseen it for so long. Now she saw it for real. Her vision overlapped the reality. R'hllor didn't lie to her. He never lied. The young woman with blond hair, flying on the back of a dragon. Her smile faded as she looked at another dragon.

Chapter End Notes

When I wrote this chapter, I tried to illustrate the order of the red priests, or at least the one from Volantis, as a religious organization, but also as a political organization, with its own rules, its own government and its own internal power struggles. The red priests are surrounded by mysticism and magic, but they are also humans (see the doubts of Thoros of Myr in Season 3 about his own faith and Melisandre's chapter in ADWD) and they have the same flaws and qualities as any other people.

I also keep forging a personality to Kinvara. I'm mostly turning her into an original character since there wasn't much we could tell about her from her short appearance in Season 6.

Please review

Next chapter: Battle of Bastards (Yes, finally. The battle will be split in four chapters from four different POV.)
The Battle of Bastards, or the Second Battle of Winterfell. Four chapters, each one from a different POV. Sorry for the delay, but my thesis took a lot of my time lately.

She was woken up by someone who shook her shoulder. She met the eyes of Howland Reed as she opened hers. He placed a finger on his lips.

"I brought you everything necessary," he said.

He pointed his chin towards the ground near Arya's bed. In the darkness, she discerned a huge bag with something glistening through the opening. A helmet.

"Thank you," she said in a whisper, all smile.

"Let's start right now. You must be ready. The sun is about to rise."

Arya looked through the flap of the tent. It was closed, but through the small slit she distinguished a dark blue sky. Dawn wasn't far indeed.

Howland Reed helped her to don the complete set of armor he brought for her. There was everything she needed. A helmet, a chainmail, an armor in leather with the arms of House Cerwyn, and even a sword, a real sword. It felt heavy when Arya took it. It was far heavier than Needle.

"Where did you find all this?" she asked, as the Lord of Greywater Watch helped to place the belt around her waist.

"There are surpluses everywhere. I picked the things that looked the most at your height. Here."

He placed the helmet on her head. Then he stepped back and looked at her. A smile appeared on his face.

"You make me think more than ever about your aunt."

Arya felt as if she was in a cage, but if all men carried these on their back during battle and could suffer it, then she could as well. Lord Reed had accepted to help her so she may go unnoticed in the army. Jon had refused her to participate to the battle, but Arya didn't care about what he said. She wouldn't stand aside while her brother fought, especially not when Rickon's life was at stake. She was of a very good mind to kill Ramsay, if only for killing Shaggydog. She had added him on her list and he was at the top of it right now. She would take care of Beric Dondarrion and Thoros of Myr later, and maybe of that red witch as well. First, she would have to find out if she really brought Jon back to life. It seemed so impossible for Arya. However, she saw Thoros bring Beric back to life in that cave and Jon wouldn't lie to her. She wished she had been able to kill those who stabbed him, but she didn't blame Jon for killing them himself. That was his right.

"I must go now," Howland said.
"You'll be in the first ranks?"

"No. I'll be with the bulk of the forces. However, you will be in the vanguard, with that tabard of House Cerwyn. Be careful, Arya. Don't get yourself killed."

"I won't."

She had survived worse than battles and she wouldn't die when she was about to go back into her home and take it back from the men who murdered Robb and her mother. When her father's friend was gone, Arya waited for a moment. Then she crouched onto the floor and took something under her bed. She took it off the scabbard and looked at the blade. It wasn't entirely identical, but it was close to the one she had. Needle was with her again.

Jon had brought her a new one yesterday, before she went to bed. Apparently, he ordered a new one from the blacksmith Lyanna Mormont brought from Bear Island, giving him as much detail about it to have a sword exactly like the one he gave her before they left Winterfell. The result wasn't bad. Arya missed Needle for a very long time. It was probably kept somewhere at the Eyrie. She may get it back the day they would kill Littlefinger, but in the meantime, she would contend herself with this one.

Jon had been smiling when he gave it to her last evening, just like he smiled the day he gave her the first one. She missed those days. She missed her home. She looked outside. People were beginning to move around and it had turned more clear. The battle would be soon. She placed back Needle into its scabbard. First lesson: stick them with the pointy end. She would stick Ramsay with it, and poke him full of holes. She was quick enough for that now. She hid the second Needle under the leather jacket to make it less visible. She didn't want to be recognized among the men.

The call to arms came soon and Arya went out. She merged among Lord Cerwyn's men and managed to get her hands on a horse. She spoke to no one, and no one bothered speaking to her. When Lord Cerwyn spoke to all of them and they all had to answer, she used a booming voice to hide the fact she was a girl. Then they followed him to the battlefield, where they took place at the edge of the Wolfswood. The Cerwyn forces were in the center of the vanguard. She missed Needle for a long time. It was probably kept somewhere at the Eyrie. She may get it back the day they would kill Littlefinger, but in the meantime, she would contend herself with this one.

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On the right side, only a few banners could be seen as well. The mountain clans had been placed there. There were also the Freys who made the left flank of the vanguard with their cavalry. Arya hated to see them here. She also saw the golden lion and the silver trout who closed the right flank. Behind them, only trees were visible. Arya thought she saw something move. Ahead of them stood many crosses with dead bodies burning. They were in the space separating them from the Bolton forces.

Arya had never seen a battle. She was there at the Red Wedding, but that hadn't been a real battle. It was a slaughter. This one would be her first. She had to admit she felt powerless in the mass of men she found herself among. She had almost no place to move in the middle of the northern cavalry that took place at the center of their forces. The Bolton army stretched on a great distance before her. Arya knew they had more men than Ramsay, but she still felt small here. She saw Jon advancing on his own horse between their lines. Ser Davos, the one with an onion as a sigil, stood where Jon stopped. The wildling with a red beard wasn't far away as well. Arya looked at her right, towards the red and blue banners. She couldn't see her granduncle, nor the Imp. She wasn't close enough to see
them. However, she noticed another red banner on a hill, farther away on her left. There were a few horses there, and she recognized the small frame on one of them. She wanted to spat on the ground. The Imp didn’t even stay with his men. Her father always said a lord should lead his men into battle. Lord Tyrion remained away, on a hill. She didn’t think the Blackfish was with him. She didn’t see him, and there was no banner of House Tully to be seen at the top.

Arya could see the numerous banners of the flayed men right in front of her, despite the distance. The image, along with the dead bodies burning, sent a chill along her spine. She would never see these banners again after this day, once they had killed all the Boltons and their men. The North remembered, and it remembered what the Boltons did at the Twins. She would remind them the price of betraying her family, and she would remind the Karstarks and the Umbers of the same thing as well. When she was near the Twins, she had spotted banners of House Umber, and she failed to understand how people who suffered at the Red Wedding could help the Boltons. That made them worse traitors than the others.

Everything was silent. No one dared to speak. Last evening, the men had drunk while murmuring between themselves for the most. Some had been noisier, but not many. At least there had been some talking. Now there was only silence. They kept waiting. Lord Cerwyn told them they had to wait before they charged the enemy. Jon would give the order.

The Bolton looked as silent as they were. They could hear ravens cawing. Arya even thought she could hear the flames from the crosses far away. Two small figures detached from the army before them. Arya squinted her eyes, trying to see better who they were. After a moment, she recognized Ramsay. She gripped Needle’s pommel. The monster had a reserved place as her next kill. He held something, but she couldn’t see what it was exactly. The other figure was difficult for her to discern. She kept peering at it, until she finally recognized him.

Her heart stopped. Rickon. He was alive. That was him. He was older, taller, but that was him. Sansa had been wrong. Their brother was alive, and he was right there, on the other side of the battlefield. Arya only wanted to ride to him. When she noticed a dagger in the hand of Ramsay, she froze. Before she could do anything, the blade went down.

No. She waited to see her brother’s dead body fall. No, not Rickon too. Arya gripped Needle even more tightly. To her surprise, Rickon’s body didn’t fall on the ground. She saw Ramsay show something with his arms. Then Rickon started to move forward. Was Ramsay freeing him? Why would he do that? It wasn’t long before she understood.

Rickon began running. A bow and a quiver were brought to Ramsay. Arya took a very quick breath. She had to do something. Jon was already riding to help Rickon. She made her horse move. The other horsemen grunted as she moved through them. Couldn’t they get out of her way? She pushed some of them and managed to escape their tight formation to a space between the ranks. She hit the flanks of her horse and he began to run.

Someone tried to stop her but she didn’t care. She left the army and rode, pushing her mount to the highest speed it could reach, always asking it to run faster. She could feel the muscles of the horse working hard. It was as if she was part of him. The wind blew in her face like it didn’t for a very long time. Jon was before her. Arya was a very good rider, but Jon did very well too. Rickon was running in their direction. She had to get to him. She kept moving forward at the highest speed. Rickon was getting close, very close. Jon wasn’t far from him.

Rickon kept running. He was so close. He tumbled and fell on the ground.
Everyone held his breath as Jon Snow rode to save his brother. It had to be Rickon Stark. Who else could it be? Asher didn't know who was the other rider who followed Ned Stark's son. He bore the arms of the Cerwyns. After he broke the ranks, the smuggler and the other commanders ordered the men to keep their lines. Asher, atop his horse, gave the same order to his own men. Beskha was the only one with a mount aside from him. All the others were on foot, including Bloodsong. Even for Asher, it was strange how a killer like him could turn into the most loyal man after you defeated him in single combat. He wished Amaya was still alive.

When Rickon Stark fell on the ground, pierced by an arrow, the silence that followed was thick as mud. Asher saw Jon Snow stop at his brother's side, then he saw the other rider arrive where they were and dismount. He leaned over the dead boy's body. Even from afar, Asher could imagine how the boy looked, probably like Ethan. He stared straight towards the bastard, Ramsay Snow, holding a bow in front of his army. He had killed his brother, and now he killed someone else's brother.

Asher knew what Jon Snow would do. He would do the same in his stead. He turned to Beskha.

"Are you with me?"

"To the end, Asher."

With that answer, he turned to his men. They were only a hundred, but he would fight Ramsay and his entire army by himself if necessary.

"The one who brings me Ramsay's head will have enough gold to never need to fight again in his life. The one who brings me Ramsay alive so I can kill him myself will have so much gold he won't be able to spend it through his entire life."

His declaration was followed by a general uproar from his men. All around, men were already preparing to charge. Asher unsheathed his sword, the sword that had belonged to his father and to his brother before it went to him. The Boltons and the Whitehills had Forrester blood on their hands, and he would soak his family's sword with Bolton and Whitehill blood. Asher knew what to do. He saw Jon Snow charge the enemy, and the other rider too. He roared and joined the charge.

Asher could hear roars all around him, on his sides and behind, but he didn't care. He would kill Ramsay. He would kill Torrhen. He would kill Ludd. He would kill every Bolton and every Whitehill until none of them was left. He looked at the place where he saw Ramsay for the last time. He wasn't there any longer, but Asher was sure he hid behind his lines. He would gut this coward and feed him with his own balls. He charged straight where the bastard had last been seen. He saw the two riders before them fall, and then a wave of cavalry from the other side charge them. Asher hurried his horse. He would kill them all. If they fought for Ramsay, they were his enemies. If they were his enemies, they would die.

The shock came quickly, and Asher was ready for it. He avoided a spear that a man with a white sun on a black field on his tabard destined to him. Instead, he thrust his sword into the man's heart, knocking him off his horse. He held the pommel firm as the body fell on the floor. The sword went
to another man on his left. His horse evaded all attacks and Asher killed all the men who attacked him. He turned left when he saw a Whitehill banner. He killed another horseman on his way, then a second. He rode towards the hill with a star over it. Torrhen was in the vanguard. Asher would kill him. He would end what started years ago.

He felt a wave of wind close to his cheek, and then his mount whinnied. Asher was expelled from its back. Looking around, he noticed a few men and horsemen with arrows in their bodies. Asher looked at where the white hill had been a moment ago, but it wasn't there anymore. A man with the flayed man on his armor ran to him. Asher raised his sword and swung it so hard at his opponent that he lost his. Asher only had to swing his father's sword to his throat to end his miserable life.

Asher hacked, smashed, punched, cut, hit, crushed, killed. The heat of battle was on him, and all he could do was kill. He killed for his father. He killed for his mother. He killed for Ethan. He killed for Rodrik. He killed for Gared. He would kill them all. A volley of arrows hit them and killed several people around him. Asher noticed a Whitehill rider among the victims on the ground. He walked to him.

"Where's Torrhen?" he shouted at the man still barely breathing on the ground.

"Fuck you!"

Without hesitation, Asher ended his torments by plunging his sword through his eye. He went back to the battle and fought everyone he met. Sometimes he wasn't even sure of the side they fought for, and he couldn't care less.

Then he saw him, on a white stallion, his family's sigil on his breastplate. The bastard hadn't been knocked out of his horse yet. Asher would remedy this in no time. He seized a nearby lance that was planted into a dead body and threw it at the heir of Highpoint. The lance plunged into the neck of his horse, and Torrhen Whitehill fell on the ground. Arrows fell all around again and Asher saw a man with the hill on his breastplate fall at his feet, two arrows in his back. He looked around for another enemy and ran at a Karstark who was about to kill a wildling on the ground. He slashed his back before the man could finish his opponent. Asher never thought he would kill a Northerner to save a wildling.

He looked where he last saw Torrhen and saw him fight, along with two or three Whitehill soldiers. "Torrhen!"

Asher yelled in his direction, but Gwyn's brother didn't seem to hear him. He walked heavily towards his enemy, the man who had his own father exile him, who ruined his relationship with Gwyn. He would kill him. He came upon one of the Whitehill men and dealt with him without difficulty. Then he found himself face to face with Torrhen. They looked at each other for a moment. Then they started to spar. Attacks, blocks, counter-attacks, feints succeeded. Asher tried to hack his head with a powerful blow, but the heir to Highpoint blocked it easily. Asher had to step back to avoid the next blow. Torrhen was a much better swordsman than he remembered. He hadn't been able to stand before Asher when they fought years ago, but now he managed and stood his ground. Their swords kept meeting. It was only the two of them and the rest of the battle didn't matter at all.

Again, arrows fell on them. Distracted for a moment, Asher couldn't completely stop his opponent's next blow. He felt a pain in his leg, and Torrhen attacked him. Asher could deflect his blows, but not without losing ground. He was falling back each time Torrhen attacked. His brother-in-law had a huge grin on his face. Then the Whitehill delivered a huge blow from over his head, and the force was so great that Asher fell on one of his knees, the pain in his leg, unbearable.
"Finally, you understand where your place is, Forrester. On your knees!"

Torrhen sent another attack over his head. Asher only used one hand to hold his father's sword and waved his sword to deflect Torrhen's. Once it was done, he threw his fist right in the face of the arrogant man. He thought he heard something break. Then Asher was standing again on his two legs and launched series of blows. Now it was the Whitehill who was falling back, barely able to counter Asher's attacks. He kept hammering and smashing Torrhen with his father's sword until one of his blows was so strong that Torrhen almost fell back. He held his sword only with his left hand, and he was defenseless. Asher rushed forward and cut the hand holding it. A scream tore up the air.

Asher hit the heir to Highpoint with all the force of his left fist and heard something else crack. Torrhen Whitehill was on the ground, screaming and holding the stump of his missing hand. A missing hand cut by House Forrester's great sword. Now was time to end the work.

He raised his sword. "Give my regards to Gryff." Then Asher plunged the sword in the throat of his opponent. He gurgled for a second, and then he was dead. Two sons for two sons. Torrhen and Gryff for Rodrik and Ethan.

Asher looked around him. Piles of bodies were to be seen everywhere. There were almost no horses left. Asher ran to the nearest man he saw with the Bolton sigil and killed him easily. The work wasn't over yet. He kept fighting as long shields with the flayed man on them appeared not far away.

Chapter End Notes

Next two chapters tomorrow : Tyrion and Jon.
Tyrion XXV

TYRION XXV

When Jon Snow rode forward to the enemy's lines, Tyrion cursed. What is he doing? He's going to get himself killed. The cavalry charged first, followed behind by the infantry. Tyrion didn't know for sure who was the other rider who followed Jon Snow closely, but he had a good idea of who it could be, especially if they considered how she knelt next to the small boy. Tyrion double cursed. He just witnessed Sansa's little brother die, and now her sister and her half-brother would get themselves killed as well. That was foolish. They were supposed to let Ramsay attack them, to let him make the first move, to let him reveal his strategy. Instead, they charged him without thinking.

Tyrion was standing on a hill with his personal guards, Bronn, Podrick and Ser Forley Prester. His father always took a position like this one during a battle, to have a perfect overview of the whole battlefield. Tyrion had this advantage here. He saw everything happen, and right now he didn't like what he saw.

First, Bolton's archers drew a flight of arrows that knocked Jon Snow and his sister on the ground. The Bolton cavalry charged, as their own cavalry was approaching. Tyrion saw with relief that both his half-brother-in-law and his sister-in-law had gotten on their feet, but with the Bolton cavalry heading towards them, he didn't give them much chance to live. Sansa would never forgive him. The two cavalries collided somewhere at the point where the Stark siblings were standing and Tyrion lost all sight of them. From where he stood, he could hear the clatter of swords, lances, shields and horses clashing together. It wasn't like the Battle of Blackwater at all. Tyrion had looked from afar as the enemy ships were destroyed by wildfire. He had seen the enemy coming close to the battlements. He had seen the battering ram approaching the Mud Gate and heard the crashing sounds each time it hammered the door. Then he had led himself the sortie outside the walls of King's Landing.

The only time Tyrion ever witnesses two armies crashing together in a field battle, he was on the field. He was among the men who fought. This time, he wasn't. It made it look so unreal, to see everything from afar. He heard the noises of battle, but they were faint. Looking at the battle this way gave the impression that it was no big deal, when it was. People were dying right under his eyes, and this looked so abstract. He wasn't in the heat of battle. The men looked like pieces on a board game.

A huge silhouette came at Tyrion's side. He knew it was the Blackfish immediately. "That's not how we imagined things," he said. He sounded as displeased as Tyrion was.

"No, not at all," Tyrion agreed.

Tyrion noticed after a moment something queer. The archers on the Bolton side were loosing arrows. Tyrion could see men falling at each volley. However, the men who were hit by these projectiles were from both sides in the melee.

"He's shooting arrows on our men and his men at the same time," commented Tyrion.

"Aye. Why is he doing this? He's killing his own men. No general would do something like that."

The Blackfish seemed to think that Ramsay was a fool or a monster, probably both. Tyrion, however, had no difficulty to imagine his father ordering his archers to fire on his own men if this could allow him to win the battle, or cover the retreat of his army. Tyrion remembered a great battle where a general ordered all his catapults and archers to fire on the enemy army while they fought his infantry, when it became obvious at the end of the battle that they had lost. It covered his escape. The
general lived, only to be exiled when he came back in his city. He died alone on an isolated island a few years later.

"I doubt Ramsay cares about the men under his command," Tyrion said.

"Still, this is suicidal. He's losing men he cannot lose. That's stupid. I never saw something so stupid in my life."

"If we sent more men, they would be caught in the arrows as well."

"Aye," confirmed the Blackfish. "We can't send more. Better wait they run out of arrows."

So they watched. They watched from afar as about ten thousand men from the Westerlands, the Riverlands, the North and from beyond the Wall fought for the castle of Winterfell and the control of the North. Their men on foot had reached the heart of the fight now, but the number of men who fell was so great that corpses were piling everywhere and it was getting difficult to move on the battlefield. Tyrion looked at their own archers who did nothing near the Wolfswood, and at those of Ramsay who kept shooting. The bastard had kept most of his infantry behind. Tyrion noticed the huge shields and the very long lances. They were far longer than those the horsemen normally used. It was so long that Tyrion doubted someone could hold one of these lances with a single arm. Why didn't Ramsay send them to fight?

"Ramsay is keeping most of his infantry behind," he said.

"But he's sacrificing all of his cavalry. He's going to lose everything if he doesn't have any horse left," retorted Ser Brynden.

Men kept dying and bodies accumulated on the ground. "Ramsay killed Rickon Stark right in front of us."

"That's quite obvious," replied the old knight grimly.

"He baited Jon Snow. He wanted to bring him in the center of the battlefield. It was a trap."

"Of course, it was a trap!" snapped the Blackfish. "A trap to kill Jon Snow, and he fell into it like a bloody fool. He should have retreated after that. Our men wouldn't have charged then."

"It's a trap." Tyrion realized it now. "It's a trap." He repeated it louder than before. He looked at the infantry in the Bolton lines, and all the men dying under the arrows. He turned to the knight. "Ser Brynden, we should send our archers into the battle."

"What?"

"Send them in. Order them to join the fray."

"Are you mad? They will only get killed. They won't accomplish anything."

"Don't you understand? This is a trap. Ramsay set all of this. He killed Rickon Stark right before us to bring Jon Snow far, knowing he would charge the Bolton lines all alone, and that his men would follow him. Then he shot arrows at all of them. He didn't only trap Jon Snow. He trapped the whole army. That's what he's doing. It's a trap. He can't be keeping his infantry behind without reason."

"This bastard is mad. He can't think like that."

"He's mad, yes, but that doesn't mean he's an idiot or stupid like Joffrey. From what I heard, he likes
toying with people, to use them, to get them to have certain reactions so he can torture them better afterwards. He's been doing this for years. That's what he's doing here. He thinks he's in control. If we want him to reveal his plans, then we have to make him believe he's entirely under control. Let him believe he has no one else to fight. Let's clear the space before the Wolfswood."

Ser Brynden Tully looked at Tyrion, then on both sides of the battlefield. He looked behind him, to one of his men. "Karal, order Ser Davos to send his archers into the melee." The man spun his horse towards their line of archers and rode down below. "I hope you are right, or else we will lose more men."

About thirty seconds later, the archers before the Wolfswood dropped their bows and charged, swords in hand. There was no one left before the Wolfswood. Tyrion watched how Ramsay's army would react. Not long after the northern archers ran into battle, the Bolton infantry moved forward. The huge amount of bodies at the center of the battlefield had almost turned into a hill. Tyrion didn't want to know what a hell it would be to fight into this, and he didn't want to risk his nose a second time. He almost lost it the last time. Going into wars, fighting soldiers, you're terrible at this. Shae had been right on this point.

Tyrion looked very carefully at the movements of the enemy. The fighting kept going on in the middle of the field as reinforcements arrived from both sides. Ser Davos's archers joined the fight, but the Bolton infantry didn't. They formed two columns that got around the heart of the battle. Tyrion noticed again the length of the spears at this moment.

"Ser Brynden, these are not common infantry. It's a phalanx," stated Tyrion.

"What? A phalanx?"

Tyrion got his confirmation not long afterwards. Ramsay's men who carried the shields had formed a full circle around their men and lowered their spears. Tyrion remembered something he once, about a battle that took place thousands of years ago between the Ghiscari Republic, before it became an empire, and another powerful nation that were their main rivals for centuries. As long as the Ghiscaris could keep an unbroken front, to turn first in one direction and then in another to meet the assaults of the enemy, they held out; but the outer files of the circle continually falling, and the circle becoming more and more contracted, they at last were all killed on the field.


"You were right. The bastard had a plan. It was a trap. I must go to my men." The Blackfish rode away without another word.

"Bronn, go to Daven. Don’t get yourself killed, my friend."

"As you command," his friend said with his usual smirk as he obeyed the order.

"Ser Forley, prepare your men."

"Yes, my lord."

The knight left their group as well. They all knew what they had to do. Tyrion had to admit Ramsay Bolton had come up with quite a good plan, only he didn't know what he was up against. During their approach to Winterfell, they made sure no scout approached their camps, especially those left behind. Ser Brynden and the crannogmen were very good at keeping the Bolton scouts away. They tightened the space in their camps that could be seen from Winterfell, and they positioned their army before a forest. As a wise man once said, information is power. They gave the wrong information to
Ramsay. I have six thousand. I know you have more, but not that much. Most of your men must have died of the cold and disease. Ramsay didn't know how many they were.

The first blow resonated. A second followed. Tyrion looked at Podrick who blew in his own horn. Tyrion looked as the two columns of cavalry emerged from the Wolfswood. They had been stationed there, hidden by the trees, after they came from a camp more in the south, far from Ramsay's eyes. This charge of cavalry was huge, nothing like those who fought before. The might of the Riverlands and the Westerlands, along with the few horsemen the Hightowers brought with them, charged together. The red knights that Bronn and Daven led attacked the left wing of the Boltons while the Blackfish charged the right wing.

At the same time, the Lannister and Tully infantries emerged from the woods as well. They had been hidden there too and advanced towards the enemy, although it wasn't very useful in the end. As soon as the horsemen hit the wall of Bolton men, the phalanx broke off. Ramsay had completely discarded the possibility that there were other men behind. Once a phalanx was engaged in combat, it could hardly turn around. That was the weakness of the formation, and why it had long ceased to be used in Westeros. The Boltons were in disarray. Now was the time.

"Pod, blow the horn."

His squire did so again. From Tyrion's left, two thousand men in crimson armor emerged from behind the hill they hid behind. Tyrion had kept them under Prester's orders for a very specific task. He turned to look at the place where the bastard stood.

"Now, what are you going to do, bastard?" Tyrion asked with a grin.

Without surprise, Tyrion watched Ramsay Bolton run away from the battlefield. He wouldn't escape. He had nowhere to go now.
Jon VII

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

JON VII

Jon didn't stop to fight for a single second. All the while, he looked all around for Arya, but she was nowhere to be seen. Both their horses had fallen to the enemy's arrows and they were saved by their horsemen who collided with the Bolton cavalry right before they got to them. Jon had lost sight of his sister after that. All he could do was fight now.

His arms were aching from all the swings of sword he made. Men with the sigils of the Umbers, the Karstarks and the Boltons came from the mountain of bodies and Jon kept cutting through them, one after one. He knew the phalanx was pressing them. What were Tyrion and the Blackfish doing? He heard three blows of horn behind him. Jon couldn't turn around and look from where it came. He knew it had to come from their side. Help was finally on its way. He kept fighting, killing everyone who presented himself before him.

Then Jon found himself before Jon Umber. He remembered the arrow who killed Rickon. This man hadn't killed Rickon, but he gave him to Ramsay, the man who killed him. Jon prepared to fight against this man, and their swords clashed. Jon was exhausted. He heard the tales about the Greatjon, and it seemed his son was just like his father, without the honor. His attacks were stronger than Jon's. The Lord of the Last Hearth, who had been the staunchest supporter of his brother, now forced him to pull back. Jon parried all his blows, but he couldn't reach the man. They were at the same level of sword's skill.

At one moment, they found themselves chest against chest, their swords tangled only an inch from their faces, and then they both had the idea. They spit in the other's face. The Smalljon pushed him on the ground and threw his sword down on Jon, attempting to strike the final blow, but Jon stopped it with his own sword. He still had Longclaw in hand. Jon Umber brought his sword down a second, then third time. When he tried a fourth time, a blade ripped through his heart. For the second time today, Jon owed his life to Tormund. His friend helped him to stand up. When Jon looked around him, he saw the Boltons didn't encircle them anymore. Their enemies were the ones to be surrounded, the wildlings and the Northerners on one side, the cavalry with the lion and the trout sigils on the other. The shields with the flayed man were falling everywhere, the men holding them slaughtered by the knights of the Riverlands and the Westerlands. Jon never thought he would be so happy to see Lannisters in the North.

"Too bad they didn't arrive sooner," Tormund said.

Jon agreed, but now wasn't the time. He had to find Arya. He decided to climb the pile of bodies. From there, he could have a better view of the whole battlefield and would have more chance to see his sister, and could know better what was the situation of their enemy. He ignored the screams of the dying men under his feet as he walked on them. The battle wasn't over yet. They would take care of them once this was over. At the top of this small hill of human beings, Jon could have a better measure of the disarray in which the Bolton army was. Their lines were entirely torn down. There was no more organization to their ranks. Not only the horsemen were killing them, but the rest of the infantry that was hidden in the Wolfiswood before the battle began was coming to shut any last issue the Boltons and their allies might have. They were defeated. Arya was still nowhere to be seen. Jon didn't think he would find her in this sea of men who were almost all taller than her. He feared she might have been crushed by the others.
He looked towards the place where the Bolton lines had been standing before the battle began. There was nothing left. Only the crosses with bodies still burning remained there, but they meant nothing now. Jon saw a contingent of men in crimson armor running before him. He recognized one of the men on horse who followed them on the side. Jon came down from the pile of human corpses and ran to the knight.

"Ser Forley! Ser Forley!"

He caught the attention of the knight who served the Lannisters. Ser Forley Prester didn't seem to recognize him first, but then his facial expression changed. "Jon Snow"

"What are you doing?"

"I have orders from Lord Tyrion. We must take Winterfell now."

"How many men do you have?"

"Two thousand. The others are there to make sure no Bolton man escapes." He pointed with his sword towards the battle still raging behind.

"It's not enough. They will still have men inside."

"We have ladders to take the battlements and rams to breach through the gate. They'll be taken by surprise."

"Rams?" Jon hadn't realized Tormund followed him. "Who said we needed rams?"

Tormund turned behind him, and Jon followed his gaze. Wun Wun was there, several arrows into his body. Jon knew immediately what his friend meant. The giant could open the gates by himself. He remembered how Mag got through under the Wall. The king of the giants had also died from this feat. Wun Wun was greatly injured. Jon could see the many open wounds he had.

"Wun Wun. You don't have to do this."

The giant looked at him. "Jon Snow."

Then he ran towards Winterfell. Jon couldn't hope to stop him. He turned to Ser Forley again. "Tell your men to leave the gate to Wun Wun. Occupy the garrison by attacking the battlements."

"Very well." The knight nodded and rode forward to warn his men.

Jon looked behind him when he heard cries. Wildlings, mountain clansmen and Northerners were racing towards Winterfell as well. Tormund stared at him and smiled.

"Looks like the day isn't over," the wildling said.

Jon looked forward and saw his home standing not far away. It was so close. Only a few men stood between him and the place where he grew up. He took a deep breath and raced towards Winterfell.

When he arrived close to the battlements, the Lannisters had already engaged what was left of the Boltons forces. Their archers were firing arrows at them, protected by men who held shields before them. Wun Wun was already hammering the gates. The archers on the battlements tried to kill him by shooting bolts and arrows at him, but they were themselves harassed by the Lannister archers and the men who started to climb the battlements with the ladders they leaned against the walls. They couldn't stop the giant.
Jon stopped his men who charged the gate. They had to wait until it was breached. The Lannister soldiers were doing an excellent work. They were very well trained and organized, and fresh, untired by battle, unlike Jon’s men. The Bolton defense was quite weak. Jon wondered if they even had three hundred men inside. Perhaps Ramsay had been overconfident. They made him believe they were far less numerous than they actually were. Ramsay underestimated them, and now he was paying the price. Jon looked at Wun Wun. He had too many projectiles dug into him. He should have let the Lannisters take care of the gate. They were obviously prepared for this.

Wun Wun roared and pushed heavily the gate that slammed open and ran inside. Jon raised his sword, seeing the pommel with the direwolf’s head for a moment.

"FOR THE NORTH!"

Roars followed as they charged the gate, just like the Lannister men did. When he got inside, everything was chaos. Many Lannisters had gone through the gates first. Their archers, along with the wildlings, shot arrows at every Bolton in sight. A man with a Mormont shield plunged his sword inside the heart of a Bolton. Another in crimson armor almost cut the head of another in two. Lannister infantry men were climbing over the battlements and killing every man they found. A wildling struck another man to death with his fists. A Dustin and a Ryswell cornered another soldier with the flayed man and killed him. The battle was almost over when Jon arrived in the courtyard.

He and Tormund looked at the giant. Wun Wun was heavily injured and breathed heavily. He looked back at Jon. As he tried to place his hand on the huge shoulder of the giant, an arrow flew and dug into his eye. The last of the giant fell on the ground as another arrow pierced his other eye. He had died to free a castle that belonged to people who fought his for thousands of years. Jon looked to where the arrows came from and found Ramsay with a girl standing next to him, bows bent in their hands.

"I heard you believe in fair fights, don't you?" said Ramsay. "I believe in them too. What say you? My lover and I, against your wildling lover right here and you. What do you think of it, Myranda?"

He had looked to Tormund while he spoke of Jon’s lover. The girl next to him raised her bow with a huge smile. "I say it's a wonderful idea."

This man had killed his brother. Jon was about to seize a shield on the ground to stop their arrows when he heard a scream. The girl Ramsay called Myranda fell, an arrow piercing her eye. Ramsay was looking at her, his face showing utter surprise, and even horror.

"Myranda?"

Before he could do anything else, an arrow appeared in his balls. A scream escaped his throat as well as his body dropped on the ground. Jon looked at where the arrows seemed to come from and saw a man with Cerwyn arms on his breastplate, with a bow, but without arrows. Jon knew who it was before she removed her helmet. She walked straight to Ramsay and shoved Jon aside on her way. Ramsay kept crying on the ground. Arya unsheathed a sword from under her jerkin. Needle, the one Jon gave her yesterday to replace the first one she lost.

"Find it funny now, to have an arrow in you?"

His sister didn't wait for a reply and plunged her sword through Ramsay's leg. Another horrible cry escaped from the throat of the monster who killed Rickon, and Arya did the same with the other leg.

"You said you would spoon my brother's eyes out. Very well."
With a swift move, Arya pricked an eye with her sword, then did the same with the other one. Then raised her sword high and plunged it into the body. She repeated the same movement again, and again, and again.

"YOU KILLED RICKON! YOU KILLED RICKON, YOU MONSTER!"

All the while, Ramsay kept screaming as Arya yelled the words over and over again. She said it one last time and plunged Needle right into Ramsay's face. She didn't take it back. It stood straight, dug into the ground. Ramsay was dead.

Jon did nothing as she poked the man full of holes. When she looked back at him, she was limping from her right leg, but the look on her face was savage like Jon never saw it. Everyone was silent in the courtyard before the savagery of Ramsay's death. Until the voice of Tyrion Lannister broke it.

"I suppose the battle is over. We have won."

Chapter End Notes

I must admit that I wish I had made the battle different, but since I try to follow the show and to make the characters behave like they would have, the Battle of Bastards mostly went the same way. Ramsay used Rickon's death as a bait to provoke Jon and tried the same trick than in the series, and Jon took the bait, along with Arya this time.

Still, there were a few changes. The Knights of the Vale didn't show up. They are still on their way to Winterfell. Also, the vanguard itself, with most of the Northerners, the Freys and the wildlings, was larger than the whole army Jon had under his command in the show. Despite this, Ramsay tried to surround his enemies like he did in canon.

We have to understand that Ramsay underestimated his enemy. In the Roose chapters, when the Lannisters besieged Moat Cailin, the garrison of Moat Cailin couldn't tell how many men they brought, since their camp was too extended along the Kingsroad to make a good count. they couldn't see it all. That, and the fact that Tyrion, Brynden, Jon and Davos squeezed their camps, stopped all Ramsay's scouts, and placed a part of the army away in other camps hidden by the Wolfswood, led Ramsay to believe that they only had barely more men than he did. Only, the bulk of the army, both the cavalry and infantry, were hidden behind the vanguard, in the Wolfswood, and waited for Ramsay to engage all his troops to attack.

The citation Tyrion remembers is an actual excerpt from the Histories of Polybius, who is the best source about the Battle of Cannae that took place in 216 B.C., and where the Carthaginians led by Hannibal defeated a great Roman army and almost caused the fall of the Roman Empire. The showrunners did take a lot of inspiration from this battle for the Battle of Bastards, so it seemed appropriate that I include it. As for the general Tyrion is thinking about who ordered to shot on his own men to cover his retreat, this is an adaptation to a medieval context of the decision of Emperor Napoleon at the end of the Battle of Waterloo, when he decided to make his artillery fire on the English lines, as some of his own men were still fighting them, to prevent the enemy from chasing him. The last decision he took on a battlefield was to bombard his own men. The weaknesses Tyrion mentions about the phalanx are real weaknesses this formation had at the end of Antiquity.
When I wrote this version of the Battle of Bastards, I wanted to keep in line with my goal to remain realistic and to imagine the effects of a single change on the whole story. I decided that Ramsay would most likely try the same trick than in the show, and there was no reason for Jon to not react the same way. This time, however, since Arya was present, she would run to help her brother as well and would be part of the fight. I had her chapter to explain the initial position of all the forces in presence and to show Rickon's death from his sister's POV, to know what it was to see your little brother die. Then I switched to Asher, to see the chaos following two armies charging each other, and I included his duel with Torrhen, like it was announced during the parley.

After these two chapters from people on the battlefield, I made a Tyrion chapter, to have a view of the battle as a whole, to have the vision of the strategist instead of the soldier. Then finally I had Jon for the final chapter, the liberation of Winterfell and the death of Ramsay, which was more appropriate to see from someone who actually fought, and because we want to see a part of the battle from Jon's perspective.

Now, there are certain things about this battle that I am less comfortable with. First, because I tried to remain true to the characters and the reactions I thought they would have, it mostly happened the same way, only the Lannister and Tully cavalry replaced the Knights of the Vale, and it was Arya who killed Ramsay here. I even let Wun Wun die again. But I think the main weakness of this battle is that Tyrion and Brynden were able to hide maybe twenty thousand men in the Wolfswood. The charge of cavalry almost seems as unrealistic as the one at the beginning of the movie Gladiator, though it is more likely since in Gladiator, the cavalry charged through a forest and fought inside of it, while here it was only hidden and fought in open field, which is where cavalries were used at the time.

I hope you liked the battle all the same. In fact, what might be much more interesting will be to see the aftermath of the battle. Just to give you a clue, remember that most of the vanguard was made of Northerners and that both Lannisters and Tullys only joined the battle at the end. The consequences of this battle will be important, and quite different from the show.

Please review

Next chapter : Tyrion (Sansa's chapter is right after that)
Chapter Notes

A few hours after the battle. Tyrion must face the consequences of victory. The next chapters in Winterfell will be mostly about politics, with people from four different kingdoms present. The future of the North will be decided soon.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

TYRION XXVI

My dear Sansa,

We have taken Winterfell. Ramsay Bolton is dead. Jon and Arya are alive and well. We summoned all the lords in the North to meet here. We'll need you to be there as well, so they may acknowledge you. Come as soon as you can, but don't push yourself too hard if you're still recovering. Be careful.

I'm sorry to tell you this, but we found out that your brother Rickon really was in Winterfell after all. Ramsay didn't lie about this. He killed him before the battle. I'm so sorry, Sansa.

I love you.

Tyrion

Tyrion read the small scroll again. He had made several attempts to write it the best way possible. How to tell Sansa that her little brother died and that they could do nothing to save him? He didn't have enough space to tell the whole story. Finally, he settled for this message. He would explain her everything when she would arrive. He didn't look forward to it. How could he explain to Sansa that her brother died because of him? He had made Ramsay angry at the parley. What if that brought the bastard to kill Rickon? Tyrion remembered the small boy he saw at Winterfell. How old could he have been at the time? Five? Six?

Tyrion had been almost sure that Sansa's brother was dead. Everyone said he and Bran were burned by the Ironmen, and there was nothing to deny it. The Boltons lied about having Arya Stark, so why wouldn't they lie about her little brother as well? When he had seen the direwolf's head, Tyrion had some doubts, but after all Ramsay Bolton had been the one to besiege Winterfell after the Ironmen took it. He may have found the direwolves then and killed them, or maybe Theon Greyjoy had done it and Ramsay just retrieved chopped heads. Tyrion had almost dismissed the possibility that Rickon Stark could really be in the hands of the bastard. Maybe he hadn't wanted to believe it. Maybe he had wanted Winterfell for him and Sansa, and for their children.

Tyrion didn't know how to ask about their child. Had Sansa delivered now? He was afraid to ask her about it. He was afraid of many things. What if the child was a dwarf, like him? What if the child had died? What if Sansa had died? His mother died when he was born. Did he condemn Sansa to the same fate? Now, faced with the inevitable birth of his first child, all the worries he put aside before came to the surface. He didn't have Sansa's home to take back like before. He didn't have to worry about that anymore, so his mind was filled with repressed worries for his wife. His sweet, young, beautiful Sansa, the only woman who he could be sure who ever loved him. He couldn't support to lose her.
He tried to calm himself. He couldn't assume that something had gone wrong when they still had no news. He needed to wait for the reply. In the meantime, there was still work to do. He had prepared a message for all the northern lords, convoking them to Winterfell to swear their fealty to Sansa, but also to order them to bring to their attention any information about any movement of Brandon Stark. If Rickon Stark had survived, the odds that his older brother survived the Greyjoys were quite high. Tyrion wouldn't lose another brother of Sansa. He would have the messages signed by Jon Snow and Ser Brynden. If it was only signed by him, the northern lords would believe he was only looking after Brandon Stark to kill him. Perhaps he shouldn't sign the messages at all, but he didn't want to be left aside like he always was.

Tyrion's chambers were comfortable enough, but they were stark and cold when compared to the ones he had in King's Landing or Casterly Rock. If only Sansa had been there… He missed her more than ever. If the Manderlys had dared to touch her… Tyrion wiped these thoughts away. He hadn't taken his rooms into Ned Stark's former chambers. He didn't want to attract more criticism from the Northerners and the river lords. He would wait for Sansa to arrive, and then he would move in with her. Until then, he would reside in the guests' quarters of the keep. He had to make sure the people wouldn't see him as if he ruled the North. They didn't trust the Imp, even less now that they weren't united like before by their hatred of Ramsay Bolton. Curiously, this remembered him of his time in King's Landing, as Joffrey's Hand, when people blamed him for the ills of the city. Sometimes Tyrion wondered what was the use of trying to save people when all you got from them in return were insults and blame for the crimes of others. He thought about Jaime and the Mad King.

Podrick came inside his solar at this moment. "My lord, Jon Snow would like to speak with you."

Tyrion nodded and Pod stepped away to let Tyrion's half-brother-in-law walk in. His clothes were still all muddy and dusty from the battle that ended hours ago. Tyrion had barely been able to recognize him at the end of the battle with all the soil on his face. He had washed the said face, but his clothes still bore every mark of the hell through which he had just gone. Tyrion didn’t take part to the battle like him, so he was in a much better shape.

Jon Snow's face was hard. Tyrion supposed this had to be expected. He had every right to be angry. A battle you won at the cost of thousands of your men was quite a bitter victory. A pyrrhic victory, some called it, from the name of a long dead king in Essos. Tyrion himself didn't feel quite proud about their success right now.

"Have you found your brother's body?" Tyrion asked.

"Aye. I had him buried in the crypt."

"I'll go and pay him my respects when it's done. What about your sister?"

"She's all right. The maester says the cut in her leg is superficial. She risks nothing."

Tyrion sighed in relief. He wouldn't have to inform Sansa about any other death among her siblings.

"If he was alive, we can consider it very likely that Bran is alive somewhere."

Tyrion still remembered how the boy looked happy the day he told him he could ride again. If there was a chance to save him, to save another brother of Sansa, he had to try.

"Maybe." Jon Snow's voice sounded hollow.

"Where do you think he may have gone?"
The bastard didn't answer. He looked at Tyrion. "How many men have you lost?"

"About one hundred and fifty."

That was the number Daven gave him not long ago about their losses. Most of them were horsemen they lost in the initial charge of the battle. The rest were a few knights they lost when they took the phalanx of the enemy from the back and what little men died when they assaulted the castle.

"Do you know how many men I lost?" the lad asked.

Tyrion pursed his lips. He wasn't eager to let the number drop. Daven had told him about the losses of everyone. The river lords had lost about a hundred men, which made them those who endured the less casualties, though their men were fewer than those under the Lannister banners. However, that was when they didn't consider the Freys. Of their four thousand men, half were dead, among them Ser Perwyn Frey. Like Daven said, a decent Frey was dead, and everyone knew how rare they were. The wildlings and the Northerners had deeply bled as well. Of the mountain clans and the wildlings, about half of them were dead too. For the northern lords who had their cavalry in the vanguard, they lost it all. The commander of the Manderly forces, Ser Jocelyn Waterfell, was among the victims. Overall, they lost a little more than six thousand men in this battle, and the majority of them were from the North. The opposite army had been entirely slaughtered. No Umber, no Karstark, no Bolton had escaped the battle, or they thought at first. They hadn't yet found the body of Harald Karstark. Within a single battle, over ten thousand men of the North were dead. And of course, there was Rickon Stark. Tyrion knew he would be little loved for this.

"Thousands," he finally replied to Sansa's brother.

Jon Snow walked forward, a look between threat and sadness on his face. "You saw us. You knew that the Boltons were killing us all. You could see it."

"I did," Tyrion confessed.

"And yet you did nothing? You just stood there on your hill and watched us being slaughtered. Why?"

"We came to your rescue. We sent the whole cavalry when you were surrounded."

"Only then? Couldn't you send them before?"

"For what?" Jon and Tyrion turned their heads to look at the Blackfish who stood in the entrance of the room. "To get killed by the arrows Ramsay's men were firing? To reveal our positions and our plans to that bastard?"

"Thousands of good men died while you waited."

"And more would have died if we hadn't waited. You blame us for the men who died today? Listen to me carefully, bastard." A great emphasis was put on the last word. "These men would never have got caught in Ramsay's trap if you hadn't taken the bait. He killed your brother right under your eyes in the hope you would charge him without thinking and that your men would follow you, and you did exactly what he hoped you would do. If you had come back to your men, instead of trying to take Ramsay on your own, these men wouldn't have died in that trap."

"I was in the command of the whole army," Ser Brynden resumed. "I didn't come to your rescue either. Why? Because if I had sent more men to you, they would have gotten caught in the same trap than you, they would have died, and maybe we wouldn't have been able to break the phalanx. So don't blame anyone else when you're the only one to blame, bastard. You acted like a boy today, not
like the Lord Commander of the Night's Watch."

It was strange for Tyrion to hear Brynden Tully give a lesson in military strategies to Jon Snow, and even stranger to see the Blackfish take his defense, but he knew the Blackfish had little love for Jon Snow. The knight and the bastard stared at each other for a very long time. Ser Brynden's eyes were as hard as Jon Snow's when he had come to see Tyrion. He supposed Jon Snow's face wasn't much different. The bastard of Winterfell walked out without a word or a glance to Tyrion. The door slammed behind him.

"Thank you," Tyrion said.

Ser Brynden Tully scoffed. "The boy may have been Lord Commander of the Night's Watch, but he has much to learn about leading men. The boy has courage, but he has no brain."

Tyrion wouldn't have gone that far. Jon Snow wasn't a fool and wasn't without experience in strategy or command. He had only been a man who saw his youngest brother die right in front of him. Tyrion thought it was probably Catelyn Stark's uncle who spoke here, from his distaste for the son his niece's husband had with another woman. Tyrion didn't tell to Sansa's granduncle who in his own family would have done exactly the same if he had been the one running.

"Still, he was right about one thing. We stood behind while the Northerners were being killed."

"We all stood behind," said Ser Brynden. "Not just you. I did the same, and it was the right thing to do. If we had sent more men in that battle, before Ramsay sent his infantry, more would have died. It was impossible to fight a ranged battle in that pile of bodies. We would have needed to get around it to attack Ramsay's infantry, on a disadvantageous ground, and with divided forces. We did well to wait, or else this phalanx could have attacked us on the front."

"You don't understand, Ser Brynden. The Northerners bled, fighting each other, and we watched it. Aside from the Freys, the Riverlands and the Westerlands lost less than five hundred men today. Ten thousand Northerners died in that battle if we include those who fought for the Boltons and the wildlings. How do you think the North feels about us right now?"

The Blackfish sighed heavily. "I think I have a pretty good idea."

"They probably believe we used them as arrow fodder, or that we tried to let them slaughter each other until only a few were left."

"Aye. Strange, considering it was Ramsay who used his men as arrow fodder. He shot on them while they fought our men."

"Ramsay is dead. They can no longer blame him. They will look for someone alive to blame, or several someones alive to blame. We are going to be on their list."

"I know." The knight blew some air. "Gods, I hate politics. If they hadn't planned to turn on us in the middle of battle, too. We wouldn't have placed the bulk of the North in the vanguard."

"Too late to be sorry about that."

"Well, you have my support, no matter what happens. We have to make sure Sansa can be proclaimed Lady of Winterfell and Wardeness of the North. We must obtain the surrender of Karhold, the Dreadfort and the Last Hearth, and of their bannermen of course. We must make sure the lords who didn't side with us accept Sansa as their lady."

"A good thing we have many men then. Or it might be a bad thing. They could see us as invaders,
“Well, we’ll have to make them understand we are on their side. Let’s summon everyone at Winterfell first, so Sansa can be acknowledged, or else that damn decree of your nephew won’t have any value.”

“We must also search for Brandon Stark.”

The knight nodded. “True. We must.”

“I’ll need you to sign the ravens we will send. I don’t believe they will trust a message if it only comes from me.”

Ser Brynden chuckled without humor. “Probably not. Call for me when it’s ready. I’ll see to my men.”

Tyrion found himself alone again. He looked at the message that was destined to Sansa. He decided to bring it to the maester’s turret right now. Wolkan, the maester in service here at Winterfell, hadn’t looked like he regretted his previous master. He had helped to heal the wounded as soon as he was asked. Anyway, it wouldn’t be in his interest to not serve the new occupants. From what Tyrion had seen, the staff that the Boltons employed hadn’t been reluctant to serve the enemies of Ramsay Bolton. Tyrion couldn’t imagine how someone would be pleased to serve Roose Bolton’s bastard.

Podrick and four guards accompanied him. Tyrion wouldn’t take any chance. Wolkan wasn’t in the turret. Tyrion supposed he was still helping with all the people who were injured. He went to the rookery himself and attached the message to a raven for White Harbor. The sooner it would reach Sansa the better.

Tyrion then went to the courtyard. They had already removed all the bodies, but many wounded men were scattered along the walls. The banners of House Stark were already hung on the walls. Maybe that was only his imagination, but Tyrion thought the wildlings and the Northerners looked at him with more hatred than usual. He saw Bronn walking towards him and stopped. Tyrion was glad that his old friend had survived the battle, though it wasn’t a surprise since Bronn hadn’t been part of the vanguard. He had been with Daven and the Lannister cavalry when they charged the phalanx.

“Anything to report?” Tyrion asked him.

“We found an entire yard with skinned bodies. Looks like the shit decided to flay one of his bannermen along with all his men the night before the battle, as a warning for the others.”

Brons looked like he was about to spew his breakfast or whatever it was he took before or after the battle. Even him couldn’t take in Ramsay’s atrocities.

“How many?”

“Two hundred, probably.” Two hundred men skinned alive. Tyrion wondered if some were on the crosses in the battlefield. “And something else. We questioned the men who survived the battle and the servants. They said there was a girl who Ramsay married. They barely saw her. She was locked in her room all the time and they only had a glance at her during the wedding. They say Ramsay skinned her too last night. They all believed it was Arya Stark.”

Tyrion looked at his friend. “So Ramsay really had someone he wed, and he believed she was Arya Stark?”

“Aye. She was brought here months ago, by a man with an escort from the Vale.” Littlefinger. So
the snake brought the Boltons another girl after the real Arya Stark escaped. "They didn't see her a lot, so they couldn't recognize her, but they heard her weep and scream every night, when the bastard visited her." Bronn had a sorry look on his face. "Let's not feel guilty about that. From what I can tell, she suffered much more before he flayed her. Maybe it was a mercy he finally ended her sufferings."

Tyrion tried to not feel guilty, like his friend advised, but he couldn't help it. They had revealed during the parley that the real Arya Stark was with them, hoping this could bring some of Ramsay's allies to desert, but instead they got two hundred flayed men, and the death of an innocent girl along with Rickon Stark's. No matter what Tyrion did, people got hurt. He thought about how Ros paid the price for his actions against Cersei and for his attempt to be generous with her.

"The bodies?" Tyrion asked, trying to shake these memories out of him.

"Buried, for the most. Those left will follow soon."

Tyrion took a deep breath. It was cold out there, and light was beginning to fade. "Care for a drink, my friend, like in the old times? Podrick, will you join us?"

"If you want, my lord," the squire replied shyly.

"Then it's settled," said the sellsword. "Though I'd need a woman too."

Bronn was looking up. Tyrion followed his gaze to the battlements and saw who he was looking at. "I wouldn't try if I were you, my friend."

Bronn made a face as he looked at the red priestess. "You're probably right. Too much red hair. It's more your style."

Tyrion sighed. "I'm a married man, Bronn, and I'll have a child soon if he's not already there."

"And? I'm married, I have a child. That doesn't stop from having a girl when I need one."

Tyrion was startled. "You have a child?"

"Aye. Daisy was pregnant when we left."

"You never told me."

Bronn shrugged. "Never thought it was necessary to say. So, about the drink."

Before they could walk to his solar, Tyrion's attention was caught by a commotion near the kennels. Tyrion remembered this place from his last visit in Winterfell. Some of his men were dragging someone outside. Tyrion blinked when the man was thrown on the ground. He walked forward to see what it was about. One of his captains stood as he approached.

"My lord, we found the bastard's dogs in the kennels. What do you want us to do with them?"

The famous dogs that Ramsay used to hunt down girls in the woods. "Kill them all. I don't want anything left to remind us that Ramsay Bolton was once the master of Winterfell," Tyrion said, not without disgust.

"Don't do it." The man they dragged from the kennels spoke with a quivering voice. "Don't do it. He's going to hurt you if you kill his dogs. It will get worse."

Tyrion heard this voice before. He approached the man who was crouched on the ground, his messy
long hair falling before his face, making it impossible to discern it. He stank worse than horseshit.

"What by the Seven Hells is that?" asked Bronn, clearly referring to the man on his hands and knees before them. Tyrion noticed one of his hands only had two fingers, and the other one had three.

"We found him in the kennels. We couldn't get much from him. He kept saying the same thing all the time," answered the captain.

Tyrion was sure he had seen him before. He took him by the chin and forced him to look at him. He didn't expect that.

"Theon Greyjoy."

Immediately, Eddard Stark's former squire backed down. "My name is Reek. My name is Reek. My name is Reek," he repeated frantically.

"That's all he's been able to say since we found him."

Tyrion barely gave any attention to the captain. Theon Greyjoy was believed to be dead. First Arya Stark, then Rickon Stark, and now Theon Greyjoy. Tyrion looked at his fingers again. Ramsay had taken Winterfell. It seemed that instead of killing the heir to the Iron Islands, he decided to make him his toy. Tyrion would almost pity the man if he hadn't betrayed his wife's family and burned her brothers… or pretended to burn them. He never liked the Greyjoys, and he liked this one even less.

"Captain, bring him to a cell. We'll interrogate him later."

His men obeyed Tyrion's orders. He wanted to rest. He would take care of that new element tomorrow. He walked to his solar with Pod, Bronn and his other guards. They spent the evening drinking, until Bronn left them to find himself a woman. Tyrion was tempted to follow him. He longed for Sansa's presence. Pod left not long later, Tyrion advising him to find himself a girl too.

As usual, Tyrion could barely sleep. When he did, it was only to dream about Sansa, and he dreamed she was dying in her bed, giving birth to a twisted little creature. After the third time he woke up, Tyrion pushed aside the furs with a grunt. He went to the library, only to find out the place where he read the last time he was in Winterfell had been burnt years ago. He found the new place where the books were kept, and brought some with him back to his rooms. He tried to forget about his nightmares. He only half succeeded. Then the sun rose, he laid back the book he was reading on the table and went to look after Jon Snow and Ser Brynden Tully. They had to get to work. He ran into a wildling who couldn't tell him where the Blackfish was, but who pointed the Great Hall when Tyrion asked about Jon Snow.

When he reached the hall where everything began years ago, Tyrion was surprised to see Jon Snow with Melisandre of Asshai.

"When we had feasts, our family would sit up here, and I'd sit down there." He pointed the end of the hall. He couldn't see Tyrion, not yet. He hadn't walked in the hall yet.

"Could have been worse, Jon Snow. You had a family. You had feasts."

"For once, I agree with the lady." Tyrion made his presence known and came in.

"Hi, my friend." That was much better than what Tyrion feared after yesterday.

He looked around. "Four years ago, we were all here, feasting together. The king, my sister, my brother, my nephews and my niece, your father, your uncle, your brothers and your sisters. Now
we're back, and look at what's left of it. How many of them died?"

He thought about Myrcella, about the king who Cersei had killed, about Eddard Stark and his wife. He remembered seeing Arya throwing food at Sansa. He remembered the discussion he had with Jon Snow at the time.

*You're Tyrion Lannister, the queen's brother?*

*My greatest accomplishment. And you, you're Ned Stark's bastard, aren't you?*

And now? Tyrion's father was dead, and the little girl who was supposed to marry Joffrey at the time was his wife. Jon Snow had become Lord Commander of the Night's Watch, and he had a girl for a time according to that Tormund Giantsbane. He would have to ask about her later.

"Aye. Many things have changed. If someone had told me at the time that you would marry Sansa one day..." Jon said, chuckling.

"I suppose you would have had a good laugh at your sister's expense, you and Arya."

"Aye." The atmosphere turned sour again. "We should never have left."

Tyrion wasn't sure what to think about it. True, if they hadn't left, Sansa may never have lost her father, or her mother, or her brothers, but Tyrion would never have met her either. She was only thirteen when he first came to Winterfell, a little girl on the cusp of maidenhood. He barely noticed her at the time, and he was sure Sansa had barely cast a glance toward him. Who could blame her? Why would a pretty little girl like her, who loved knights, dresses and flowers, look at the ugly dwarf when she was supposed to marry the handsome prince?

Tyrion tried to find something else to talk about. He turned to the red priestess. "I suppose you never came to Winterfell before, my lady."

"No. I saw it in my visions, but I never set foot in it."

She looked at Tyrion, the same way she looked at him two nights ago. Tyrion found himself wondering how she looked like without her clothes for a moment. Gods, Sansa was away for two months and he only needed another red head to feel his breeches tighten. *Damn you, Bronn. I never paid you to put evil notions in my head.*

"I can feel the power in this place," she added, still looking at Tyrion, then turning her face to Jon Snow.

Before Tyrion could ask what she meant, he heard footsteps behind him. Tyrion turned in time to see Ser Davos Seaworth enter the hall. He threw something to the Red Woman, like some called her, and she caught it. When Tyrion looked at what it was, he realized it was a small figurine in the shape of a stag or a unicorn.

"What is that?" Jon Snow asked the question before Tyrion could.

Tyrion looked at the Onion Knight. Ser Davos was staring at Melisandre, anger plain on his face. "Tell them. Tell them who it belonged to."

Tyrion looked back at the priestess. She was looking at the floor, turning the figurine in her hands, obviously hesitating to speak. Something told him he wouldn't be pleased by what he was about to hear.
"The Princess Shireen." Her voice was shivering.

"Tell them what you did to her. Tell them!" Ser Davos yelled the last order.

"We burned her at the stake."

She managed to stammer these few words after a long hesitation. The room went silent immediately. Tyrion looked at the woman. She didn't dare to look at anybody. The Princess Shireen. Tyrion hadn't seen her a lot. While her father had served as Master of Ships in King's Landing, she spent most of her time on Dragonstone, and she seldom appeared at court. Surely Stannis didn't want to show his only daughter when she was disfigured by greyscale. Tyrion had thought more than once that his father might try one day to arrange a marriage between him and Stannis's daughter. After all, a dwarf and a greyscaled daughter didn't seem a bad match. Tyrion had only seen her closely once, if he recalled well, about a year before Stannis left the capital. She had come with her mother, Selyse Baratheon, to visit the king and Tyrion had found her reading a huge leather book about the Targaryen wars. Half her face was covered by the greyscale. Her expression had been uncertain when she had looked at Tyrion, but he thought this was more curiosity than fear or revulsion. She had to be at most seven at this time. Now she was dead. We burned her at the stake. She was burned alive. A child of ten.

"Why?" Ser Davos asked.

"The army was trapped. The horses were dying. It was the only way," the lady in red explained quickly.

"You burned a little girl alive!"

"I only do what my Lord commands."

"If he commands you to burn children, your Lord is evil." Tyrion couldn't have agreed more with it.

"We are standing here because of him. Jon Snow is alive because the Lord willed it."

"I loved that girl like she was my own." The Onion Knight was close to tears. It was obvious he had been close to Stannis's daughter. "She was good. She was kind. And you killed her!"

"So did her father. So did her mother. Her own blood knew it was the only way."

Tyrion had heard enough. He heard septons and septas say stupidities and nonsense all his life, but that was too much.

"The only way for what?" Tyrion asked. "Did the sacrifice save Stannis? Did it save his army? I heard the Boltons killed them all the same. Did it really help? Did your Lord tell you to murder a child so Stannis and his men could be slaughtered by Ramsay, instead of dying from cold and disease?"

The Red Woman had nothing to reply to this. "You told everyone Stannis was the one," resumed Ser Davos. "You had him believing it, all of them fooled. And you lied."

"I didn't lie. I was wrong." Tyrion thought he heard a lump in her voice.

"Aye, you were wrong. How many died because you were wrong? I ask your leave to execute this woman for murder. She admits to the crime."

It made sense. Tyrion had to admit he would say the same in Ser Davos' place. However, there was
something in Melisandre of Asshai that made him hesitate to call for her head immediately as well.

"Do you have anything to say for yourself?" Jon Snow's voice was hard.

"I've been ready to die for many years. If the Lord was done with me, so be it, but he's not. You've seen the Night King, Jon Snow. You know the great war is still to come. You know the army of the dead will be upon us soon. And you know I can help you win that war," she said.

A moment passed. Then Jon Snow proceeded to walk towards the red lady.

"Snow." He stopped at Tyrion's voice. "May I speak for a moment with you, alone?"

Tyrion didn't know why he did this. She confessed she burned a child alive, only so the man who she thought was a savior could become king, and she had burned many other people alive. Still, he felt he had to speak with Jon Snow before he gave his decision.

Ned Stark's son nodded. Tyrion looked at the Red Woman, who looked back at him with pleading eyes. Tyrion turned away and walked with Jon Snow to a corner of the hall, far away from the others. Maybe it was because, unlike Janos Slynt, this woman looked like she regretted what she did, or maybe it was something else, but he felt he had to try.

"I think we shouldn't kill her," Tyrion whispered to the lad.

"She killed a child, no more than twelve."

"Yes, but she regrets it. Unlike Rickard Karstark or Janos Slynt."

"That doesn't erase what she did."

"She really brought you back to life?"

"Aye, she did." Jon Snow's face showed regret after anger.

"Her powers are real?"

"Aye."

"I'm not saying she doesn't deserve to die, but we're going to fight the dead very soon. We're going to fight things we barely understand, magical things, and she's the only magic we have right now. We may need her, even if we don't like it. Let's place her in a cell under guard. She'll still be at hand when the White Walkers come."

Tyrion looked at the woman. Ser Davos Seaworth was still staring at her in full hatred and she kept looking on the floor. Why did he feel pity for a woman who burned hundreds of people alive for a so-called god?

"I can't let that go," Jon Snow finally said. Tyrion saw he wouldn't change his mind. He inherited more than Ned Stark's looks. He had his mind, and his honor. The same honor that got Sansa's father killed.

"Let's wait for Sansa to arrive, at least. She's the Lady of Winterfell and the crime was committed in the North. That's her duty to judge her."

Jon Snow was unflinching. "She followed me here. She's under my orders. It's my decision to take."

He went back to the lady in red and gave his sentence. "Ride south today. If you return to the North,
I'll have you hanged as a murderer."

Jon Snow had finally decided to not execute her, but that wasn't much better. They wouldn't be able to use her help against the dead, no matter she was executed or exiled. Resigned, Melisandre laid down the figurine on the high table. On her way to the exit, Ser Davos stopped her.

"If you ever come back this way, I will execute you myself."

She moved past him and left the hall.

Later, Tyrion was looking at her ride away from Winterfell along the Kingsroad. She deserved much more than exile, and yet he feared they might have just made a terrible mistake. What if she could really have helped them? He thought about the ranging of Jeor Mormont, the ranging that never came back. The Old Bear had died fighting the dead. Tyrion had failed to send him the necessary help after he and Maester Aemon explained to him how much they needed it. What if more men died because of that decision?

"I'm having the lord's chamber prepared for you."

Tyrion was quite startled by Jon Snow's words. He was standing next to him on the battlements. "You really want me to sleep in your father's bed?" he asked, half-joking.

"Sansa is the Lady of Winterfell, and you're her husband."

It was a tempting offer, but Tyrion had to refuse it for very good reasons. "There's still your brother Bran. He's probably somewhere, still alive."

A silence settled between the two. "Bran went north of the Wall two years ago. One my sworn brothers met him at the Nightfort while he was heading there." Jon Snow looked at him, his face tired. "What are the chances that he's still alive, cripple like he was?"

That was news for Tyrion. He closed his eyes. He had dared to hope he could at least find her other brother for Sansa. Now he was probably dead as well, lost somewhere north of the Wall, in lands that very few people knew.

"We should wait for Sansa," Tyrion decided. "I'm not the Warden of the North. I'm only a consort here. You would be more at your place in these rooms than me."

"I'm not a Stark."

"You're more than I am. You don't have the name, but you have the blood. I have none." I only have a Stark wife who doubts she even is still a Stark.

"I apologize for yesterday. Ser Brynden was right. I fell into Ramsay's trap like a fool, and thousands of men died."

"Most of the people would have done the same than you. I know my brother would have, if I had been the one running." He wondered what was Jaime doing right now. He missed him.

"Without you, I wouldn't be here. The battle would have been lost without your help and Ser Brynden. The Boltons would still be ruling the North." He looked straight into Tyrion's eyes. "I thank you."

Tyrion moved his eyes to look at the horizon where the Red Woman was fading away. "What I did, I did it for Sansa, for the most."
"Well then, I'm glad to have you as my brother-in-law."

Tyrion raised an eyebrow. "Half-brother-in-law."

Jon Snow smiled. "No matter. Glad you're in the family, my friend."

The bastard left him there and went to other duties. Tyrion looked at the castle from the battlements where he stood, over the South Gate. The last time he had come, the hospitality of Winterfell had been refused to him. Robb Stark thought I had tried to kill his brother. Despite this, he gave Brandon Stark a plan for a special saddle that would allow him to ride again, because Tyrion promised his brother to help him, and a Lannister always pays his debts. The hospitality had been granted to him in the end, but he had flatly refused it, preferring to spend the night in the brothel with Ros. Now Ros was dead, murdered by Joffrey who used her as a target practice with his crossbow. Yoren, who accompanied him on the road until the accident at the inn, was dead, killed during the war by his father's men. The boy who looked so happy when he told him he could ride again was probably dead, and the Lord of Winterfell who had welcomed him so harshly was murdered at a wedding on his father's orders. Even the two guards who followed Tyrion at the time died on their way to the Vale, and so were many of the people who had been at Winterfell back then. Of all the people present this day, only Theon Greyjoy still lived. There really was no justice in this world.

He thought about Sansa's brothers. He wished he had the chance to know them better. Now they were all gone, and all that Sansa had left was Arya and Jon, the two siblings she had the most difficulty with.

Tyrion looked at the Great Keep. This was Sansa's castle now, and his in some way as a consequence. But it would never really be his. Winterfell belonged to the Starks. Only a Stark could rule Winterfell, and this Stark was his wife. This place would never belong to him, a stranger whose father almost succeeded in annihilating one of the most ancient houses in Westeros. His wife's family. Arya Stark was safe, and so was Jon Snow, but right when they learned Bran and Rickon could still be alive, they lost them again. Tyrion couldn't let another Stark die. He couldn't allow it.

He turned his gaze to the south. Snow was falling on the fields before him, and the trees were covered of white. Far away, at the other end of the North, Sansa was waiting for news of the battle. Tyrion wished there were faster ways to communicate and to travel. He wanted to see her again. He wanted to see that he hadn't killed her, like he killed his mother.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
Sansa XXVIII

Chapter Notes

Here it is, the chapter everyone was waiting for. It is quite short. The reason is that this chapter wasn't supposed to exist at the origin. We were only supposed to see Sansa again when she would come back at Winterfell, but I thought finally that we needed to know at least how were things at White Harbor, and there were so many people who asked me when we would get to see Sansa's child that I decided to make this one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

SANSA XXVIII

She woke up in the twilight. The shutters of her window were closed, but a faint light filtered through. Sansa turned on herself to face the opposite wall and tried to go back into sleep. She felt well in her bed sheets and didn't want to leave them. But no matter what she tried, she couldn't fall asleep again. Finally, grunting, she sat in her bed. If Tyrion was there, he would remind her a lady shouldn't make such unlady noises. The memory of her husband's humor brought a smile on her lips, but also caused her worries to emerge again. She hoped they would take Winterfell, and that they would take it soon. If not... The gods wouldn't dare to take away another person she loved. And yet, they had taken so many already.

Sansa looked at her red locks she smoothed with her fingers. Tyrion loved to wander his hand in them. He pretended it was to disentangle them, though in truth this only made the mess her hair was worse when she woke up. Her handmaidens had the difficult task to do the disentanglement themselves the following morning. Slowly, cautiously, Sansa let her right foot land on the stone floor. She shuddered. It was cold. Still taking all her time, she laid the other foot on the stone, feeling the same sensation on the second palm. She stood up, leaving behind her the warmth of her bed. She shivered in her nightclothes. She didn't remember feeling that cold when she was young.

Slowly, Sansa walked to the window and opened the panels. A gust of wind hit her immediately. Outside, the sun had barely begun to rise. Ships were to be seen in both harbors despite the cold rain. Sansa was happy to not be outside. She closed the panels. The fire was extinct in the hearth. She would ask Willia to make another one. They had kept the fire fed all the time while she labored. The memory to these days still haunted Sansa's mind. To think that her mother had gone through this five times... She looked at the door. She was about to walk to it when knocks at the other door startled her.

"Lady Lannister, Maester Theomore would like to see you. He says it's urgent." It was one of her guards who spoke. She had four before the two chambers at all time. Brienne was actually resting, so she wasn't among them for the moment.

"Wait a minute." Sansa seized a heavy night gown that covered most of her and made her warmer. "Let him in," she said when she had adjusted it well enough.

The maester of the New Castle came in. Theomore Lannister was a fat man, with thick lips and golden curls. He had been the one to supervise Sansa's delivery, and since he was a Lannister of Lannisport, Sansa trusted him. Theomore had shown more respect to Sansa than to the Manderlys the few times she saw him, but though his manners were respectful, Sansa never saw him smile, not
even once. His face was cold as ice and hard as stone. He did his duty and nothing more. It was quite a contrast with Luwin and Creylen.

"I hope you are well, my lady," he said, his eyes betraying no expression.

"Yes, I am."

"Do you feel any pain, dizziness, itching, urge, weakness that are unusual?"

"No."

"Very well, then. Everything seems under control. You're recovering very well. Much better than I expected. The birth went without problem and there doesn't seem to be any sequelae left from it." He said it as if they talked about the weather. Had he come this early in the morning, when the castle barely began to awake, only to ask her questions about her health and examine her if necessary?

"We received a message from Winterfell, my lady." That caught Sansa's attention. "It was written by Lord Tyrion himself."

Sansa almost snatched the small scroll from the maester's hand as soon as he handed it. Her heart hadn't beaten more frantically since the birth of her child. Reading the first lines, Sansa could barely hold her joy. Ramsay Bolton was dead and Winterfell was free. Jon and Arya were well. She didn't think she could have been happier.

Then she read the second part of the message that her husband wrote with his fine handwriting. *Rickon really was in Winterfell. Ramsay didn't lie about this. He killed him before the battle.* Sansa needed to read the passage a few times before she could register the information. Her hand was shaking.

"Do you need me for anything else, my lady?" Theomore asked. His face wore no expression. If he knew about her brother's death, he showed no sign of it, and no sign of grief or regret.

"No. You may leave."

Bowing, the maester left. Sansa returned to the scroll. *Rickon.* She thought her little brother was dead, but then learned he was alive, only to learn again that he was dead. Tears didn't come to her face. Maybe she had drained all the reserves of tears she had from all the losses she endured these last years, or maybe she didn't grieve her brother because she had already grieved his loss two years go. In fact, she barely felt anything. Her mind was hollow, numb, empty. She rolled the scroll and hid it in the folds of her gown. She asked for Willia and had her prepare for the day. Sansa went to the godswood where she prayed for Rickon. The concept of death was overall absent from the religion of the Old Gods of the North, but Sansa needed to be alone and she knew there would be no one in the godswood while there would certainly be someone in the sept at this hour, even if that was only the septon. She also took the habit of praying to the Old Gods much more often than to the Seven, and she thought it was only fitting for the Lady of Winterfell to honor the gods of the North before those of the south.

An hour later, she thought she felt at peace over the loss of Rickon. She cried, silently, letting tears roll on her cheeks. She let him go, just like she had let her parents go and Robb and Bran. Was it possible that Bran still lived somewhere? She was sure most of the northern lords wished it right now. She was the Wardeness of the North, and if the Manderlys and their allies were any indication, no one wanted of her as their lady. A raven she received from Tyrion during her delivery stated they eluded a conspiracy involving half the northern houses in their army, which was the conspiracy Lord Manderly confessed to her two weeks ago. Sansa felt betrayed more than ever, and she took
dispositions to remain safe under protection all the time. Tywin Lannister had married her to Tyrion in the hope that a Lannister would rule the North one day, but judging from what happened so far, the previous Lord of Casterly Rock had misjudged the people of the North. He probably gave her in marriage to Tyrion in the hope that he would get killed when he would arrive in the North, thus getting rid of a son he always despised. Sansa was glad that the Old Lion was dead.

When she came back to her personal rooms, Brienne was standing there. She faced Sansa as soon as she arrived.

"My lady, Lord Manderly came to see you, but since you weren't here I didn't allow him to enter."

"You did well." Sansa didn't want anyone in service of the Manderlys to be alone in her rooms or with her without at least one of her guards present, not even Lord Manderly himself. She didn't forgive him his betrayal. "I'll go to see him right now."

Not entering the rooms she was heading for a moment ago, she turned around to seek the Lord of White Harbor. She would come back later. Someone was waiting for her. Wyman Manderly was in his solar and she entered it with Brienne at her side. He rose from his seat and greeted her very politely, more than usual, before he invited her to sit and offered her a glass of wine. Sansa didn't think the Manderlys would poison her. They wanted to take her hostage at worst, not to kill her. She was still the daughter of Eddard Stark, no matter her family name.

"Lady Sansa, I believe I owe you an apology, and probably more than one." The Lord of White Harbor looked tired. Very tired. "We were fools to trust a man like Petyr Baelish."

"Only a fool trusts Littlefinger. "You were not the first." Hopefully, he will be the last. "Lord Baelish will pay for his crimes very soon." Good riddance.

"My lady, I want you to know that House Manderly only wants to restore the rule of House Stark in the North, no matter what happens. As long as Lord Tyrion is doing the same, we will remain at your side. We won't try to betray you. Our plan was only to ensure that a Stark would rule Winterfell."

It was a little too late for this kind of declaration. "Lord Manderly, there was a battle at Winterfell. The Boltons have been defeated and Ramsay is dead."

There was a huge flash of surprise on the face of the Lord of White Harbor. "Really? How do you know that?"

It seemed Theomore didn't tell the content of the raven she received to Lord Manderly. Was it ignorance because he didn't read it, or did he know what the message was about and didn't tell Lord Manderly all the same?

"I received a message from Winterfell. You were right, my brother was there."

"He really was? They found him? Lord Rickon is alive?"

"No. Ramsay Bolton killed him before the battle. He's dead, and for good this time."

Sansa's voice was hard. The Lord of White Harbor looked quite remorseful. "What a loss. I'm so sorry, my lady. You have all my condolences."

She was quite sure he regretted even more the fact that now he had no one to oppose her rule as Wardeness of the North. "Lord Manderly, I will make something clear. My brother Bran may still be alive somewhere. I will do everything to find him. He's my brother. When we find him, I will step
aside and let him rule the North as Lord of Winterfell. My lord husband will do the same and we will return to Casterly Rock. In the meantime, I expect you to obey my orders and to follow my rule. I will not tolerate another betrayal."

The Lord of White Harbor seemed to think for a moment. Only a moment. "Of course, my lady. House Manderly has always been loyal to House Stark, and we will remain loyal to House Stark forever."

She noticed he didn't give her a personal pledge. He was loyal to the Starks, not to her, but it wouldn't do any good to press the matter. "You will receive very soon a summon to go to Winterfell. All the lords of the North will gather there. We should leave as quickly as possible."

"Very well. We can leave tomorrow at dawn if that is your wish and that you feel good enough."

"Maester Theomore assures me I am in perfect health. We'll leave tomorrow." She didn't want to stay here one more moment.

The meeting ended on this. Sansa walked back to her quarters with Brienne and three other men following her, two with the crimson armor of the Lannisters and one with the trout of House Tully on his tabard.

"I'm sorry, my lady," said Brienne as they progressed. "I never thought the Northerners would turn against you."

"Lord Manderly may claim the opposite, but when they look at me they don't see the daughter of Eddard Stark. They see a Lannister, the Lady of Casterly Rock." The grey gowns she wore recently wouldn't be enough to change the perception the people of the North had of her.

"I don't. There are times I look at you and I wonder if your mother truly died."

"My mother was a Tully before she was a Stark, Brienne."

For the first time in her life, Sansa wished she had an appearance closer to Arya. She had always been proud of her beauty and the resemblance with her lady mother, but now looking more like her father would be quite useful.

Sansa went back to her personal room and wrote a reply to Tyrion's letter. She sent Willia to bring it to Maester Theomore, then walked in the adjacent chamber that communicated with her own through a door. There was a woman in the thirties who sat into a chair against the wall, and a Tully guard at the door giving on the corridor. She never left someone in this room without a guard.

"My lady." The woman stood up.

"Everything is well?" Sansa asked her.

"Yes, my lady."

"Leave us alone. You too." She addressed the woman and the soldier.

When they were gone, Sansa turned her gaze to the cradle at the center of the room. She slowly walked to it, unable to keep a smile out of her face. The labor had been horrible. It was as if she was being torn apart from the inside. The slaps she received from Joffrey and his kingsguards were nothing compared to this. She was afraid more than once that she would die. She kept pushing and breathing and following the instructions Theomore gave her, until finally it was over. When she received her child in her arms for the first time, all the pain, all the suffering, all the ordeals she faced
had disappeared immediately. She wished Tyrion had been there.

She had his eyes. They were green and big, and they looked at her all the time. She already had a blond duvet over her head. Her daughter took much after her father from what Sansa could tell. Tears were close in her eyes. Little arms tried to reach her in vain. She remembered something Cersei told her, the day she bled for the first time. Love no one but your children. On that front, a mother has no choice. Sansa had asked if she should love Joffrey at the time, and Cersei had answered her she could try. What would she have answered if Sansa had asked her whether she should love Tyrion or not? Cersei once told her that Tyrion wanted to be loved and that it was a disease. How could that be a disease? How could something so beautiful, that made you so whole, so happy, be a disease?

Sansa took her little daughter into her arms and sat nearby, her daughter resting comfortably in her lap, and sang her a lullaby she heard her lady mother sing to Rickon when he was still a babe. By the time it was over, she was sleeping peacefully, just like when she was still in her mother's belly. Tears threatened to leave Sansa's eyes, but they were of joy, not of grief or sadness. She didn't want to be sad for Rickon, even if he was dead. She wanted to be happy. Had her mother felt like this when she was born? Sansa understood better now why her lady mother had loved all her children so much, because she felt it for her own daughter right now. She was so beautiful.

Sansa just sat there for a long time, rocking her little girl and continuing to sing. She never thought she would sing again so much. She had lost the taste for music after she came to King's Landing, and in Casterly Rock she mostly listened to music, with all her duties. She brought her back to the cradle and laid her down in it carefully. Her daughter was so calm and looked so peaceful this way. Sansa approached her face from hers and whispered something.

"We're going to leave very soon. You're going to meet your father, my little Joanna." Sansa kissed her on the forehead with all the love she had.

Chapter End Notes

So, this is it. Tyrion and Sansa have a daughter. Concerning the name, I thought there were mostly two choices that Sansa would consider: her mother's name, or the name of Tyrion's mother. She could also have chosen her aunt's name, or her sister's name. The choice she made is in part motivated by political reasons. Their daughter is so far their only child, so she is the heir to Casterly Rock, before she is the heir to Winterfell (something that is not certain). So it makes sense to give her a Lannister name. The choice is also another proof of Sansa's strong identification to House Lannister now. Finally, we've seen through some chapters Sansa come into indirect contact with Tyrion's mother (the discussions she had with Genna and Cerenna when she arrived at Casterly Rock, or when she read Maester Yendel's work at White Harbor) and to feel some connection with this woman she never knew, because they faced similar situations. Hence the name that is chosen. However, it might not help for the Northerners to see her as one of them.

Please review

Next chapter : Jaime
The column marched forward in what looked like a slow pace. Jaime knew that Lord Randyll Tarly had ordered a forced march on King's Landing as soon as he received the news that Loras Tyrell had been imprisoned by the High Sparrow, but since they learned that Margaery and Cersei were arrested as well, Jaime could only think that they didn't progress quickly enough.

The raven had come from Storm's End and it reached Lord Tarly as they had begun to march to the Boneway. The Lord of Horn Hill had gritted his teeth, obviously furious. He let his son lead his army to the Boneway against the Yronwoods while another army led by another Reach lord went through the Prince's Pass. All in all, Randyll Tarly brought two thousand men with him to King's Landing. Jaime had decided to follow him to the capital. After all, it was his son's brother-in-law who was arrested. When he learned that Cersei was in the same situation, it increased his resolve to come back. Jaime didn't understand how the fanatics they took care of before they left could have come back so quickly.

Most of the men in the army that followed them were from the Reach. Jaime seldom spoke with them and ate alone. Many looked at his golden hand with disdain, or maybe it was because he was the Kingslayer. Either way, he stayed away from the other men and they stayed away from him. Lord Randyll invited him to dine with him from time to time, since he was a kingsguard, but it was obvious the Lord of Horn Hill did this out of duty and for nothing else. Jaime never missed the disapproving look he had on his face when he looked at his forged hand. You'd be better to sell that hand and use the money to equip a few men for the war. The gold would be far more useful in that case, he told him one day.

Lord Randyll's son was a little better than the father. While they marched on Dorne, he went to see Jaime sometimes and asked him questions about the wars he took part in, the Mad King and his time as kingsguard. At one moment, their discussion had turned to the time he spent as a squire in Renly Baratheon's army.

"I respected Lord Renly," Dickon said. "He was a good man. He would have made a good king. Though the Iron Throne wasn't his."

"And yet your father followed him," Jaime said bitterly.

"My father followed his liege lord. My family swore loyalty to the Tyrells hundreds of years ago." The boy was loyal to his father, Jaime had to give him that. Sometimes, Randyll Tarly reminded him of Lord Tywin.

"Yes, just like all the other lords of the Reach and the Stormlands. You fought for the Targaryens during Robert's Rebellion, then you knelt before him, then you sided with Renly before going to Joffrey when he died. You switched your cloak thrice in the last twenty years. But then, many are worse. The lords of the Stormlands rebelled against the Mad King as well, then they sided with Renly during the last war, only then to switch to Stannis and then to Joffrey. That makes four instead of three."

The heir of Horn Hill replied nothing to this. Maybe Jaime shouldn't have been so harsh on him. He
was only a squire after all. "You didn't fight during the Robert's Rebellion, didn't you?"

"No," Jaime sighed. "My sworn brothers fought him at the Trident, but I didn't. I was to stay in the capital to protect the king. Instead I shoved my sword through his heart before Ned Stark could do it himself." And he despised me for that. He would have respected me if I had died protecting a man who tried to destroy the city and kill all its inhabitants.

"Lord Renly was killed by one of his kingsguards too," said Dickon as a matter of fact.

Jaime scoffed. "Brienne didn't do this."

"She was alone with him."

"She loved Renly. Why would she kill the man she loved?"

"But she did."

"Believe me, lad, she didn't."

"She should never have been in his army," Lord Randyll's son had continued after a moment. "Armies are not a place for women, at least not with swords. When I was there, the knights started to make a gamble about who would get her maidenhead. They were so many to put money on this that the man who would have won would have gotten very rich. My father put a stop to that before it went too far. He told her to leave at this moment, but she refused."

A contest for Brienne's cunt. Jaime never thought he would hear of that one day. He thought about all his nights with Cersei, how they were good. He never had been with another woman. He didn't know what it was to be with someone else than Cersei. Maybe he should ask Tyrion when he would come back from the North. His brother had had two wives, not to mention his many whores. Surely he could tell him what it was like.

"Truth be told, lad, I saw Brienne of Tarth fight, and she's better than many knights in Westeros, and more honorable than most. She might be a woman, but she will always be more a knight than almost all these men who boast that title." Myself included.

Jaime had ended their conversation with these words. Dickon Tarly would certainly not listen to him and side with his father. Which son wouldn't? Jaime missed their discussions, and he envied the lad who was going to war against Dorne while Jaime was stuck to save his sister. Cersei had been supposed to leave the capital. How did she end up there so the Sparrows could arrest her? Jaime wouldn't be surprised if she was behind the arrest of both Margaery and Loras Tyrell.

He was tempted more than once to ride all alone to King's Landing to save his sister, but he knew that would do no good. He needed to be patient. It killed him. He needed to get to the capital and now. He raged daily against the Sparrows for imprisoning Cersei.

Finally, they saw them far away, the Red Keep and the Great Sept of Baelor that towered everything else, along with the Dragonpit on Rhaeny's Hill. As they approached, Jaime spotted banners with the Seven-Pointed Star hanging from the battlements over the gates. That wasn't something he expected. When they came close enough, Jaime distinguished men with dark robes over the battlements of the gates. The Sparrows literally took control of the city.

Randyll Tarly sent men to the King's Gate, but they only returned to say that the gates wouldn't open. Jaime was accepted in Tarly's council, but mostly as an observer. He wasn't allowed to talk very much.
"The men at the gates had a star carved on their foreheads. All of them," explained the captain. "They were armed with clubs and sticks. None had a sword. They said no sword was allowed in the city anymore."

"No sword in King's Landing? What's this madness?" scoffed the Lord of Horn Hill.

"They say King Tommen proclaimed King's Landing a holy city of the Realm, and that hence no sword was allowed behind its walls. They wouldn't let us go in, but they said the High Septon would be ready to receive us in an hour. They said he would wait for us into the Great Sept of Baelor."

"And I suppose we must come without weapons?"

"I suppose, yes, my lord."

"Then go back to these Sparrows and tell them we will meet their leader before the gates and nowhere else. If he's not there at the hour he gave us, we're going to storm the gates and take the city. Make it clear."

"Yes, my lord."

The captain looked afraid as he left. He had every right to be. Jaime wasn't sure if it was a good idea to storm the city. Cersei, Queen Margaery and Ser Loras were still the prisoners of these Sparrows. What if they killed them the moment they breached the gates? If they were quick enough and that the Sparrows were disorganized, this might work, but there was a risk. As his commanders left the tent, Jaime found himself alone with the Lord of Horn Hill.

"If you want, Ser Jaime, you can be there for the negotiations with the High Sparrow, or for the battle, whatever happens, but I would advise you to remain behind. You're not known for your talents in diplomacy and neither are you known for your feats with a sword now that you only have one hand," the lord said coldly.

"I am the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard. I must be present," Jaime argued.

"A Lord Commander of the Kingsguard who can't fight." Another scoff. "Have you ever seen something like this. I will never understand why your nephew got rid of Ser Barristan Selmy. It was stupid and insulting. It would be a good thing to have him with us right now. Instead, he went to Meereen to serve that Targaryen girl."

"And he died there," Jaime counteracted.

"I think it would have been preferable if he died for our king, instead of the Mad King's daughter. Wouldn't you agree?"

Jaime couldn't oppose this. Ser Barristan thought that he should trade his white cloak for a black one after he killed the Mad King, but despite this Jaime admired the man. He died a true knight, serving someone he believed in. What had Jaime done on his side? Serve as a dignified bodyguard, the way his lord father put it, for a mad man he murdered, a drunken fool, and two boys he had with his own sister.

"Let us be clear about something, Ser Jaime," said Lord Tarly as he sat behind his desk. "Our priority is to free the queen and her brother. Ser Loras Tyrell is the only son of Mace Tyrell and the heir to Highgarden. Queen Margaery is the wife of the king. They are the two people we must try to save at all cost."

"And Cersei. She's the Queen Mother."
"Yes, she is. And I wonder what she's doing in King's Landing when I made it clear she should leave." Jaime hadn't been the only one to notice the incongruity of Cersei's imprisonment. "Cersei Lannister is secondary. The queen and her brother are the ones we must focus on."

"You're not going to abandon my sister in the hands of these fanatics?" Jaime asked, angry.

"I'm not abandoning your sister, but she's not the reason why I'm here. I'm here to save the queen and the heir to Highgarden. The alliance between the Crown and the Reach relies on that. Is Cersei Lannister vital to this alliance?"

"Of course, she is."

"Then you're a fool to believe that. Cersei Lannister murdered her husband, the king. She slept with her own cousin who helped her to murder he king. She tried to have her brother killed in front of hundreds of people. There are even some to pretend she laid with you."

"That's a lie!"

"Lie or not, people believe it. I think your sister caused more than enough trouble to the Crown and our alliance. Everywhere she is, disaster seems to follow her. If she gets out of here, we will send her to somewhere in the Reach to spend the rest of her days. She will never be allowed to see the king or the capital ever again. And this time, she won't have guards from your house to watch her. Her guards will be from the house where she resides, or provided by House Tyrell."

"You can't do that! Cersei..."

"I didn't ask for your opinion, Ser Jaime. I merely informed you so you might not be surprised when her release is not among my demands to the Sparrows when we'll negotiate... if we negotiate. You are Lord Commander of the Kingsguard. Your duty is to the king, not his mother. I don't care if there's anything special between you, whatever it might be, but the fact she is your sister doesn't matter here. You serve the Crown, not the Queen Mother who almost destroyed the Crown with her decisions. Now leave. You're dismissed."

Jaime left, his left hand clenched into a fist. If he still had his right hand, it would be clenched as well, and he would certainly have tried to kill Lord Tarly on the spot with his sword, but to do that only with his left hand would be foolish, and he wouldn't help Cersei by dying. He wouldn't abandon her. The moment he had a chance, he would enter the city and save her. He couldn't let Cersei die.

An hour later, the parley took place between Randyll Tarly and the High Sparrow who was now High Septon. The man was old, unshaven, unwashed, without shoes. Jaime never thought he would see a High Septon like this. Tyrion had wanted to become High Septon when he was young. He said a crown would make him look taller. This High Septon wore absolutely nothing that would tell someone he actually was the High Septon. He had four men with him, all armed with clubs. They wouldn't stand a chance against knights, swords and crossbows. Their men over the battlements didn't even seem to have arrows.

"We order you to release the queen, Margaery Tyrell, and her brother, Ser Loras Tyrell," demanded the lord roughly, not caring for introductions.

"The gods wait for Queen Margaery and Ser Loras to confess their crimes and seek their mercy. We must wait as well," replied the High Sparrow.

"Do you think I give a shit about what the gods want? You're just a fool in dirty clothes who hear
voices in his head and believe he's doing the god's work. If you care for your life, I suggest you free them right now."

"I am at the service of the gods. I only do their will."

"Then the god's will must be that you die, because that's what will happen if you don't release the queen and her brother."

"Go on, then." The High Sparrow advanced and offered his throat to the Lord of Horn Hill. "I deserve it. We all do. We are weak, vain creatures. We live only by the Mother's mercy."

The Lord of Horn Hill burst into a humorless, cold laugh. "You really are mad. I'm not stupid or without honor enough to kill a man at a parley, even you. You only live by my mercy. Nothing stops me from storming these gates and killing all of you. You don't have the men to face us, nor the weapons."

"No doubt many of us would fall. But who are we? We have no names, no family. Every one of us is poor and powerless. And yet together, we can overthrow an empire."

"I wonder if you will say the same after I stop any wagon or people to get inside the city. When the people will starve and when they know that not only you imprisoned their queen, but also took bread away from their hands, I wonder for how long you will survive in a city full of thousands who want you dead."

The High Sparrow chuckled. "Have you ever sowed the field, Lord Tarly? Have you ever reaped the grain? Has anyone in House Tarly? Or House Tyrell? Or any great house in Westeros? A lifetime of wealth and power has left you blind in one eye. You are the few, we are the many. And when the many stop fearing the few, the few have no more power over them."

"I wonder if you will say the same when the whole population of King's Lading is after you, and when my men put yours to the sword. How many are you? A few hundreds? I don't call that many. What I have under my orders, I call that many."

The old man kept smiling. "The gods will wait for Margaery and Loras Tyrell to atone for their sins, and so we will. And we will fast."

"You will fast to death then. I warned you, old man. King's Landing is under siege from now on. Let's see if your faith can feed you. I won't kill you now, but when we take the city, my men won't hesitate to kill you, even if you take refuge in the Great Sept of Baelor."

"You would spill blood in this holy place?"

"The gods won't mind. They spilled more blood through history than kings. You can rejoice in the fact they will appreciate your sacrifice, as far as I'm concerned."

"You should be careful, Lord Tarly. You should look at your sins, the same way the Queen Mother looked at them."

That drew Jaime's attention. "What do you mean?" he asked to the old man.

The High Sparrow looked at him. "You must be Ser Jaime. Good. You will be happy to hear that your sister confessed her sins. She confessed of laying out of the bonds of marriage." Jaime's heart stopped. No, Cersei would never do that. That would mean her death, his death, and their last son's death. Cersei would never put at risk her children's life.
"You're lying."

"I never lie. Your sister sought the god's mercy and atoned for her sin."

"What of my sins? I broke a sacred oath and stabbed my king in the back. What sort of atonement is required from me? Come, make me atone."

Jaime put his left hand on the pommel of his sword. The old man didn't move. Jaime wished he did, so he may have an opportunity to kill him. "Your sister made her walk of shame. She was stripped from her clothes and fineries, and she made a walk naked through the streets, showing to the people who she really was." Jaime gripped the pommel more tightly as anger flowed through his veins. "Soon, the queen and Ser Loras will do the same."

"I doubt it." It was Lord Randyll who talked again. Someone gripped Jaime's arm. "Cersei Lannister committed crimes, we all knew it. The queen, however, has no crimes to atone for."

"The queen committed perjury at an holy inquest. She lied in front of the gods."

"That's what I said. She committed no crime. This is your last chance to free her and Ser Loras Tyrell." The old man said nothing and just stood there. "Very well. Let's see if the Seven will send you bread and meat from the skies when there's nothing left to eat in this city."

Lord Tarly turned away. Jaime wanted to stay to disembowel the High Sparrow, but a knight forced him to ride away with them. He would kill the High Sparrow, and all the Sparrows if necessary.

Back into camp, Randyll Tarly talked to him as he dismounted. "It seems Cersei Lannister won't need our help in the end. She finally confessed her crimes. It was about time."

"They humiliated her. She's the mother of the king." Jaime said, angry.

"She is, and it seems she has no will. I respect Queen Margaery. Even though she doesn't know her place, she's strong. Not like your sister. At the first challenge, she crumbles on the floor like a shy maid of twelve. She doesn't deserve a family who tries to free her."

The Lord of Horn Hill walked away. He called for one of his commanders. "Do you have any idea where Lord Selwyn Tarth could be?"

"We don't know, my lord," answered the knight. "We heard nothing about him. Maybe he arrived in the city before all this madness began."

"Find him. We need all the help we can get. He should have arrived in the capital by now."

Chapter End Notes

A short chapter, far from being one of the most exciting I admit. It's mostly there to know what's going on in King's Landing while the main action has been in the North all this time.

Please review

Next chapter: Jon (a new character appear, a character that some have been asking for)
Winterfell, about a month after the battle. Let's see how Lannisters, Northerners, Tullys and wildlings fare together. And let's see who's the new character.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"I didn't bring my men here to see the North invaded by wildlings."

"They didn't invade. They were settled in the Gift as part of a deal with the Night's Watch," Jon explained to the lord.

"They are not in the Gift right now. They are camping right outside of Winterfell and they wander in the castle daily and freely."

"They helped to free this castle and the North. The same cannot be said about you, Lord Arryn."

Harrold Arryn, new Lord Protector of the Vale, turned red. "I brought my men here, ten thousand men, to help to free the North."

"We appreciate your assistance, but we appreciate the assistance of the Free Folk too. They lost hundreds in the battle. How many men have you lost?" The lord had no answer. "When you have lost as many men as they have, we'll talk again about sending them away. The Free Folk will be allowed to remain stationed at Winterfell until all the lords of the North arrive, then everyone will go his way."

"As you wish, Jon Snow. But I warn you, I won't let these savages plunder the North, and don't expect me and my men to become friends with them."

"I'm not asking you to be their friends. Just keep your men in line and I'll make sure they keep theirs quiet. I don't want any other fight between them."

"Very well."

The Lord of the Eyrie turned away to go back to his men. The Knights of the Vale had arrived two weeks after the battle. They had been quite disappointed to discover they had missed the fight, and their lord more than everyone else. Jon didn't understand at first why the men of the Vale had come in the North. Ser Brynden Tully and Tyrion Lannister didn't know either why they had come, though since then Jon's friend told him about the machinations of Lord Petyr Baelish. He suspected this could be linked with that. They had received a raven from Sansa from White Harbor, announcing she was coming to Winterfell, but also saying that the brothelkeeper wouldn't last long. Jon was suspicious towards the Vale men since then, much more suspicious than towards the men of the Westerlands. He hadn't appreciated that they didn't come to their help before late in the battle, but the Blackfish had done the same. Taking a step back, Jon understood why they waited for the Bolton infantry to be engaged to send their cavalry. Furthermore, Lord Tyrion was a friend and a member of his family now that he was married to Sansa.
Tents were everywhere around Winterfell. The standards of House Arryn, House Lannister, House Tully and House Hightower flew everywhere, with the standards of their bannermen spread all around. There were the tents of the Free Folk too, easy to distinguish with their skins, and by the absence of banners. The castle was packed full, and so was the Winter Town, at the exception of rooms they left empty for the northern lords who hadn't arrived yet. Lady Eddara Tallhart of Torrhen's Square had come a few days ago, and Robett Glover of Deepwood Motte had arrived yesterday. His behavior had changed a lot since he refused to help Jon to take back Winterfell. Many more were still to come. Jon supposed Sansa would only arrive when almost all the northern lords would already be there. That is, all the lords who answered the call. They didn't receive answers from some families. Without surprise, the Dreadfort, Karhold and the Last Hearth were silent. They dispatched battalions to these three places to force them to surrender. These detachments were mostly composed of forces from the Westerlands and the Riverlands, the ones who suffered the fewer losses during the battle. There was also the Hightower army that marched with the Forrester forces on Ironrath. Mira and Talia Forrester were the ones to stay behind to represent their families at Winterfell in the meantime.

Jon looked at his home. Over it, only the Stark banner flew. Tyrion didn't want to upset the northern lords by hanging a golden lion on a crimson field next to the direwolf, but to not spite his own bannermen, they also decided no other banner than the Stark direwolf was to be seen anywhere inside Winterfell or on its walls. No falcon, no trout, no single or twin towers were to be seen over the castle. That was the best compromise they could come with. Despite his friendship with his sister's husband, he wasn't eager to see a red banner hanging on the battlements of his family's home.

Jon went back to his horse and rode it back to Winterfell. If banners were forbidden, the armors and garbing of the men walking all over in the courtyards and the corridors testified of the fact that Winterfell was now controlled by men from all Westeros, from Oldtown to Hardhome. They were all armed from head to toes. Jon thought it was difficult to bring all the wildlings together, and then to bring them to fight along the Night's Watch against the dead, but compared to this, it looked like a child's game. While he walked to the guests' rooms, he saw at least two Lannisters, three Tullys, two Arryns, three Northerners, one Frey and one wildling eyeing someone else suspiciously. They would really need the dead to bring all these people together. Sometimes he wondered how Tyrion and Ser Brynden managed to keep all this army in one single piece. Within the last month, they had a minimum of two brawls every day, most of the time over insignificant reasons.

The squire was waiting before Lord Tyrion's door. He announced Jon and let him go in. Lord Tyrion was busy looking into accounts, a frown on his forehead. He made a sign for Jon to take a seat, not leaving the scroll he held for a moment.

"It seems Ramsay wouldn't have lasted long at all against a siege. There isn't enough food in storage, not at all. We'll have to ask for foodstuffs to King's Landing and the Reach." He dropped the paper on the desk and looked at Jon, tired. "Easier to conquer a land than to rule it."

"You and Sansa will have a lot of work to do when she arrives," Jon commented.

"Hmm. No need to remind me. I wonder if we'll have any time for our daughter."

A smile crossed the dwarf's scarred face, like it did each time his daughter was mentioned. Despite the fortnight that passed since they received the news, Jon still found it funny to believe that his sister had a child with Tyrion Lannister. Less disconcerting was the fact that he had a niece now.

"You must be eager to see her again," Jon said.

"I am. Just like me. Four years that I haven't seen her, and she was thirteen when I left. How does she look like now?" I wish the same could be said of the Northerners. Finding your brother would
help us a great deal."

Jon averted his eyes. If only they knew exactly where Bran was, he could send a searching party north of the Wall, but without any idea of his location, they couldn't send people to wander in the wilderness with dead men lurking everywhere.

"The Knights of the Vale are growing restless. They don't like being left out," Jon informed his friend.

"They should have arrived in time for the battle, then we would have given their lords rooms inside Winterfell. Though I'm not unhappy they arrived late, if what Sansa discovered in White Harbor was true."

Jon sighed. "All this, that was a plot from Petyr Baelish." Lord Manderly had confessed to Sansa his plans to turn against the Lannisters during the battle with the help of the Vale, and the role the former acting Lord Protector of the Vale had played in this. "I do hope he dies soon."

"Me too. I wish he had been the one to betray me to Cersei when I was Hand of the King. I would have had a good reason to execute him."

"We must send forces to the Wall as quickly as possible," Jon said, changing of subject.

"First, we have to take back the Last Hearth. The lands of the Umbers are in the way, and I don't believe they will let us pass without saying a word."

"Still, we must hurry. All our men will grow restless doing nothing here for too long, and we must garrison the other castles on the Wall, before the White Walkers come. Winter is here now. The dead cannot be far any longer."

"According to the ravens that the new Lord Commander Eddison Tolett sent us, there are no signs of wights or White Walkers or Night King anywhere near the Wall. It seems for now they won't try anything."

"Let's hope they don't know how to climb it."

"Well, I read some of the books you still have in your library, and according to some historians, the Wall has a certain magic that prevents the White Walkers from going through it. If that's the truth, then we only have to make sure the Wall doesn't crumble. It doesn't seem much difficult to me."

"Maybe, but I don't trust magics or visions." He thought, not without anger, and neither without regret, of the Lady Melisandre.

"Strange for someone who's alive thanks to it."

Jon brushed aside the subject. "We need weapons against our enemies. Swords and arrows will not be enough."

"Ah yes, I've been thinking about it lately. You told me that Valyrian steel swords can defeat the White Walkers."

"Aye."

Tyrion Lannister grimaced. "Too bad there are only a few dozens left through all the Seven Kingdoms. Although thanks to my father, the number increased of one recently."
"What do you mean?"

The Lord of Casterly Rock seemed to hesitate for a time. "After the Red Wedding, my lord father had your father's sword, Ice, melted."

"What?" Jon stood up, anger filling his mind and body. Ice had been his father's greatsword and that of many Starks before him. For four hundred years, it belonged to the Lord of Winterfell. And now it was gone.

"My father made two swords with it. He gave one to Joffrey for his wedding, and he gave the other one to my brother, Jaime." Ice, in the hands of Joffrey and the Kingslayer. Jon couldn't believe it. "The smaller one is with Tommen in the capital right now, but the longest one that went to my brother is with Sansa. He gave it to a woman who's protecting her at White Harbor. I'm sorry, Jon Snow. If I had known, I would have sent it back to your brother along with your father's bones."

That didn't make Jon any less angry. The Imp looked uneasy as he talked about mining dragonglass on Dragonstone and asking his nephew to send shipments of it to Eastwatch-by-the-Sea. Then the door opened. Jon didn't expect something that could make his anger worse, but here it was all the same. Two men in Lannister armor brought forward what was left of a man, but Jon couldn't feel any pity for it all the same.

"Time to question our prisoner again. I suppose you'll want to stay, Jon Snow." That wasn't a question Lord Tyrion asked, and he didn't need to ask one. Jon would stay of course.

They forced the body into a chair, his chains clicking as they moved him. They had questioned Theon many times since they found him in the kennels. At first, it had been very difficult. He barely seemed to recognize them and murmured incoherent words. Whenever he was called Theon, or Greyjoy, or Theon Greyjoy, he kept saying My name is Reek all the time. Still, one conversation at a time, they managed to gather information from him. They had the confirmation that he never burned Bran and Rickon, and that he killed two farm boys instead who he made everyone believe they were Bran and Rickon. He claimed he had no idea where they were and that he didn't know Rickon was at the Last Hearth until Jon Umber brought him to Winterfell. Jon wasn't ready to believe him. He also claimed he didn't burn Winterfell and that it was Ramsay's work. Jon didn't believe him at first when he said so, but after questioning Maester Wolkan, people living nearby and the few Bolton prisoners they had, they obtained a confirmation from one who had been part of Ramsay's army that besieged Winterfell when Theon held it that it was Ramsay who burned the castle and skinned the Ironmen alive when they surrendered. Theon also confessed that he was the one to kill Ser Rodrik Cassel, and that he betrayed Robb, which were no secrets.

Jon sat, staring at the man Robb trusted and who rewarded his trust with betrayal and treachery. Jon had never liked Theon particularly, but still, he had been their father's ward, and only for the children's murder, he deserved to be hated and more.

"So, can you tell us who you are?" Tyrion asked. Jon had almost forgotten for a moment that he was present. His anger from learning the fate of his father's sword had almost dissipated before Theon's arrival.

"I... I am... My name is Theon Greyjoy. I am the son of Balon Greyjoy. I have a sister, Yara, and two brothers who are dead. I was given to Lord Stark as a ward after my father rebelled. I fought with Robb Stark at the Whispering Wood. I betrayed him. I took Winterfell. I was betrayed by my own men and delivered to..."

That was, overall, a very good summary, though he forgot to mention the two boys he burned and Ser Rodrik's murder. "Very well, Greyjoy. Now, can you tell us where Brandon Stark is?"
"I don't know. I didn't kill him. I didn't kill Rickon. I didn't kill them."

"No, you didn't, but you certainly have an idea where they were heading."

"I have none."

"Are you telling us that this is a pure coincidence that Ramsay got his hands on Rickon while you were at Winterfell and that you knew he was still alive?"

"I didn't know Rickon was at the Last Hearth."

"Are you really going to tell us that you said nothing to Ramsay about the Stark boys?"

Theon had looked down all the time. He dared to look up for a moment to Jon, and he lowered his face again, all shaking. "I... I told him I didn't kill them. I told him they weren't dead. I told him that when Roose Bolton was there."

"Ramsay knew that Rickon was alive because of you?" Jon asked, fury flaring inside of him once again.

"I didn't know where they were. They thought they might be heading for Castleblack. They sent a man, someone named Locke, to find them there."

Jon remembered that name. "Locke?"

Theon nodded quickly. "I know that name," said Tyrion. "He was the one who took my brother prisoner as he escaped and cut his hand."

That was something Jon didn't know. It seemed there were many things he didn't know about Locke. He should have done better than believing his story about entering the Night's Watch instead of losing a hand for hunting a partridge. Locke had come with them north of the Wall, and he died at Craster's Keep. If he was hired by the Boltons to kill Bran and Rickon, then that would explain why he was so eager to take his vows and go north with Jon. Jon highly doubted the man had a chance to put his plan to execution before he died.

"Have you ever heard of this man?" Tyrion asked this question to Jon.

"He joined the Night's Watch, but he died not long after."

"Well, no need to worry about him anymore. He never came back, I suppose?" This time, he asked to Theon.

"I never saw him again. I told them nothing else about the boys. I didn't know where they were. That's why I killed the two farm boys. I swear, I don't know where Bran and Rickon are..."

Jon jumped from his chair and took Theon by the collar. "Look at me. Look at me!" Jon shook him until Theon did as he was told. He stank. "Do you think that because you didn't kill Bran and Rickon you will live? You killed Ser Rodrik. You betrayed Robb. You took Winterfell with your men. And you burned two children all the same. It doesn't matter that it wasn't Bran or Rickon. You burned two children! Do you think Robb would spare you if he was still alive, when he executed Lord Karstark for killing two Lannister children?"

"I don't want to be spared. I deserved what happened to me, and worse."

Jon released him, dropping him into the chair, Theon's self-pity making him hate his father's ward
more than ever. The door burst opened at this moment. Arya came in, still limping a little from the
arrow she received in the leg during the battle. She kept practicing every day despite this, shooting
arrows and sparring with the other men, mostly wildlings since they had no problem with women
fighting. None dared anything against her. The story of how she killed Ramsay had spread, quick as
the wind.

"What is he doing here?" She came to stand between the desk where Tyrion Lannister sat and Theon
and looked at both of them. Jon didn't know at who she looked with the most disdain. "Why is he
still alive? He should be dead. We should kill him right now."

"Arya, this man is probably the only one who could give us some information about the location of
your brother Bran. Do you want to see your brother again someday?" Tyrion's question startled
Arya, who didn't seem to know what to answer. Jon doubted Theon could tell them more than he
already told. "He will stand trial for his crimes when Sansa arrives, and his fate will be decided
then." Jon agreed on that. They had to maintain justice, and traitors had to be executed like every
other criminal.

"And he will die?"

"I doubt Sansa will let him live."

Theon had no reaction as she talked, but when she looked back at him, he lifted his head and his
eyes widened in surprise. "Arya? But... you're dead. Lord Bolton killed you."

Jon's sister looked straight in Theon's eyes. "I'm not dead, but Rickon is. You know what Ramsay
did to him?" Theon dropped his eyes on the floor. "Where is Bran?"

"I don't know."

"You're lying. Where is Bran?" No answer. "Look at me!" She forced Theon to face her. "I lost two
brothers because of you. You betrayed us. You betrayed my family, you betrayed my father, Robb,
Rickon, Bran. Tell me where he is or I'll gut you like I did for Ramsay!"

"I'd tell you if I knew where he was."

Jon would have felt pity for Theon in other circumstances, seeing him broken and crying like he
actually did. He had nothing to see with the Theon he once knew. Jon was also aware of the torture
he had to endure in the hands of Ramsay. Although he found what Ramsay did disgusting, he could
barely sympathize with their father's ward after everything he did. He even helped the Boltons to
take the North and did nothing while Rickon was being held prisoner.

"You don't deserve to die." Jon was surprised by Arya's words. She looked at him. "We should skin
him alive. He watched Ramsay do that to everyone and he did nothing. It's time he suffers as well."

Jon didn't like that side of Arya. It was the side he saw when she killed Ramsay. "Arya, I think he
suffered more than enough. He will be judged and sentenced to death..." he tried to reason her.

"That's not enough! Have you forgotten everything he did? Rickon died because of him. He didn't
even try to save him. He's a traitor!"

"She's right," Theon's voice was weak. "I deserve to suffer. I should have saved Rickon. I should
have saved that girl. She asked me to help her escape and I refused. I said it would only get worse if
she tried to flee. I warned her. She tried to escape one day, and..." Theon's voice broke.

"It's a little too late to have regrets," Tyrion said. "Rickon and the girl are dead. If you hoped for
forgiveness, you should have saved them when you had the chance."

"I don't want to be forgiven. I was there the wedding night. Ramsay forced me to watch. He said, watch her become a woman. I should have killed him at the time."

"I think we heard enough," said Jon. He had heard more than enough about Ramsay Bolton's atrocities. He didn't need to listen to the details Theon would give. "Better to send him back to his cell." He didn't say he had certainly nothing more to tell about Bran, or else he feared Arya might kill him on the spot. She had Needle at her belt. Not that he would mind so much if Theon died at this very moment, but he didn't want Arya to kill him.

Tyrion raised his hand. "Wait. That girl that Ramsay married, you knew her?"

Theon was shaking uncontrollably. "She had to make him believe she was Arya. Or else he would have killed her. That night before the battle… He… He went to his chambers with the other girl… and he… She took a knife and she…"

"I don't think we need more details about Ramsay's horrible games. Who was the girl? Who was Ramsay's wife?"

A long silence followed. Theon was sobbing now and his voice was only a whisper when he gave the name. Jon barely heard it. "Jeyne."

"Jeyne? Jeyne Poole?" asked Arya.

"I have the impression I heard this name before," said Tyrion, his face showing clearly he was searching his mind. Jon gave him the details in a tired voice.

"Jeyne Poole was the daughter of Varyon Poole, the steward of Winterfell. She was Sansa's best friend."

"Oh, yes. I think I remember now. Sansa talked about her a few times."

"You let that monster hurt Jeyne?!!" asked Arya.

"I think we should send him back to his cell," Jon quickly said.

"I agree. Bronn!" The dwarf's man cam inside immediately with two other men in crimson armor. "Take him back to where he came from."

"The sea? To drown him?" the knight asked with a grin.

"You know what I'm talking about."

"Very well. Boys!"

Without much care, they forced Theon to stand. Balon Greyjoy's last son was half-dragged half-kicked outside the room. Jon didn't know what to do of this man. Ser Bronn of the Blackwater was quite similar to Tormund, but Jon didn't get the occasion to know him yet. Still, if Tyrion trusted him, he surely had good reasons. Jon had seen Free Folk behave with more honor than members of the Night's Watch or high lords, so why couldn't a mercenary be better than a proper knight?

"He must die," said Arya.

"He will," Lord Tyrion assured her.
"He must die NOW."

"I must go and see to the encampments outside the walls. Arya, will you follow me?" Jon asked her.

"Aye," his sister replied after a moment, not without reluctance.

Jon nodded to the Lord of Casterly Rock who seemed to thank him. The discussions between him and Arya were never very courteous, and as they left Arya shot him an angry glare again. Jon suspected Arya held him responsible in part for Rickon's death, and maybe also for letting the Northerners being slaughtered by Ramsay's arrows during the battle. Jon blamed him as well at the start, but in this case he should blame the Blackfish as well. He didn't send his troops either when the vanguard charged. Jon knew he should have gone back to their ranks after Rickon died. Lord Tyrion's remark that his brother would have done the same in his place didn't lift his spirits, if that had been the intent.

Jon looked at his sister, the little sister to who he gave a sword before they went separate ways. However, he didn't like the way she changed. The ordeals she went through these last years had changed her from the little girl who played with swords for fun into a soon-to-be woman who wanted to kill everyone who wronged her and their family. Jon couldn't get out of his mind the savagery of the way she killed Ramsay, even though he deserved it. She was no longer a little girl. Jon regretted she wasn't. When he thought about it, he had been but a boy when he left for the Wall. Now he was a deserter of the Night's Watch, a former Lord Commander who died, murdered by his own sworn brothers, and a dead brought back to life. Had Sansa changed very much as well? According to Arya, she had. Although Sansa was always polite and had never been evil with him, she had always maintained a certain distance with him. He wasn't even sure the Sansa he knew four years ago would have written to him at the Wall, and he knew for sure that girl of thirteen he had known would never have fallen in love with Tyrion Lannister. The comic side of the situation brought a smile to his lips.

"What's funny?"

"Nothing, Arya."

Jon chased the smile from his face. When he looked back upon Arya, he saw how dark her face was. He couldn't remember her smiling a single time after their reunion.

"Theon will die, Arya. Don't doubt about it."

"I know," she said gloomily. "I just wish we could kill him more painfully, right away and be done with it."

"He must be executed. We must follow the old way."

"Why?"

"Because that's our way. The man who passes the sentence must swing the sword. Because he must be sure that the man he executes is guilty, or else he couldn't kill him himself." He remembered swinging it himself a few times. He remembered Olly's lifeless body hanging from a rope by the neck.

"But we're sure that he's guilty."

"Aye, but that's not the way to do it. We must give him a trial."

"Why give him a trial? Everyone knows he's guilty."
"Not everyone. We must wait for the northern lords to all come, then expose Theon’s crimes, and execute him before all of them."

"Do you think Father had a trial? Or Mother? Or Robb? Rickon? Do you think Theon gave Ser Rodrik a trial before he killed him?"

Jon took his time to answer. "I want to see Theon die as much as you want, but we have to give him a trial, or else we wouldn't be better than those who murdered our father, or your mother, or than Theon himself."

Arya didn’t seem convinced by his words and looked straight before her as they arrived to the stables. "I don't care about the way Theon dies. As long as he dies. I'd kill him with a chicken wing if I had to. I want to kill him myself."

Jon wondered how she would do that. As stableboys prepared their mounts, Jon turned to Arya once more. Something had come to his mind, but he said nothing as they placed their saddles on the beasts and climbed on them. Sansa was the Lady of Winterfell as long as they didn't find Bran, so she would be the one to sentence Theon to die. The man who passes the sentence should swing the sword. Their father had taught this to all his sons, even the bastard. Jon didn't imagine Sansa swinging the sword on Theon, so maybe Arya would be the one to kill him. After all, after Sansa, she was second in line to inherit Winterfell. There was Sansa's daughter before her, of course, but she was still a babe. Jon thought for a moment that Sansa hadn't told them how she named the child. He would to make sure Arya wouldn't be the one to execute Theon. He had to speak with Sansa as soon as she arrived and arrange for himself to be the one to carry out the execution. They would also need to tell her about Jeyne. She had always been Sansa's best friend here, and now she was dead. Someone else was gone.

"You might still get your chance to kill Theon," Jon finally said as they rode through the gates, without thinking. "I will."

Jon had already visited the different camps previously today. In fact, he had given this as an excuse to get Arya and Tyrion as far away from each other as possible. He headed to the Free Folk tents, deciding it would be best to see his friends there again, then perhaps pay a visit to the northern lords. The main tensions were still between Northerners from beyond the Wall and Northerners from south of the Wall. Thousands of years of uninterrupted wars wouldn't disappear after a single battle.

As they rode towards Tormund's camp, a rider came in their direction and stopped before them. He wore the sigil of House Lefford. "Jon Snow, you should come to our camp. There are Karstarks who just arrived."

"Karstarks?"

"Yes. I'm on my way to warn Lord Tyrion, but I believe it would be better if you were present. They're kept inside our trenches for now."

"Very well. I'm going there."

The messenger resumed his path. As Jon rode to the sea of red tents that spread to his right, he wondered if the Karstarks had decided to surrender in the end. Harald Karstark hadn't seemed the type of man to surrender during the parley. He never forgave his father's execution. Arya followed him. Jon spotted the banner of House Karstark somewhere in the center of the camp. Their small group of about fifteen men was surrounded by several soldiers in red armed with every possible
weapon the Westerlands could provide. They made way for Jon as he approached. A young woman about his age, still on her horse, turned to face him.

"Jon Snow. It's been a long time. My house and yours are bound by blood and honor, though there's been a lot of blood and few honor between us lately."

Jon looked at her. I know this girl. She was tall and skinny, her brown hair was woven in a thick braid and bound with strips of leather, she had a long face with a pointy chin and small ears. For a moment, the memory eluded him. Then it came.

"Alys Karstark."

That brought a smile to her lips. "I wasn't sure you would remember. I was six the last time you saw me."

Jon nodded. "You came to Winterfell with your father." The father Robb beheaded. "What are you doing here?"

"I bring you a present." Two men with the white sun on their chest came forward, holding a third one in shackles who struggled.

"How dare you?! I'm your lord!" he shouted.

One of the two guards punched him in the stomach and the others shoved him forward into the mud. Jon had seen him at the parley with Ramsay. He was the one who escaped from the battle alive. Harald Karstark, Lord of Karhold, bound by fists and ankles.

"What does that mean?" Jon asked to the young lady.

"My brother fought with Ramsay against you and he lost. I give him to you as a traitor. I only ask in return that my house keeps Karhold. I will swear loyalty to your sister and what men my family still has will help you against your enemies."

Jon looked at the fallen Lord of Karhold, then to his sister. "You're really giving up on your brother?"

She scoffed. "Truth be told, I never loved him. I loved Eddard and Torrhen, they were kind, but while they went south to fight the Lannisters and died in the war, Harald remained behind to play with little boys in his chambers. I advised against siding with the Boltons, but he didn't listen to me. I suppose he liked Ramsay because of their mutual tastes. The people of Karhold are loyal to me now. None really loved my brother anyway."

"Be careful, Jon Snow." Ser Daven Lannister stepped forward from the circle around them. "Her father murdered two of my cousins in their cells, boys without weapons. He killed my father and was later beheaded by your brother Robb Stark. And let's not forget that her brother fought against us not long ago."

"My father is dead, and so are Robb Stark, your cousins, your father, two of my brothers, and I don't care what you do with the one I have left. I warned him to not fight alongside Ramsay and he didn't listen. But we are still living, the three of us." She looked at Ser Daven, then to Jon. "Is there blood feud between us, Lord Snow?"

"If every man, or woman, were held accountable for the actions of every relative, we'd all hang." Jon looked at Lord Tyrion's cousin. "Ser Daven, have your men bring Lord Harald to the cells. My sister, Lady Sansa, will decide what to do with him."
Daven gave orders to four men to bring the fallen Lord of Karhold, who cursed all the way. Jon brought back his attention on Lady Alys. "Lady Karstark, the hospitality of Winterfell is yours. I'll allow you to move inside the castle with a servant and two guards to protect you, but your other men will have to stay outside. Lady Sansa will decide of Karhold's fate."

She shrugged. "I'm in no position to negotiate. Very well, but I suggest you chop my brother's head as soon as possible."

"Come, I'll escort you."

As they rode toward the castle with the Karstark lady, her three men and several Lannister soldiers, Arya said something for the first time they went out the castle. "We could kill Lord Harald right now, if she wants it so much."

"You must be Arya Stark," said Alys Karstark from behind. "We meet again."

"We never met."

"We did, only you don't remember. You had just been born. Your sister Sansa was three and already behaving like a lady back then. I'm glad we can meet properly for the first time. Thank you for thinking my brother should die immediately."

Chapter End Notes

So, as ALEXK supposed, the new character was indeed Alys Karstark. She appears in the A Dance with Dragons and there are rumors that she will appear in Season 7. Even if some of these rumors say that he would have red hair, I decided to keep her physical appearance from the books. Her behaviour towards her last living brother is different from the books because the last son of Rickard Karstark is quite different in the series from who he is in the books, at least from what we know.

Please review

Next chapter: Daenerys
For the first time in this fic, Daenerys gets an original chapter. I tried to write it in a way that would make the events from the show more realistic, filling gaps. It wasn't very likely that they only needed to defeat the armada in Meereen to have all the other cities go on their knees immediately. War and peace are never that simple. Nothing is ever over in one single great battle. GRRM does a very good job in the books to show that, but sadly the show lacks it and simplify things in an unrealistic way, perhaps because of time constraints.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Daenerys III

You could still see the marks left by the fires in some districts near the harbor. From her balcony at the top of the Great Pyramid of Meereen, Daenerys looked at the city. Entire pans of the city had been destroyed because of the masters' attack. The people had started to rebuild their homes, but the reconstruction was slow. The money that Volantis and Yunkai had sent was still on its way, so they would need time before the inhabitants of Meereen could fully bring back their city to what it looked like before the war. Still, things were better than when she left. The Sons of the Harpy were all dead or arrested, as far as they knew. Lord Varys had put to their disposition his network of little birds and came up with several crucial members of the organization, though the red priests and the Unsullied brought as much if not more. The ships were almost ready. They would set sail for Westeros in a few hours. This was the last time Daenerys would ever see Meereen.

The two months that followed the Battle of Meereen had gone quickly and yet she had accomplished a lot. She flew to Yunkai, Astapor and Volantis and made treaties of peace with the governments of all these cities. In Astapor, she was welcomed as a savior by everyone. The new council of the city, led by former slaves, freedmen and red priests, was very enthusiastic about her arrival. She didn't have much to do there. The masters had been kicked off the city or murdered quite easily by the people, and the sellsword companies had abandoned their farce of a siege when they heard the Wise Masters were defeated in Meereen. She contented herself with a public declaration that every slave was now free and the rest of the stay was mostly about festivities. The people would have liked her to stay longer, but she left after one day. She had more pressing matters to attend. She stayed long enough to enjoy a play about her and how she saved Slaver's Bay, though it wasn't very true to what happened. There were a few other plays, including one that was called the Bloody Hand and that showed the events that happened in Westeros during the War of the Five Kings, mostly centered around the dwarf son of Tywin Lannister, now the Lord of Casterly Rock. There were also musicians and singers. Surprisingly, one of the red priestess, Tishae, came to perform a beautiful version of The Seasons of My Love, a Myrish song Daenerys heard a long time ago. Then she performed another song specially made for Daenerys, Mother of Flame.
Through high walls
Tyrants of toil will fall

Queen of the free
The breaker of chains
Winter will cry out my name
Look to the sea
To follow my claim
Become the mother of flame

The situation she found in Yunkai had been quite different. The masters still held a part of the city, but when Daenerys came with her dragon, they only needed two hours to surrender. Daenerys forced the masters to pay an amend for the damage their fleet caused to Meereen, then constituted a council made of both freedmen and former slaves to rule the city. She also included a red priest on the council and chose freedmen who took part to the rebellion or masters who opposed the war with Meereen and the repression against the slaves to have a seat on it. Then the sellswords companies were sent away without payment. Drogon's sight was enough for most of them to fly away quicker than her dragons could followed them, and those who remained and demanded their payment didn't have the opportunity to demand anything else for the rest of their lives.

If Yunkai had been difficult, Volantis had been a hell. The masters were still resisting inside the Black Walls and refused to surrender. Even the sight of her dragons didn't make them flinch. Daenerys had no choice. She made her three dragons come and attacked with all of them the buildings inside the Black Walls. Viserion was almost shot by a scorpion during the first day of the attack, so Daenerys waited for the night and launched her attack while no one could see her and her children. All the palaces, courtyards, temples and bridges inside these walls burned for three days and three nights before the triarchs surrendered in the name of all the masters of Volantis. The city had fallen. It took four more days to extinguish all the fires. The city inside the Black Walls had burned for an entire week. For once, the rich were the ones to suffer while the poor were safe, protected from the fire by the walls of dragonstone.

Creating a government was much harder than for Volantis. Daenerys had forced the masters to pay an amend as well for the damage they caused to Meereen, which left them with almost nothing since most of their possessions inside the Black Walls had already burned. With the masters and the triarchs neutralized, the red priest Moqorro proposed that the Red Temple took responsibility of ruling Volantis. Back in Meereen, before she left, Kinvara had strongly advised her to not trust Moqorro, and even told her to not leave the government in the hands of the Red Temple. Since this came from the High Priestess herself, who was the leader of the Red Temple, Daenerys supposed this really had to be serious. She decided to keep the political model of Volantis with three triarchs, but added a council of ten people to advise it, and decided that everyone in the city, no matter their birth or their riches, could vote for the triarchs and their advisors. She put into place a council of transition to make sure the elections would go well, excluding Moqorro from it, while still allowing him to present himself for the vote.
She had only come back two days ago and made an alliance with Yara Greyjoy, supporting her claim on the Iron Islands in exchange for her help in taking the Iron Throne. With the masters' armada, the Grejoy and the Dornish ships, they had enough to bring all her Dothrakis and the Unsullied across the Narrow Sea. On her way, she had thought about changing the political system of Astapor and Yunkai to turn it into something like she did in Volantis, but she had already given her word to the rulers in place in the two cities, and she couldn't come back on it. However, she established the same measures in Meereen than she did in Volantis. She would be the last Queen of Meereen. She looked again below her. It was the last time she would enjoy this view. The sea called for her. Her homeland was waiting for her. She didn't know much about it. She couldn't rely on what Viserys told her. She had Lord Varys, of course, but she wasn't ready to trust him, not entirely. Of course, there was Malcolm Branfield and Prince Trystane, and Jorah as well. She accepted him back into her service. He saved her. How could she maintain his exile after everything he did for her, despite the fact she sent him away?

"This is a great city, when we look from here."

Daenerys knew to who this voice belonged. "It is," she replied shortly.

"There are many changes coming for it, and for its people."

"But will they accept change?"

"They will. They have to. If you don't change, you die. Many men don't want to understand this, and most of the time they die." Kinvara came to stand next to her. "The Great Masters believed Meereen was great. When you look at it from here, that's the impression you have. You see temples, pyramids, high walls, a great harbor, huge mansions there and there. You can even distinguish the smaller houses. But you don't see the people living in it. You can't distinguish them. You can't put a name on their faces. They are like ants for you. You only see the buildings. No wonder the masters never cared about the people. They didn't see them. All they saw were statues, columns and pyramids, all that to display their riches to the eyes of the world and to their eyes. And all the while, people suffered, and they didn't see it."

"Perhaps they saw it, but they didn't care," Daenerys suggested.

"Probably, too. It's difficult to care for ants. Do we?"

"No, but the people are not ants."

"No, they're not. You'll make a good queen, Daenerys Stormborn. I don't need visions in the fire to see it. What the people of Westeros will gain from you, those of the Bay of Dragons will lose."

"It's the end of slavery," Daenerys stated. "I fought so that no child born into Slaver's Bay would ever know what it meant to be bought or sold. But this is not my home. It's time for others to make sure that slavery never returns."

"There are good men and women who will fight for freedom after you've left, though it won't be easy. Lys, Myr, Lorath, Pentos, New Ghis… There are still many cities were slavery is practiced, but with the trade disrupted, Volantis on its knees and Braavos who is still the most powerful of the Free Cities and where slavery is banned, it will only be a matter of time before slavery disappears from most of the cities of Essos. Will it ever see you again?"

"Not before a long time."

That was strange for Daenerys. She had lived in Essos for about twenty years, and yet it had never
felt like home, except when she was a child and she lived with Ser Willem Darry in the house with a red door. She would be home soon, her real home.

"I heard you're coming to Westeros with us," Daenerys said at the intention of the High Priestess.

"You heard well."

"May I ask why?"

Kinvara looked at her. "I must advise the queen, if she would have me."

"You've been a great help here in Meereen. I thought you'd stay."

"Zanrush will make a very good job, and although I don't trust him entirely, Moqorro is capable. Besides, I believe it's time for the word or R'hllor to reach the Seven Kingdoms. The priests who went there these last years did poorly."

"I have no wish to prevent any people from preaching their faith, but don't expect me to give you a special treatment or to force my people to follow your god."

"He's not my god. He's our god to us all, but you don't have to worry about me. R'hllor wants people to choose him and to follow him with a true faith. If I was to force people to follow him, they wouldn't have faith. It wouldn't be a choice and R'hllor is a choice."

"From what Lord Varys is telling me, there are fanatics in King's Landing who don't share your views about this when it comes to their own gods."

She heard the High Priestess muffle a chuckle. "If these Sparrows really read the Seven-Pointed Star, they would discover that the teachings of these gods are full of contradictions and incongruities. One of the texts tells a story about a general who promised to the Father that he would offer in sacrifice the first person he would see when he would get back home if he granted him the victory. The Father gave him what he asked for, but when the general went back home, the first person he saw was his daughter, his only child. He sacrificed her and the Father was overjoyed by this."

That didn't look like the things Viserys told her about the Seven. "You read the holy texts of the Seven?" Daenerys found it strange that a High Priestess of R'hllor read the Seven-Pointed Star.

"The Seven came from Essos at the origin. And how could you discuss with people if you don't understand them? How could you understand them if you don't understand their faith? Furthermore, the people who follow the Seven are looking for R'hllor. They're just looking at the wrong place, and they don't know exactly what they're looking for." She paused. "Even if I had no word to bring from the Lord, I must go to Westeros all the same. The great war yet to come is coming. You'll have to face your greatest enemy soon, Daenerys Stormborn."

Daenerys didn't care to ask. The High Priestess was often talking in strange terms and she didn't want to engage her on a religious discussion. Meereen was already full of priests talking of a great war yet to come, of Azor Ahai reborn, of a certain Great Other, and much more.

All in all, Daenerys wasn't displeased that Kinvara would come to Westeros. She had proved to be very useful while she was away from Meereen. Her priests and soldiers were vital in the keeping of the peace and the fights they had against the masters. And she had powers, just like the Undying. Daenerys didn't know where the powers of the red priests came from, nor did she know where dragons came from and why her eggs in stone hatched, but if the red priests were ready to help her, she would take it. Where she was going, she would need allies. So far, Kinvara's advices had proven very useful. She hoped they would remain so in a foreign land. Of the three people who arrived in
Meereen in her absence, Daenerys trusted the High Priestess more than Trystane Martell or the Spider.

"A conspiracy of women, it seems. I do hope it's that and not the other thing I think it might be."

Daenerys turned to see Daario Naharis standing before her, brushing the pommel of his dagger displaying a naked woman. She turned to the High Priestess and silently ordered her to leave. The woman bowed and left the room, leaving Daenerys all alone with her captain.

"Your ships are nearly ready. I saw them painting the sails." He grabbed a cup of wine and poured himself a cup from the flagon. He was about to take a sip, then after a moment of hesitation poured another one and brought it to her, looking at her intently, smiling. "I'm curious to see how the Dothraki do on the poison water."

He took another sip, his eyes full of desire. Daenerys walked away for a moment. She couldn't look into his eyes, not now, or she might not find the courage to do it. She had delayed long enough. She had to do it now, or never. And she couldn't allow herself to never do it.

"You're not coming with us." She turned to look at him. There was some space between them, which was much better.

Daario frowned. "New strategy? You want the Second Sons to attack from the west coast? If we take Casterly Rock, the Lannisters will have nowhere to run when you hit King's Landing."

"You're not going to Westeros." She said it quickly. She wanted it to be over. It had to be done. "You're staying here with the Second Sons. There's finally peace in Meereen. You will keep the peace while the people choose their own leaders."

The captain of the Second Sons had no reaction for a moment. "Fuck Meereen. Fuck the people. I'm here for you, not them."

"You promised me. My sword is yours. My life is yours. This is what I command," she said, unflinching. Then she explained. "If I'm going to rule in Westeros, I'll need to make alliances. The best way to make alliances is with marriage."

Daario's face broke down as she spoke. He laid his cup down on the nearby table. Daenerys still had her own in hand. Her captain sighed. "Who are you marrying this time? This prince?"

"Maybe. I don't know. Maybe no one."

"I never thought you would marry this young fellow. You reassure me, but still… You need to lure all the noble houses to the table?" She didn't need to explain everything finally. "Are you a queen or fish bait?"

She looked at him. Fish bait? "I can't bring a lover to Westeros," she said, her voice hard.

"A king wouldn't think twice about it," he almost shouted.

"So that's what you want? To be my mistress?"

"I'm not proud. I don't care what perfumed aristocrat sits beside you in the throne room. I don't want a crown. I want you." He approached her very closely. "I love you. And I make you happy. You know I do. Bring me with you. Let me fight for you."

That was the first time Daario begged something from her. She didn't think it would turn out like this.
She placed her hand on his cheek. She had to do it. Now. There would be no turning back after this.

"I can't."

Daario turned away after a moment, then looked back at her. She wanted to tell him she was sorry, but what good would it do?

"Who told you to do this?"

"No one tells me to do anything," she replied.

"Was it Jorah the Andal? Or the eunuch? Or was it that priestess you talked with just before? Or this prince?" He waved his hand. "No matter. I can't argue with the logic. I'm no use to you over there."

"Don't get angry," Daenerys said softly.

"I'm not angry. I'm full of self-pity. Who comes after you? Who can ever follow Daenerys Stormborn, the Mother of Dragons?"

"A great number of women, I imagine." He cast his eyes down. They both knew each other too well. They knew they would both find someone else. They were not romantic people. "Specific orders will be left for you regarding the welfare of Meereen and the Bay of Dragons."

"Bay of Dragons?"

"We can't call it Slaver's Bay anymore, can we?"

Daario seized the cup he previously abandoned on the table. "You'll get that throne you want so badly, I'm sure of it. I hope it brings you happiness." He took a sip of wine. "I pity the lords of Westeros. They have no idea what's coming for them."

He had half a smile on his face. Perhaps she should tell him something else, but nothing came to her mind. "Farewell, Daario Naharis."

With a bow and a forced smile, the sellsword left. She would never see him again. It was done. She looked at her own cup and emptied it. She felt the wine going down through her throat, but except for the sour taste of it, she felt nothing. She said farewell to a man who loved her, a man she thought she cared for, and that was all she felt. She was just glad it was over and done.

"He seemed to take it quite well." The statement came from the High Priestess. She was back.

"You were eavesdropping?" Daenerys accused her.

"I only heard. You didn't forbid me to stay close."

This almost sounded like something the Spider would do. "I forbid you, in the future."

"As you wish, your Grace." She refused wine when Daenerys offered her some. "Are you afraid, your Grace?"

That was quite a personal question, but Daenerys was in no mood to sermon the woman. So she nodded to make it known that she was.

"There's nothing wrong with fear itself. The only mistakes we can make is to fear the wrong things."

"What do you fear?"
The High Priestess looked at her with a hollow face. "To fail."

"I thought the Lord of Light was with you."

"He is with everyone. And yet, everyone fails, one time or another."

They remained silent for a moment, the queen and the red priestess. Then Bhakaz appeared at the entrance. "Your Grace, Prince Trystane is asking for an audience with you."

She just sent away a lover and a possible betrothed now wanted to see her. "Tell him to wait in the audience chamber." Bhakaz left. She turned to the priestess. "Come with me."

The High Priestess followed her. The corridors of the Great Pyramid looked empty. Daenerys had reduced her personal guard to the minimum because of the preparations for their leaving and the reconstruction of the city. The Unsullied were needed all over the city. Furthermore, the resistance had crumbled after the defeat of the masters. Very few would try an attempt of assassination against her. On their way to the Hall, they came upon Ser Jorah.

"So, you did it?" he asked.

"I did," she replied a little too coldly.

"Look, I know… I'm sorry…"

"No, you're not."

She walked past him. Maybe she was unfair. Jorah had been right when he advised her to break up with Daario, but she knew very well he didn't advise her only for political goals. She knew her bear wasn't be unhappy to see the sellsword far away from them, and far away from her, while he stayed close.

Prince Trystane of House Martell was waiting in the audience chamber. He bent the knee when she entered. A ward was standing behind him, holding a box in his hands. He knelt as well. "Your Grace."

"Rise, Prince Trystane," she told him. The young man stood up as Daenerys sat on the ebony bench. It would probably be the last time she sat on it. "You wanted to see me?"

"Yes, alone if possible, if you allow me."

She knew who he was talking about. Kinvara was standing behind her, in retreat. "My advisors are welcomed to my audiences. All my advisors."

After a moment, he conceded. "As you wish, your Grace."

Ever since she arrived, Daenerys had kept a good distance with the Prince of Dorne. Despite Kinvara's and Malcolm's assurances, she didn't find his ruling of Meereen in her absence very brilliant, and she had suspicions about him because of that marriage contract. They had never been alone. Daenerys had to admit he was handsome in his own way, though a few years younger than her. Still, he couldn't compete with Drogo or Daario. He had come here because his father wanted him to marry her in exchange for Dorne's help in her quest of the Iron Throne. The fact she sent her lover away a few minutes ago didn't place her in good dispositions towards the prince.

"I think you may want to know that the ships my father sent are ready for the sailing," the prince said.
"I'm already aware of this." She meant that if he had nothing else to say, he could go now, instead of wasting her time.

The prince seemed to hesitate. "Your Grace, maybe that's not the right moment, but we both know why I'm here, why my father, Prince Doran Martell, sent me here. I think we ought to discuss it."

He didn't look as if he wanted to discuss about it. Daenerys found it queer.

"Prince Trystane, I will not waste your time. I'm not going to marry you." Surprise was plain on the young man's face. "Not yet. I will consider your father's offer concerning the joining of our houses, and once I take the Iron Throne, I will give you an answer, but only when I take the Iron Throne. A marriage between us would be useless if I didn't take my family's throne."

"Hmm, your Grace, my father offered…"

"I accept his alliance. Your father is already at war with the other kingdoms. I will help you and your kin, and bring you the vengeance you are looking for. I will destroy the Baratheon and Lannister usurpers and bring you justice for the crimes against your family. But we will not discuss a marriage between our two houses before I sit on the Iron Throne. You and your father will get your answer at this moment."

The boy was stammering. "My father will not like this, your Grace. For him, the marriage is part…"

"You claim that your father is loyal to my house, that he remained loyal to my house for the last twenty years and that he worked to bring down the usurpers all this time."

"Yes, your Grace."

"Then in this case, I expect your armies to fight alongside mine as loyal bannermen to my house, and I will make sure you are rewarded. I don't believe we need a marriage to ensure this alliance. If your father refuses to honor this alliance, then he cannot expect me to help you against your enemies. Furthermore, the contract that was signed years ago was about a marriage between me and Prince Quentyn Martell. There's nothing in that document concerning an union between you and me."

A moment passed. Finally, the prince nodded. "I think he will accept, your Grace. My father is loyal to House Targaryen."

"Good."

She didn't have to engage with Prince Trystane. Right now, the Martells needed her more than she needed them. She might need another alliance once in Westeros, and it wouldn't be easy to make one if she was already betrothed, and even more difficult if she was married. She had to keep her hand free for any possibility, and she didn't want to marry her again, not for now. But she would marry eventually, if this was for the benefit of her people. The prince didn't look very sad. All she could see on his face was resignation.

"Was there anything else?" she asked.

"Yes, there is, your Grace." The boy who waited behind him stepped forward. "This is a gift that my father is sending for you. I brought it with me from Dorne and waited for you to come back to offer it. I hope this will prove our loyalty."

Curious, Daenerys made a sign for the boy to advance. The box was small. It could barely have contained one of the dragon eggs Illyrio Mopatis gave to her.
"Open it," she ordered to the ward when he was close enough, but not too much. He opened the box.

Daenerys squinted her eyes first to see the content, shadows making it too difficult to discern. Then the boy inclined the box and light made what was inside shine. It was a circle made of steel, with big square-cut rubies all around. A crown. She ordered without a word to the boy to approach more and she took the crown. The steel didn't feel like any steel she ever held or touched. It was quite a simple crown, but obviously made of costly materials. She looked at the prince.

"What is it?"

"This is the crown that your ancestor, Aegon, wore when he was crowned King of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar," he explained.

Daenerys stared at the crown, then looked again to the son of Doran Martell. "I thought this crown was lost."

"It was, your Grace, until recently. The crown was lost when Daeron the First invaded Dorne, one hundred fifty years ago. A man in service of one of my family's bannermen recuperated it when the king died and they kept it for the years that followed. My father discovered its existence and where it was a few years ago. He would have given it back to you, but you were no longer in Westeros, so he kept it at Sunspear. We believe it belongs to you now."

Daenerys studied the crown closely, turning it all around to see every detail. There were no frontside and no backside. It was identical no matter from where you looked at it. Her mother's crown that Viserys sold years ago had to be at least four or five times more massive than this one, and it was made of gold, not of steel. Viserys told her once that Aegon's crown had disappeared when he was killed by the Dornish, but he never told her what the crown looked like. And yet, she could feel it was this one. She didn't know how, but she knew this was the crown of Aegon the Conqueror. And she had it in her hands.

She placed it back into the box. "I will wear it proudly the day I seize the Iron Throne. But not before," she declared.

"Of course, your Grace."

"I thank you for your present, Prince Trystane, and for your services as well. You ruled the city while I was absent, and most of my advisors recognize you did very well." Grey Worm didn't. "I count on you to help me in Westeros as much as you did here in Meereen."

"You can rely on me, your Grace. House Martell will fight for you."

"Then I suppose it's time to leave."

Hours later, they were leaving the harbor and sailing for Westeros, the people of Meereen crying and begging her to stay. Daenerys regretted to leave them, but she had to. She was going home, at last. She was going home with an army, her three dragons roaring in the sky as they sailed for Westeros.

Chapter End Notes

For those who remember, Trystane placed something very precious in a box when he
arrived in Meereen in his first chapter, Trystane I. Now you know what it was.

The song about Daenerys is a real song, "Mother of Flame", by Miracle of Sound. It can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmJF9a7-g9c

The story Kinvara tells about the general sacrificing his daughter is a real episode from the Bible, the history of Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11, 29-40). My intent here is not to criticize religions or one religion in particular. I am a Christian myself. However, it shows us well what consequences can come out when fanatics follow blindly religious texts.

Please review

Next chapter: Margaery
Margaery VIII

Chapter Notes

A chapter for Margaery, to know how she's doing as a prisoner.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

MARGAERY VIII

You could hear the thunder outside, and the rain hitting the stone walls of the Great Sept of Baelor. Margaery shivered. She didn't fear the storm. She was only cold. She was afraid of many things, yes, but not the storm. She was afraid of the High Sparrow and the other Sparrows, and what they could do to her and Loras. Neither of them had yet confessed. Cersei had confessed and made her walk of atonement, but she was still to stand for trial. Margaery had felt a burst of delight when she learnt this, and the three pieces of white bread she was given for the occasion had made her day. Cersei had thrown her here, only to be thrown in a cell too, and now she was the one everyone saw for who she really was. Margaery hadn't been so happy in weeks when it happened.

However, joy quickly left place to worry again. Her situation was very precarious. She knew that Randyll Tarly was besieging the city now, and that it would starve very soon, but if he ever attacked it, Margaery knew very well what would be the last thing the Sparrows would do before they all died. They needed a rebellion among the Sparrows themselves, or from the people against the Sparrows, to hope for freedom. Surely there were secret passages under the Great Sept of Baelor to the Red Keep, or that led outside the city. If only Lord Varys was still with them, they could have used them. Though he may not have revealed their existence.

Water was dripping from the small opening at the top of one of the walls. Margaery was glad of it, truth be told. Water rain had allowed her to get rid of most of her dirt, and she felt cleaner than she had for weeks. She had never realized what it was to live like this, without baths regularly, or perfumes, or comfortable and warm clothes to cover you. She always felt pity for the poor, but she never truly understood what it was to live like them. Now she did, and she knew what it was to live in a way worse than theirs. Not only was she living in complete misery, but she was a prisoner. At least the people she helped were free. She wasn't.

She looked at her hands. There had been pus under the nail of one of her fingers for the last few days. She washed it first with the rain, but she knew it wouldn't be enough. She was also afraid for something else. She was afraid for someone else, aside from Loras. She hadn't bled at all for three months now. Why did it have to happen now? She felt tears come to her eyes. The moment she got the child she wanted, she was imprisoned by fanatics. Would they let her leave if she told them she was pregnant? She couldn't know for sure. She didn't even tell Yeten.

The septa was her only contact with the real world. She said she was Dornish, and Margaery could see from her accent and her physical appearance that it was the case, and that she wanted the same thing than her. Revenge and justice. When she was the one to bring her food, she always brought some more, hidden in her robes. She didn't mistreat Margaery like Unella when she came to make her the lecture of the Seven-Pointed Star. She said she couldn't help Margaery to escape right now. They would only make a few steps before they were arrested. They had to wait for a battle or another opportunity, when no one would notice them. They would have to free Loras at the same
time. Margaery had to be patient and endure the fanatics who tried to make her confess. Yeten tried
to make things more bearable for her. The septas woke her up every night, stopping her from
sleeping long enough to recover. Yeten omitted to wake her sometimes, giving her a few
opportunities to rest. She entered her cell and didn't get her out of sleep. Still, it was very difficult.
Margaery had to hold. She wouldn't confess crimes she didn't commit. She was raised in the Faith of
the Seven, she believed in them, but she didn't think they wanted that from her. She never thought
she was perfect, but she wasn't a monster either. She didn't deserve this, no more than Loras. Her
family had tried to make Loras take an interest in women, many times, but there was nothing to do. It
was like a disease. He wasn't responsible for that. He didn't control that. There were far worse crimes
than a go beneath sheets between two men. Loras was arrogant, that was his main flaw, but if they
were to imprison everyone who was arrogant, there wouldn't be much free people left. Joffrey had
been a monster, there were killers all over Flea Bottom, and the Sparrows did nothing against them.
They didn't do the will of the gods. They wouldn't break her. She had to be strong, for her family.
She was a Tyrell.

Her door opened. The High Sparrow entered, in rags like always. Margaery wondered what had
happened to Sorold. She had him named High Septon herself. He was a good man.

"You seem much better today, your Grace," the High Sparrow said. She still didn't know his name.
There was another crash of thunder.

"Rain helps to wash away the dirt," she said, not hiding what she did.

She remembered one day, a long time ago, she had to be no more than seven. There was a thunder
like this outside. Loras was afraid and hid into a corner. To show him there was nothing to fear, she
went out in the godswood with her cousins and her friends, under the rain, without anything to
protect them from it but the clothes on their shoulders. She wanted to show her brother that it was
only rain, and that the sounds they heard were harmless. They all danced, walls of water falling over
them. Some climbed to the trees. After a moment, Loras had shyly joined them, and a few minutes
later he was playing with them, as if there was no storm at all. He had forgotten there was one. They
ended throwing mud at each other. It didn't stay long on their skin. They only had to scrub it with
water. However, their clothes were ruined at the end of the day. Their lady mother had been furious,
and she had good reasons to be. Margaery and Loras both caught a cold, despite the hot bath they
took immediately when they came inside.

She thought about her brother. Was he thinking about it right now? Did he even remember? He was
only five or four back then. Did he think about the times he ended on the ground, all muddy and
stinking, when he first began to train with Ser Vortimer, their master-at-arms in Highgarden? How
was he? Yeten assured her he was alive and still in his cell, and as well as she was.

"Yes. When we have nothing, we must resort to that kind of things," said the old man.

"This is not the first time I do it."

"Really?"

"No, but most of the time at Highgarden, we bathed all together in the Mander. I did it very often
when I was a child. People from all the surroundings came to let their children bathe in the river.
There was no difference between us, highborn or lowborn, rich or poor. It didn't matter there that I
was the daughter of the Lord of Highgarden. I was just a child like all the others."

The High Sparrow smiled. This was a true story, but she doubted he would let her go for that. Still, it
could help. He sat on a nearby stool.
"We are all equal in the face of the Seven. They made us to their image. We all have some of them in us. The Father, the Mother, the Warrior, the Smith, the Maid, the Crone, and the Stranger of course. Have you ever wondered why the Stranger is the only one of the Seven without a face?"

"Both men and women have the evil inside of them. Book of the Stranger, verse 34."

"True." He looked impressed. "It seems Septa Unella and Septa Yeten did their work well. But that's not the only reason. The reason is that evil cannot be seen by the eye. It's hidden, under our skin, under our flesh. There's evil and sin in each of us. Sin leads us away from the sacred. And only confession can purge sin."

"If you have come to order me to confess, you're losing your time. Septa Unella does it with a ladle of water every day and she got nothing from it. Only wasted water that could have been given to the poor. I have nothing to confess."

He nodded. "I'm sorry for Septa Unella's behavior. She can be overzealous at times. I'll speak with her. But do you believe you are pure? Perfect? Wholly without sin?"

She shook her head. She never thought she was perfect. She wasn't Cersei. "None of us are."

"You have started down the path. But you have many miles to go. If I were to let you leave right now, where would you go? What would you seek out?"

She needed no time to know where she would go. "I'd go to my brother, my family. My husband," she added after a moment. She missed Tommen. She was worried about Loras, but she worried about him too. And about Sera, and all her friends and cousins at the Red Keep. Tommen had done nothing wrong. He wasn't a monster like Joffrey. And he was probably alone with Cersei now. Who knew what she could be whispering in his ear at this very moment? She hoped Lord Selwyn Tarth had enough good sense to shut her behind closed doors until she faced her trial.

"Of course, but for you, that means seeking out money, finery, power. Seeking out your family means seeking out sin."

Maybe, but she hadn't thought about this when she said that. All she wanted was to be reunited with those she loved. That was all that mattered for her right now. Later, she would worry about money, finery and power.

"I'm not maligning you," resumed the old man. "I sought those things out, too."

"All of us do, sooner or later, at one moment of our life," Margaery replied.

"You're right. We are like this. The gods gave us freedom, and with freedom comes sins. We wouldn't know what a sin is if we didn't have it in us at the start. We're all tempted, all the time, from the king to the beggar in the streets. And that's why we must all confess. Your husband misses you dearly, you know. The love between a man and wife is sacred. It reflects the love the gods have for all of us. Confession sets us free."

"I thought the gods made us all free."

He chuckled. "They did, but sin makes prisoners of us all."

She had nothing to gain from arguing with that man. Maybe the High Sparrow looked like a sympathetic old man at first sight, but he was still a fanatic who believed he had the truth about everything, even though he didn't realize it himself. He and Cersei were more alike than both of them would like to admit.
The High Sparrow stood up. "I'll let you time to meditate and pray about it. Your Grace."

Margaery was alone again in her cell. Maybe she should have told him that she was pregnant. Maybe that would have been a reason sufficient enough to set her free, but she couldn't be sure. She could be sure of nothing. If all this kept going on the same way, she wasn't sure the child would survive. She had to take a decision, and quickly. She had to think about her son or her daughter.

She remained in the darkness for a very long time, with the the sound of rain and thunder as companions. Was it raining too in Highgarden right now? Was it raining or snowing in Winterfell? Sansa was certainly there now, and Mira too. Surely the Boltons had fallen. Her friend had managed to free her husband when he stood for trial. Maybe Sansa could help her if she was there. At least, if she had been at Casterly Rock, she could have received the news of her imprisonment and she would have come to her help. Margaery and Sansa were friends, and allies. They both helped each other, and a Lannister always pays her debts. Her husband knew some of the secret passages under the city. He had held King's Landing on the brink of uprising and used one of these passages to attack Stannis's army from behind at the Battle of Blackwater. He would have known what to do with these Sparrows, and surely he would have known a way to rescue her. Or Ser Kevan would have come out with a solution. To the opposite of Cersei, they knew they needed the Tyrells to remain in power. But Lord Tyrion and Sansa were far away in the North, and Ser Kevan was dead. Her allies were all outside the city. She was all alone. She could only rely on herself.

She dozed off. You became tired so easily in this cell. She was in a dark place, a very dark place, but it wasn't a dreadful place like her cell or a dungeon. There were torches hanging from pillars, all lit up. The ground under her bare feet was made of sand and rock. Before her was a vast pool, or something that looked like it. It was a great body of water, more than large enough for dozens of people to easily swim in it. She could see stalactites and stalagmites all over and around the pool.

Her shoes laid next to her. She had removed them. She removed her gown, then her smallclothes as well, then unbraided her hair. She felt it fall in curls behind her back and over her shoulders, covering her breasts. The place was warm, and she could feel a soft breeze run all over her skin, tickling between her legs, under the laps of her arms, on the region under her chin, in the space between her ears and her head, between her fingers, between her toes. She slowly walked to the pool, sand and pebbles crunching under her bare feet, until the left one sunk into the dark water. A pleasant chilly sensation reached the extremity of her toes as sand filled the spaces between. The right feet sunk next to the first. She kept going forward, water submerging her ankles, her knees, her thighs, her entire legs, her hips, her tummy… She realized it was bigger than usual. Smiling, she resumed her path, always forward. Her breasts, her arms and hands, her ribs, her shoulders, her neck followed under the water, until only her face emerged. She waved her arms and legs to remain at the surface, then dipped her head into the water.

Water was surrounding her. It was cold, but no different from the water in the rivers and lakes of the Reach. She opened her eyes, and could see nothing. It was complete darkness. Her hair was dangling all around her face. She pushed with her legs and feet and came back to the surface, pushing aside her hair that fell on her eyes. She breathed deeply and laid on her back, letting the water carry her, her eyes closed. The tip of her head hit something hard. It was a column with stalagmites around the base. She swam away, feeling at peace as she travelled from one end of the pool to the other.

She came back on the shore. There were a few towels laid on the ground. She rested her back on them, letting the water roll on her immobile body, covering her eyes with her arm to not let the light of the torches bother her. It was an intimidating place from some perspective, and yet a pleasant one, where she was alone, safe, quiet. You could hear the thunder over your head but you knew you were safe here. She looked again at the dark water, wondering how deep the bottom was. Why not try to
find out? There was a natural platform not far away, about four or five meters over the pool. She went there, and jumped from it. Water flew all around her when she hit the surface. She heard it. She sunk deep, without touching the ground. She came back at the surface, took a deep breath, then dived again. She kept going down, deeper and deeper. Finally, her hand touched something. She felt sand as she rubbed the surface, but as she kept tossing the sand away, she realized that under, the surface was smooth, yet solid. She couldn't see anything with the darkness around her. Keeping her breath began to be difficult. She gave herself a good push with her legs on the ground and swam with all the energy she could muster to come back to the surface. She let go the air in her lungs. There was a troubled light ahead. She had to reach it. Her strokes became more desperate. She had to reach the light.

She woke up, her breathing jerky. That was only a dream. She realized a thin water net was falling on her head. Her throat was dry. She couldn't ask for water. They wouldn't bring her anything, unless she confessed and even then... She leaned her head from behind and let the water fall into her mouth. To be true, it was better than the tepid one they gave her every day with black bread. When she had satiated her thirst, she went to the heavier waterfall from the opening and washed again the dirt off her hands, arms, legs and face. Better to use it while she had it. There weren't storms like this every day. Another thunder crashed.

The door was unlocked and opened to reveal Yeten. Again, she had a plate with only a black piece of bread and a cup of lukewarm water. Margaery highly doubted it was fitting to be drunk, but if she didn't drink it, she would die of thirst. She first ate the bread, and Yeten gave her a second one when it was over, like she always did. She dipped her head in silent thanks. When she brought the cup at her lips, she almost choked. The water was fresh. The Dornish girl smiled.

Margaery whispered as low as she could. "Thank you."

Once it was all over, the septa, or whoever she was since Margaery couldn't be sure that she was actually a septa, produced an exemplary of the Seven-Pointed Star. She began to read aloud, in a very clear voice.

"The Seven Hells brim with the souls of saintly men. They scream in agony and their shame is so great, they do not feel the flames, for now they see if not for a single sin they concealed, they were saved."

"I'd like to see my brother," Margaery said. She always asked the same question every time.

"Confess." Yeten added in a barely audible whisper, "he's still alive, and well."

"Please. How is he? At least tell me that." That meant she wanted to know more.

"Confess," the septa said on a harder tone, before adding in another whisper that only Margaery could hear. "The city is starving. People are openly talking of rebellion."

She turned a page and began to read again. Margaery let some time go. Then she spoke again. "I am the queen and I demand to see my brother."

"Sinners don't make demands. They make confessions."

She closed her book with a great sound, then hit it hard with the palm of her hand. Margaery emitted a wail, to make everyone believe she was stroke. Yeten knelt and whispered once more, lower than ever.

"It won't be long now. Cersei's trial is next week. We will have our revenge soon. Everything is
planned. Be ready to escape at this moment."

She hit the book again, and Margaery made another wail. She and Yeten couldn't stop from exchanging a smile, and Margaery would have laughed out loud if she wasn't afraid that the fraud would be discovered. Oberyn Martell had been a friend of Loras. They both had particular tastes, and Margaery suspected they spent more than one night together, and maybe not alone together. Dorne and the Reach may have had a long history of war and violence, but now her best chance for escape was a Dornish woman. They both wanted the same thing. Another lightning followed by another crash of thunder, more powerful than the previous.

Yeten started again to read aloud. She couldn't be sure about the septa, but she had no choice. She was her only chance. She said that she would help two days after Margaery was imprisoned, and without her the hell she was going through now would be far worse.

She resigned herself to listen to the Seven-Pointed Star all over again. This time, it was the Book of the Maid. Certain passages should have made all the High Septons through history redden if they hadn't ignored what they really said. Perhaps they didn't and kept these passages for this reason. In one week, Margaery would be free. She had to hold until Cersei stood trial. Another thunder crash was heard.

Chapter End Notes

I like very much this character and writing about her, so getting in her head while she is in a cell was something I enjoyed, despite her difficult situation. After all, this is the first time Margaery actually finds herself in a difficult situation and where she can only rely on herself, so this offers a new perspective on the person.

Please review

Next chapter : Jaime
JAIME VI

Rain was falling heavily on his armor, bouncing on it, making its way through the steel and under his helmet. Thunder kept crashing regularly. His clothes underneath were all wet. It was almost impossible to discern anything. The rain was no better than a thick fog and you could barely distinguish the Red Keep and the Great Sept of Baelor through it. Jaime could have retreated under the safety and warmth of his own pavilion. Genna had dispatched five hundred men to King's Landing after he asked her for help. That was all they could spare. The rest was for the invasion of the Iron Islands, strangely aborted for the time being, or in the North. Tyrion, where are you when we need you the most? Tyrion would have found a way to break the siege and to rescue the queen and her brother without killing them, or their lord father would have found a way. Instead, they stood there for weeks like chumps, waiting for the Sparrows to starve so much that they would give in, or that the people of the city would rebel against them.

Jaime hated waiting. He hated it when he kept guard for Robert, he hated it when he was a prisoner for the Starks, he hated it when he besieged Riverrun. That was why he had run to Robb Stark's vanguard when they attacked at the Whispering Wood, and that was how he got caught. Later, his father blamed him for his impatience and his foolish actions that cost them an entire army. Tyrion would have done no such thing. He would have set a trap for the enemy, or let him advance to reveal his strategy, or found a way to fight him on favorable grounds. Jaime just ran into battle, not thinking of the consequences.

Randyll Tarly was a man of war, and you could see it. Jaime never saw such a disciplined army. Even the Lannister army paled in comparison. More, although the man was harsh, he was fair as well. He punished his men with severity, but only when they committed crimes. Jaime could understand why his men were following him. He inspired both respect and fear, just like his father. Jaime, on the other hand, could inspire none. The five hundred men he had under his command followed him because he was the brother of the Lord of Casterly Rock and Lord Tywin's son, nothing more. He couldn't inspire anything as a commander or as a soldier. He had lost his right hand. Everything he was had gone. Only his family name survived. He didn't have Tyrion's mind to help him. His little brother had succeeded to escape the Starks and the Arryns. Jaime had needed his help and Catelyn Stark's will to see her daughters again to be free, and without Brienne he would never have made it to King's Landing.

Couldn't something happen? He would give his other hand for a fight, anything. Cersei was somewhere in the Red Keep. It was the only place in the city where the Tyrell and Lannister banners still hung. The Seven-Pointed Star was everywhere else, on the battlements, over the gates and hanging from the Great Sept. They were close, and yet he couldn't reach her.

He raged from the inside. Why was he helping her at all? He had never been with anyone else than
Cersei, while he knew that her… She fucked their cousin, Lancel Lannister, and after he came back, she rejected him, tried to have their little brother murdered, and who knew what else she did. Why did he still love her? He always thought there was something special between him and Cersei, ever since they were born, a natural bond that linked them together for life. Now he began to wonder if this bond had ever existed. When it was believed that she would marry Rhaegar Targaryen, Cersei had kept her distance from him, only to come back after the Mad King outright refused their father's offer. When she was betrothed to Robert Baratheon, she put an end to their relationship, to come back again when Robert turned out to be a drunken fool in love with a dead body. He had thought she came back to him every time because they were destined to be together, but now he wondered if that was only a fantasy of him. He thought Tyrion was the dreamer of the family, asking a dragon for his name day, but now… Jaime had joined the Kingsguard, the highest rank a knight could aspire to, only to find out the kingsguards were mostly here to stand by while kings laughed, drank, tortured and murdered. He came to King's Landing hoping to spend more time with Cersei, only to discover that their father resigned as Hand and left with his sister as soon as he learned that his heir was stolen from him. He came back to King's Landing after his captivity, hoping to reunite with Cersei, and she only pushed him aside. Who was the one dreaming in their shit family?

Still, Jaime was there, ready to fight to save his sister. He didn't know why. Would Cersei try to save him, if their roles were reversed? Tyrion would. He did, when Jaime was a prisoner. But Cersei? How many times had Jaime done something for her and their children, and when was the last time she did something for him? Jaime couldn't remember. His eyes fell on his golden hand. Now he remembered, but that didn't bring him much joy.

He shivered. Another thunderbolt. He decided to go back to his tent. He had to keep his forces for the upcoming battle, if there was any. Inside, his squire helped him to remove his armor. Jaime couldn't even put it on by himself. Damn this Locke. If he ever met him again… What would he do? Knock him out with his golden hand? Even Tyrion would have more chance to kill him than Jaime now. He heard his little brother fought quite courageously at Blackwater. Once he got rid of his set of armor, he warmed up his fingers over the fire.

"What's your name?" he asked to his squire. He never thought about asking him up to now. He always called him squire.

"Torrhen of House Musgood, ser."

"Musgood? You must be good at something, then."

"I'm quite capable as a squire, ser."

"Where are you from?"

"Musgood Hall, in the Stormlands, ser."

"Not very imaginative with names, your family."

"I don't know, ser."

He wasn't very talkative, this one. "Do you have family?"

"I have a sister, my lord. She's my twin."

"I also have a twin. She just made a walk of shame, naked before everyone in the city." The men who assisted to it were not the first to see her without clothes. Surely they called her the Whore Queen as she walked through the streets.
"A shame, ser." The thunder was heard again.

"Yes, a shame." Jaime wondered what he would have done if he had been there. "And your sister, where is she?"

"She's a septa, ser."

"A septa? I pity her."

"My father had no dowry to give her a marriage."

"If only the same had been true for mine." She would have had no one but him.

"If you say so, ser."

Did he think he and Cersei laid together countless times? That wouldn't surprise Jaime. The whole Realm knew about it. "Do you think my sister deserved what happened to her?"

"It's not my place to judge a queen, ser."

"I'm not asking for judgement about the queen. I'm asking about your opinion."

"Is it possible to give our opinion on the Queen Mother without judging her?"

Jaime gave a sigh. "You're free to judge her for this time. You can criticize her, even curse her if you want. I want your opinion, no matter what this is."

The young man hesitated. Another lightning followed by another terrible sound came from the outside. The young man had to be around eighteen. "King Robert was my family's liege lord. We were bannermen for him, his father before him and their fathers before for hundreds of years. We served them loyally. And… knowing that she probably killed him, and that she laid with her cousin… I don't approve the Sparrows, but I think the Queen Mother had it coming."

Jaime nodded. "Do you think I had it coming me too, for my hand?" He raised the golden one to make it clear.

"You killed your king, ser." There was no accusation in his voice. He only stated a fact.

"I did. You know, we blame my sister for fucking my dear nephew and perhaps killing her husband, but we never blame Robert for the death of Rhaegar's children, or his wife, or for the order he gave to have the two other children of the Mad King killed. One was only a baby at the time. We never blame him for shaming his queen all the time. I was his kingsguard for years, and every day, he would shame her. He liked to do it when I was on duty. Sometimes, I tried to guess how many they were, inside his rooms. I would count seven different women leaving by the door, and I would still hear his Grace shouting and at least one more woman moaning. We never talk about it, but we talk about my sister's infidelity at length."

The squire said nothing. He was only staring at Jaime.

"What would your sister say? Must only women remain faithful, or should the husband be as well?" Jaime asked.

"Normally, yes, ser."

"Normally," Jaime echoed. "How often does it happen? You know, my brother used to be like our king. Drinking all the time, visiting brothels day and night, gambling, making bawdy jokes… But
when he got married, not anymore. Almost. Why? Why would someone who had so much taste for brothels and women stopped within a single night, all that because he was married?"

A moment of silence passed. "Perhaps he was only looking for love."

Jaime looked back at the squire. "That's probably the most clever thing you said today. I'm going out for a piss now."

He patted the young man's shoulder, grabbed a cloak and left his tent. Rain welcomed him outside. He pulled the hood over his head. No one would recognize him without his kingsguard armor, or so he hoped. He still had the golden hand. He went to the woods and there relieved himself, managing to keep his breeches up enough to not get them all muddy. As the yellow liquid fell on the ground, he heard the thunder behind him. It hit several times. It wasn't the first time it happened today, that several crashes of thunder happened almost at the same time.

Jaime managed to bring back his breeches in place despite his useless hand. Tarly may be right. It would be more useful if he sold it. He walked back into the camp, among the red tents. The Lannisters were stationed near the Iron Gate, close to Rhaenys's Hill and the Dragonpit. The Tarly men were watching the other gates. Jaime was about to enter into his tent when something caught his attention. He looked at the city. He had the impression something was shining. As Jaime walked towards a nearby hill to see what it was, one of his men ran into him.


"Gone? What do you mean gone?"

"It's no longer there. It was… destroyed."

"Destroyed? But how?" Jaime didn't understand.

"I don't know, ser. I never saw something like that. One moment it was there, then there was a great flash of green. It blinded us all. When we looked back, the sept was gone."

This made no sense. Wait, a flash of green! "Is there fire in the city?"

"Yes, ser."

"And the flames? Are they green as well."

"Yes, I think so."

No, that couldn't be. Burn them all. How…? "Go and find Lord Tarly. Tell him what you saw and tell him we're attacking the city."

"Ser?"

"Go now! We have no time to lose."

The soldier didn't have to be told the same twice. Jaime summoned the five hundred men he had with him and positioned them for battle. It took time. Some of them weren't wearing their armors already, just like him, and the rain made it difficult to organize the troops. None of that would have been an obstacle for his father or Randyll Tarly. When the men were all assembled, Jaime was about to deliver a speech when the soldier he sent to Tarly camp came back.

"Ser, Lord Tarly forbids you to attack."
"What?" Jaime shouted, right in front of all his men. Did he hear well? Maybe he misheard the words because of the thunder over their heads.

"He says we're to wait. We're not to enter the city until further instructions are given."

_Damn, what's the meaning of this? "Are you telling me Tarly is going to do nothing?"

"Well, he made his men charge while he sent me away, ser."

"Tarly is taking the city, and he doesn't want us to join? Is that what you're telling me?"

"He said we are to remain behind, ser. As a reserve."

That was an outright lie. Tarly didn't trust the Lannisters, that was all. He didn't want the men of the Westerlands to fight side by side with his own. He made it clear that he didn't trust them during the last days. The Lord of Horn Hill was certain now that Cersei was behind Ser Loras and Queen Margaery's arrest. The worse was that Jaime knew it was quite possibly the truth.

"Ser Lantell," Jaime shouted to a man behind him. The knight in question rode to him. "Go with ten men as close to the walls as you can and tell me if you see anything. Any trap, any defender on the battlements, anything suspicious."

"Yes, ser."

The little group of horsemen went away and Jaime waited. Once more, he waited. He had no way to know how things were going inside the city. Was Tarly winning the fight? He didn't think the Sparrows had the means to face the disciplined army of the Reach. He hadn't disobeyed Tarly's orders. Not yet. He only sent a few men as scouts. He couldn't see anything on the walls from where he was. The rain made the visibility too low. These men could even provide a distraction and prevent any resistance near the Iron Gate to send reinforcements elsewhere in the city. His men returned a few minutes later, all dirty and muddy, but alive and without even a trace of injury.

"The walls are undefended, ser. There's no one over there," the Lantell knight told him as a report. The mud on them was only a consequence of the watery terrain. Jaime took a decision. They had to find Cersei.

"All right, men. Bring forth the battering ram. Let's take back this city."

His voice was barely heard among the heavy rain falling all around and the thunder crashing, but when he raised his sword the men followed him. The ram was slow in the muddy ground. Jaime sent forward a few men on foot to see if the gates could be opened without a ram.

Another thunder. Many more thunders. Green lights arose before them, coming from inside the city. Then a great blow from the gate right before them sent Jaime off his horse. He fell, his face first in the mud as a strident sound pierced his ears. He looked back at the city and saw blocks flying everywhere. Green flames were visible before him. The Iron Gate was gone. New blows took place as other pans of the battlements disappeared. _Burn them all._ That couldn't be. He had thought about it, when he heard how the Great Sept disappeared, but he didn't really believe this was actually going to happen. He looked all around him. His men had all been thrown away just like him, and the horses were running all around in panic, gone in every direction without anyone to control them.

He got on his feet and went running into the city. Some stones on the ground before the walls were on fire. _Wildfire is so powerful that it can burn stone_, he remembered Rossart saying, a devilish look in his eyes. He got through the remnants of the gate and saw the devastation inside. The city was in
flames. The rain seemed unable to put out the fires. Jaime ran through the streets, not caring about the people whose paths he crossed. He only had one thing in mind. Cersei.

He arrived at the main square in the center of the city and saw there that the Great Sept of Baelor was gone without any doubt. He saw a bell that seemed to have crushed a few houses when it flew around, and other debris everywhere. He saw a man with the huntsman on his armor lying on the ground, his face covered by blood. Some of Tarly's men had made it up to here. He then looked east and thought he saw the Red Keep through the rain that clouded his eyes. From there, he had the impression the castle could be damaged. He followed the paved road to it, meeting many people who were calling for help or running away, but again he paid no attention to them. When he finally reached Aegon's Hill, he thought that finally the Red Keep wasn't touched by the fires. It looked intact when you were closer. He climbed the hill until he arrived before the gatehouse. It was closed and the bridge leading to it was raised. Jaime saw men over it.

"OPEN THE GATE!" he shouted with all the force of his lungs.

"Who are you?" he heard one of the guards replied.

"Ser Jaime Lannister. Open the damn gate!"

"It's the truth!" Jaime realized someone stood next to him. It was Ser Lantell who spoke. He and a few of his men had followed him, or perhaps they just came to the Red Keep by different ways.

"Open the gate!" shouted someone from inside the battlements.

The bridge was lowered, and then the portcullis was lifted, too slowly for Jaime's taste. He ran inside to find a man with the Tyrell arms waiting.

"Where is my sister?" Jaime asked immediately.

"She's inside Maegor's Holdfast, ser, but…"

Not letting the man explain anything more, Jaime ran forward. The same operation than when he arrived at the gatehouse of the Red Keep took place with the gatehouse of Maegor's Holdfast. When he finally was inside, Jaime ran to go into the castle, but as he climbed the steps to the holdfast, he stumbled on something. Cursing, he looked at what it was. A body. A body with a crown laying next to it.

It was the body of a young boy with fine clothes, face against the ground. The neck was obviously broken, twisted in an awkward position, and so was one of the arms. There was blood all around. Jaime got on his knees, looking at the lifeless form before him. Someone was shaking him by the shoulder, but he paid no attention. The arm left him alone after a moment. Slowly, Jaime turned the body and looked at the face. It was a bloody mess, but there was no mistake when it came to the hair. He had the same blond hair than his mother, and his father. A new thunder resonated in the air as a lightning illuminated the scene and allowed Jaime to see clearly the color of the boy's eyes. He had his eyes.

He didn't know how long he remained there, on his knees, under the rain, looking at his son. A son he never felt like he was his son. A son who never had a real father. Now he was dead. Did Jaime feel something about it? He couldn't say. What could have happened for that to come? Shivering, probably from the rain, he took the boy under his legs and arms, and raised his body. He was easy to carry, even with a golden hand. There was no one around. Cersei had to be inside. He walked there.

His feet brought him without thinking to the Throne Room. He thought he saw a few bodies on the
floor as he progressed through the corridors he used so often before. When he arrived before the
Throne Room, the doors were wide open. He saw a Lannister, his back turned on him, cut the throat
of someone he held prisoner. When the prisoner fell on the floor, his eyes met Jaime's. He seemed to
be in his fifties. He had a quarterly sigil on his arms, two yellow suns on a rose field and two white
crescents on a blue field. His eyes were blue, a blue Jaime knew only too well. They looked at Jaime
as life left his body.

When Jaime looked up, the man in crimson had stepped aside and Cersei was standing before him,
her hair unusually short and looking triumphant, a hugely satisfied smile on her lips. As she looked at
Jaime and the inanimate body in his arms, the smile faded away from her face.

Chapter End Notes

The scale of the explosion was much larger than in the show. In fact, from what Jaime
saw, a large part of the city might have been destroyed here. The reasons for that will be
highlighted in a future chapter.

I will take another break of "A Shadow and a Wolf". I have two chapters left to upload
next week, then I will wait for July to post again. The reason is simple: I am in the last
round of my Master in Economics and I have a lot of work to do, with my thesis to
write. I just have no choice, too much work. I'll be back, don't worry. And Tyrion will
meet his daughter before I take my break. :)

Please review

Next chapter : Tyrion
Chapter Notes

Just before you read this chapter, you must consider that it takes place very shortly after the events of last chapter. The news of the catastrophe in King’s Landing didn't reach Winterfell yet.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

TYRION XXVII

We will need additional food stocks to last through winter. We can bring some from the Westerlands, but that won't be enough for our needs. With the Riverlands spent, we will need the other kingdoms to contribute. The winter that is coming will be the longest in living memory.

"You could listen to me when I talk," said an angry voice. Tyrion didn't avert his attention from the letter he was writing, just like his father used to. It was much more satisfying to use it against someone than to suffer it yourself. He heard what the man before him told him, but he wasn't about to make as if he gave any concern to his complaints.

"I hear what you say, Lord Arryn," Tyrion replied, not lifting his gaze from the parchment.

"Then you could act as if you did, in the least."

"Why? Does it hurt your pride?"

"I am the Lord Protector of the Vale!"

"My father would say that any man who must say I am the Lord Protector of the Vale is no Lord Protector of the Vale."

"Be careful about what you say, Imp." His tone was sharp, but Tyrion wasn't hurt by the nickname. He had made it his own a long time ago. No one could hurt him with it.

"And I would be careful about what I do if I were you, Ser Hardyng."

"I am a lord!"

"And any man who must say he is a lord is no true lord."

He stood up abruptly as Tyrion was done writing the letter to his nephew. "If you think I'll stand here and take this from you, dwarf."

That brought Tyrion old memories. "The last time someone talked to me this way, I sent him to the Wall and Jon Snow executed him after he refused to obey his orders."

"Are you threatening me?"

"No, I'm just reminiscing." He folded the letter.

"You think that because you're the Lord of Casterly Rock you can do as you like? That everyone
must do as you say because your father had people murdered during a wedding?"
"Well, not really. But I do think that when Jon Snow, Ser Brynden Tully, Ser Davos Seaworth, the wildling leaders, the river lords, my own commanders and myself agree that you should pack your things and go back to the Vale, then you should pack your things and go back to the Vale."
"I brought ten thousand men with me here. They came to fight for the freedom of the North."
"And I brought over fifteen thousand with me, and they actually fought for the North. They bled and rolled in the mud for the North. Have your men done so?" Tyrion stamped the letter with his seal. "We don't need you here in the North, Lord Arryn. We can free it without your help."
"Free it? All you want is to take the North for yourself. Everyone knows it."
"No, that's what you believe I want." Tyrion took another piece of parchment and started writing another message for the garrison of the Dreadfort. "My brother-in-law and Ser Brynden Tully don't seem to share your opinion, as do many lords of the Riverlands. Perhaps you think I fooled them all?"
"That's exactly what I believe."
"Then you're even more a fool than I thought."
A sword was drawn and the end was at an inch from Tyrion's face. He had to look up this time. "All right. Let's solve this with steel."
Bronn slammed the door open and came into the room along with four more men, their swords unsheathed as well. "Very well, boy. Drop that sword of yours and cause no trouble," Bronn warned, his own sword on the back of Harrold Arryn.
"I'm not a boy. I'm a lord."
"A lord who takes up his sword and threatens another lord at the first insult," Tyrion commented. "This is how a boy behaves, but not a lord."
"You wouldn't dare to speak this way if you faced me in the courtyard with steel in your hand."
"And you wouldn't dare to speak to me this way if you weren't the Lord of the Eyrie. But who are you really, Harrold Arryn? Until recently, your name was Harrold Hardyng and you were a ward to Lady Anya Waynwood. You are unmarried, but you already have two bastards from two different women. You won your knighthood in a small melee against other squires at Runestone two years ago, won the tourney for the Brotherhood of Winged Knights and became Lord of the Eyrie at this moment because Robin Arryn died in strange circumstances before the tourney was over, and because there was no one else in his family to succeed him. You never fought on a battlefield, nor commanded an army in war, and you never ruled anything since you left the Vale at the moment you became its Lord Protector. We have no need of green boys here in the North."
"You can speak. You are a dwarf," the young lord spat, as if that meant something. He kept pointing his sword at Tyrion's face.
"I fought at the Battle of the Green Fork and the Battle of Blackwater. I served as Hand of the King, then as Master of Coin, and then I ruled the Westerlands for almost a year. I led three sieges, one at Riverrun, one at Moat Cailin and one at Castle Cerwyn, each of them were successful, and commanded my men at the Second Battle of Winterfell, which we won. I led thousands of men into the North through the Neck with minimum losses. I even killed a man of the mountain clans, saving
Lady Catelyn Stark in the process, and I killed him with a shield. Have you ever tried to kill a man who was attempting to kill you, boy? Have you ever participated to a real battle? Don't talk to me about the tourneys you took part to, it doesn't count. This is jousting, not war, and this is men of war we need here. You are not a man of war. You're nothing but a boy trying to prove himself and the world that he's a man. Even some of your bannermen agree that you should go back home, boy."

The young Lord of the Eyrie was red of anger, and Tyrion knew he had nothing to reply to everything he just heard. It was all true.

"Now," Tyrion resumed, "put that sword away and go back to your home behind your mountains to play the chivalric knight while we try to bring peace in the North."

"A peace you broke, when you had Robb Stark killed at the Red Wedding," the lord countered, seething.

"If you want to continue to look at the past, then so be it, but I had nothing to see with the events at the Twins. Keep thinking the contrary if you want, but you will believe something untrue then. The North requires my attention."

"So you can control it. I won't allow you to do so. You are not the Lord of Winterfell."

"Nor do I pretend to be. But my wife, the Lady Sansa, is the Lady of Winterfell and I intend to protect her interests the best I can."

"Protect her interests?" The Lord of the Eyrie scoffed. "You forced her to marry you. You forced yourself upon her and put a child in her belly. A child she never wanted."

It was useless to argue with that cunt. "Time for you to leave, boy. If you refuse to, my friends here will make you do."

"I'm not over with you yet." As soon as he said the words, Tyrion made a sign of head to Bronn who seized Harrold Arryn by the neck and slammed his head hard against the desk. Tyrion heard a crack, and ducked under the desk just in time to avert the swing of the young man's sword. There were sounds of a very short battle, and when it died off, Tyrion looked at the scene where Harrold Arryn was rolled over the ground, obviously in pain at the level of his balls.

"Hit him with my knee there. I don't think he will father new bastards before some time," said Bronn.

The men behind chuckled at Bronn's jape, though Tyrion didn't find it funny as much as he would have liked. "Take him away to his camp. Tell the Knights of the Vale what happened," Tyrion ordered to his men. The four took the Lord of the Eyrie by the arms and escorted him outside the solar.

"You could have gone easier," he said to Bronn when they were gone. "It's the Lord of the Eyrie."

"Well, there wasn't really another way. And the lad is a cunt." Tyrion thought the same. "Almost everyone despises him here. Even the northern lords who plotted against you find him insufferable."

"Who wouldn't?" A couple of fair maids to who he spoke in an entirely different manner, Tyrion supposed. Well, with his broken nose, the fair maids may think twice before following him to bed. "Maybe that will teach him some humility."

Bronn shrugged, unconvincing. "There's no cure for being a cunt."

Tyrion sighed. There was blood on his desk, result from the broken nose of Lord Harrold Arryn. Jon
Snow, the Blackfish, Ser Davos, Arya Stark, that Tormund Giantsbane and most of the lords here were of opinion that he should leave and go back to the Vale. They didn't have enough food to feed all their men, and the ten thousand the lad had brought had made things worse. Furthermore, they gave no help in defeating the Boltons. A few of their men had gone to besiege the Dreadfort and the Last Hearth, but they were very few. They had no use for all these knights who came late into a war in the hope they could get some glory. By chance, Harrold Arryn was insufferable and almost everyone was unable to suffer his presence any longer. Some lords of the Vale were also of an opinion to go back home, with winter coming and the main threat of the Boltons defeated. They saw no reason to stay here.

"Bronn, go and make sure the Knights of the Vale leave Winterfell with their lord without causing any problem," Tyrion ordered him.

"Oh, and what if they cause any problem?"

"Then remind them they are surrounded by Lannisters and Tullys."

"And if they cause problems all the same?"

"Then deal with them like you did with their lord a moment ago."

With a smirk, Ser Bronn of the Blackwater left. That didn't mean the Knights of the Vale would leave the North immediately, but they just kicked their lord paramount out of Winterfell. Hopefully, his bannermen could talk some sense into him. Still, Tyrion wished they hadn't broken his nose. This could make the men of the Vale angry and they didn't need it, but it was difficult to negotiate with the Harrold Arryns of this world. He wondered how Sansa and Lord Manderly did to suffer him at White Harbor.

Tyrion tried to erase the marks left by the blood on his desk and made a ball with the paper he was writing on, useless from the red on it. He then went back to writing his letter. He was done with it when Jon Snow came inside.

"I saw Lord Arryn leave with a broken nose," said Jon as he took a seat. "He didn't take it well, didn't he?"

"No. I'm afraid we're not done yet with him. I never saw someone so stubborn, and I've met quite a lot of them in my life."

"Do you think he could leave before Sansa arrives?"

"We can hope. But if he stays, we won't be able to stop him from being there when Sansa will be recognized Lady of Winterfell. If only we could."

The exchanged an amused look. "That's not as if we can force him to leave. To throw him outside Winterfell is one thing, but to force ten thousand armed men to turn back is another one. Why did they come here at all? What interest did they have in coming here in the North?"

"According to your sister, it was all part of a plot by Littlefinger to destroy my army during the battle."

"I know, but what do they get in all this?"

"No idea. Maybe Baelish wanted them to turn against he Northerners afterwards and have the North for himself. We can never know what his plans are. Hopefully my nephew will take care of him quickly and swiftly." Sansa told them what she did with Littlefinger in her last raven, and all the
details about the plot of the Manderlys. Some details were unknown to them before.

"I've been thinking about something lately. What are we going to do about the houses that fought with Ramsay?"

"Well, as for the Karstarks, I suppose we can let Lady Alys keep it, as long as she bends the knee to Sansa. For the Dreadfort, however, the Boltons have entirely disappeared, unless Roose Bolton has a cousin somewhere that we're not aware of."

"The Dustins and the Ryswells had ties with Roose Bolton. They might try to claim it."

"They already have." Lady Dustin had come to Tyrion about this matter long ago, right after the battle. "But I don't think this would be a good idea. The Dustins and the Ryswells were on Roose Bolton's side before he died. I can't trust them with the Dreadfort."

"As you say. This is not untrue."

"As for the Umbers, did the Smalljon have children?"

"No, but I know the Greatjon had at least two daughters, and another son. He must be very young. I never met him."

"So, he's the Lord of the Last Hearth now?"

"Aye, and he will certainly fight against us. The Umbers are proud. They won't let the death of their lord go without punishment. Even if the new lord is too young, his uncles Mors and Hother will fight."

"So, in this case, the war is not over."

"Maybe not."

Tyrion joined his hands. "Listen, Snow. We have a big problem. Sansa is officially Wardeness of the North, but there's also no one in the North who wants to support her. Those who helped us when we travelled the Neck plotted to kill my men during the battle against the Boltons. The other houses deserted the Boltons after Ramsay killed his father, and the others either followed you when you asked for their help or chose to follow Ramsay. The thing is… I'm afraid Sansa will not remain the Lady of Winterfell for long."

"By right, Winterfell belongs to Sansa. Unless Bran is alive somewhere."

"By right, yes, but your fellow Northerners see her as a Lannister. They fought with us because we fought against Ramsay. Now Ramsay is gone and they blame us for not rescuing you in time during the battle. Sansa has my support and the support of the Westerlands, and I think most of the river lords are ready to support her as well, but in the North, I'm afraid Howland Reed is probably the only one who is genuinely ready to accept her as his liege. The others will rebel sooner or later when our armies will go back home."

"For now, it doesn't matter. What matters is the enemy beyond the Wall. They are the real threat."

Tyrion knew that, but they couldn't act as if they only had to defeat the dead and that nothing would come after. "Maybe, but if we beat this enemy, we must make sure the peace in the North lasts for more than a few years. The Karstarks have bent the knee, but you say the Umbers will keep fighting and any rebellion might be joined by half the kingdom. I need to strengthen Sansa's position. The best way for that is to give her bannermen who will remain loyal to her."
Jon looked at him queerly. "Are you talking about replacing the Umbers?"

"Do you think it's possible, Snow?"

Jon Snow slowly shook his head. "That's impossible. The Umbers have ruled their lands for thousands of years. If you depose them, their people will rise in rebellion. And if you were to kill every Umber left, it would be a slaughter. There are children among them."

He could see Jon Snow was totally against the idea. "I'm not my father, Jon Snow. I don't kill children." Though now he understood better why his father did kill children. It made it much easier to overthrow a house and prevent its return if you killed every last member of this house, no matter they were men, women or children. "I just wanted to know if it was possible to depose them and replace them, and you tell me it's not. Let's forget about this. We will submit the Umbers and let them keep their lands if they acknowledge Sansa. What about the Dreadfort? Is it possible to create a new house there?"

"Aye, I think so." Jon Snow looked thoughtful. "You might give it to Arya. It will create a minor branch of House Stark."

That wasn't an option Tyrion could consider. "I'm afraid I can't do this."

The bastard frowned. "Why?"

"In the eventuality of a rebellion, who do you think the northern lords will turn to to replace Sansa?"

Jon Snow's eyes grew wide. "Arya would never turn against Sansa."

Tyrion had his doubts about it. Arya and Sansa were sisters, but they always had difficulty to get along. Family hadn't stopped Stannis and Renly from fighting each other. "Maybe she won't, not herself, but whoever marries her will be Lord of the Dreadfort and might be tempted to seize Winterfell as his own. We need to place someone Sansa could rely on without doubt and who would pose no threat."

"Who then?"

"Someone from the Westerlands, maybe, or from the Riverlands if the other option is impossible."

"You want to make a man from south of the Neck one of the most powerful lords in the North?" Jon Snow asked, unbelieving.

"Unless you can find me a Northerner who could be entirely loyal to Sansa, yes. I must face these choices, Jon Snow. Sansa is married with me, and she is the Lady of Casterly Rock. We won't be able to stay in the North forever. I must go back in the south, in the Westerlands, and Sansa will have to come with me. I'll need to leave people I can trust behind, and people who will be ready to prepare the future Lord of Winterfell when he will be born."

Jon shook his head. "Do that, and the Northerners will see you as invaders. They will really say that you are trying to take control of the North. Don't do that."

"What do you suggest then? I know one thing with the actual situation, Sansa will face a rebellion within the next years at least, many rebellions in the worst case scenario."

Jon Snow took some time to answer. "My father used to say we find our true friends on the battlefield. The dead are coming. If your men fight by side by side with the Northerners, if the North really see them fighting to protect it, they will accept Sansa."
"They will forget about the Red Wedding?" Tyrion asked, skeptical.

"No, they won't. The North remembers. But it will also remember you helped us against the dead. They won't forget it."

Tyrion reflected about it for a moment. This war with the dead could ironically turn into a blessing… if they survived this war. Still, many issues remained. "We'll still have to decide about the Dreadfort. Well, that will be Sansa's decision at the end. Let's wait for her to arrive before we decide. She probably only has a few days before arriving."

Jon Snow nodded. Tyrion hoped he didn't turn Ned Stark's son against him with that discussion, but he preferred to have his opinion rather than ask some other lord of the North that would immediately believe he was trying to make the North a protectorate of the Westerlands.

"As soon as Sansa id acknowledged Lady of Winterfell, we must…" Jon Snow began, but he was interrupted by Podrick who came in.

"My lords, they've spotted Manderly banners. She's coming."

Podrick had a huge smile as he said it. Tyrion and Jon Snow were motionless for a moment. She was already back. Jon Snow ran out of the room, while Tyrion urged Podrick to help him prepare by donning his cloak and gloves. Then Tyrion went to the main courtyard as quickly as his short legs allowed him. People were already gathering to welcome the Lady of Winterfell. Tyrion stood at the first rank with Sansa's immediate family, which meant Jon Snow and Arya Stark. Ser Brynden Tully also took place with them. The rest of the courtyard was filled with the commanders, knights and lords of the Westerlands, the Riverlands, the Vale and the North. Tyrion spotted Lady Mira Hightower with her sister somewhere in the waiting crowd, as well as Lady Tallhart, Lady Mormont, Lord Royce, Lord Piper, Lord Bracken, Ser Prester, Daven and many others. The Lord of the Eyrie shined by his absence, certainly a consequence of his broken nose. Bronn and Podrick weren't far behind Tyrion, along with Daven. Olyvar Frey looked quite alone without his brother.

Snow was falling outside as they waited. It didn't fall heavily, but enough to leave a thin white cover on the ground. It was no surprise that Sansa needed about two months to travel from White Harbor to Winterfell. The banners of House Tully and House Lannister, but also of House Stark, were brought forward as Sansa's personal guard went through the gate. Sansa came after them with Brienne of Tarth at her side. Tyrion couldn't lift his eyes from his wife as soon as she entered. She looked pale from where he stood. She had to be, after going through a pregnancy and a birthing, then two months on the road, all that after learning that her little brother was dead.

Still, Sansa dismounted quite easily as everyone bowed their heads. She looked at him, and Tyrion had to refrain himself from running to her. She knelt and pulled him into a long embrace, then kissed him.

"I missed you," she said.

"I missed you too, my lady."

He tried to make the embrace last as long as he could. He had been so afraid for her, and now here she was, after all these months. They finally broke their embrace after a moment and she stood to face her half-brother.

"Jon." She threw her arms around his neck, then released him. "It's good to see you again."

"You too," he said. "You grew up. You're taller than me, now." They all chuckled.
"I have so much to tell you, Jon."

"We'll have all the time to talk later."

He turned to his left, where Arya was standing, and Sansa shared an embrace with her as well, and then with her granduncle. Lord Manderly arrived as well and plated the courteous lord. He was best to not try anything again.

"We should get you inside," Tyrion said to his wife after a moment. "It's cold out there."

"Of course," Sansa answered. "Go ahead, I'll join you." The other people in the courtyard understood it was time to scatter. She turned to him and whispered. "I have someone to present you." She said that before he could ask. He took the hand she offered him. Even through the gloves, he felt her shaking.

"Are you sure you don't want to go inside for that? We had your chamber prepared."

"No. Come." He followed her to a carriage that had followed her in the courtyard. She opened the door, and her handmaiden came out. "Is she awake?"

"Yes, my lady," she answered.

Sansa climbed into the carriage and invited Tyrion to join her. He followed her and closed the door behind him. There was a cradle with a lot of furs on one of the cushioned bench. Sansa approached it and took something inside with her two arms. Tyrion heard soft wails coming from a mass of blankets she held in her arms. She looked at him and came on her knees, showing him the content of the blankets.

Inside was the most beautiful human being Tyrion had ever seen. Her green eyes were looking at him with curiosity. It was the same eyes Jaime and Cersei had. The same eyes he had. A beginning of blond hair was visible on the top of her head. He could only stare at her for a moment, as he felt his eyes filled with water. Then slowly, he got closer to her, and then approached a hand from her face to caress her small cheek with one of his fingers. Her small fist closed around his index, and he couldn't help but let a tear roll in his cheek.

"She's… She's beautiful."

His lips were shaking. That was all he could say. For one of the rare times in his life, he was speechless. He had tried to imagine how she would look like, but he wasn't sure what to expect. Sansa only told him in the raven she sent before leaving White Harbor that he was now the father of a little lady, and that they were both well. And here she was, his daughter.

"You want to hold her?" Sansa asked. He looked at her. She was smiling as well, like he never saw her smile. "She's your daughter as much as mine."

Slowly, very carefully, Tyrion took his daughter into his arms. A wide smile had appeared on her face as well and her arms were moving in the air. Her arms weren't too small, her head wasn't too large. She was perfect. Who could have foreseen that he could have such a lovely little daughter?

"I'm sorry you have the ugliest father in the world," he told her.

"Don't say that," Sansa almost spat. "She looks like you."

Tyrion let a short laugh escape his throat. "No, she doesn't."
"Of course, she does. She has your eyes and your hair."

"She's not a dwarf."

He looked at Sansa, into her beautiful blue eyes he missed so much these last months. She smiled at him with empathy after a moment, then slowly approached him and laid a soft kiss on his lips. Then she leaned her face against his so they could both looked at their daughter.

"She's so beautiful." His voice was almost breaking up. He was afraid this could all shatter. He held her very cautiously. He was afraid he could drop her by accident. She looked so fragile, so innocent, so vulnerable, just like Sansa when they met in King's Landing.

"I…" Sansa started, but she seemed to have difficulty to talk as well. "I know we didn't discuss about it, but… I decided to call her Joanna. For your mother."

He looked at her for a moment, speechless once more. She couldn't have made him happier. "Thank you." He struggled to make the words leave his throat, knotted as it was. Then he looked back at his daughter, Joanna, and just stayed there, looking at her with his wife. For a very long time, they were alone, he, Sansa and Joanna, and there was nothing else in the world that mattered.

Later, they were all dining together in the Great Hall. In normal times, they would organize a feast, but with the winter that settled recently and the lack of provisions, that was a luxury they couldn't afford. Still, they made their best and Winterfell's cook, who happened to be the same than when Sansa left (he somehow managed to survive the destruction of the castle and the Boltons) made all Sansa's favorite plates, including lemon cakes for dessert. They were all at the high table, Tyrion, Sansa, Jon Snow, Arya and Ser Brynden. Ser Davos, Lord Yohn Royce, Lord Norbert Vance and Lord Manderly were guests invited to seat with them, and Sansa also welcomed Lady Mira and her sister as personal friends.

Their daughter wasn't with them. They installed her in a room adjacent to theirs, under the watch of Willia Marbrand, Sansa's handmaiden, and of Lady Brienne. The ambience was good, though it could have been merrier. After she had introduced him to their daughter, Sansa had showed her to her siblings and the Blackfish. Jon Snow was very happy for her while Arya didn't seem to know what to think, but even she made an effort to look happy for her sister. As for the Blackfish, he looked disappointed at first, maybe because Joanna looked more like her father than her mother, but he had held her in his arms with joy all the same and kissed Sansa on both cheeks. Tyrion had to admit there was a part of him that wished their daughter had inherited more of Sansa's looks.

However, the reunion was soured by a few elements, one being their visit to the crypt, where Rickon Stark was buried. Sansa lit a candle for him, before his grave, where a statue would be made soon. She also lit candles for her father, her mother, her brother Robb and for her aunt Lyanna, her uncle Brandon and her grandfather Rickard Stark. Tyrion accompanied her with her siblings and that made the general mood much darker. But that was something she had to do and Tyrion didn't blame her. It was his family who destroyed hers, and their daughter wouldn't replace the void his father, his sister and his nephew created.

They also told her before the feast about the presence of Theon Greyjoy, and after the initial shock, Sansa had asked why he was still alive. The two Stark sisters had agreed for a moment they should have killed Theon before. The most difficult part had been to reveal to Sansa the truth about her friend Jeyne. Tyrion had told her that when they were alone in their new chambers. He spared her the details of what she endured from Ramsay, but he didn't hide the fact that Ramsay killed her after he revealed they had the real Arya Stark with them. Sansa had only wept, her face buried on his shoulder. She hadn't yelled at him. She wasn't even angry at him, but Tyrion felt guilty for that girl all the same. Revealing the Bolton's trickery hadn't caused the problems he hoped for in the enemy
ranks, and an innocent girl died. The birth of their first child was darkened by the war, and they had another one ahead.

Still, they all made their best to look merry, even Arya. Many toasts were made for those who died in battle, Sansa's brother the first. Ser Brynden made one for Ser Perwyn Frey, stating he honored his house more than anyone else in this family, which was more than accurate. There were toasts made for Sansa as well, for Jon Snow, the Blackfish, and the bastard of Winterfell even made one for Tyrion, which the Northerners shared grudgingly. Tyrion also knew the toast for Sansa should have been more cheering. Considering there was no fight, thanks to a careful organization that placed wildlings and Northerners at two far sides of the hall, that was a pleasant time, quite relaxing when compared to the last months of warfare.

Later that night, for the first time in what looked like an eternity, Tyrion slept in a real bed with his wife. Her head lied on his chest, like she did so often at Casterly Rock, and he caressed her red hair like he used to long ago. He inhaled the familiar scent of her red locks. She was here, finally. They had taken back Winterfell, freed the North from the Boltons, Roose and Ramsay Bolton were dead, her little sister was alive and safe, and she was even reunited with her half-brother. Over all that, Sansa had given birth to a beautiful little girl, and the pregnancy hadn't left her weak. Her pale appearance when she arrived seemed to be only the result of her tiredness from two months on the road. She was simply exhausted, nothing more. Why then didn't he feel happy about all that?

Sansa was resting peacefully against him, his arms around her shoulders, one on her back and the other one in her hair. She was more beautiful than ever. Tyrion could tell from her breathing that she wasn't sleeping. He thought about the lullaby she sang to their daughter before they went to bed together. Joanna had fallen asleep almost at the precise moment when Sansa gave the last words of the song. Only a closed door separated them from their daughter and there was a wetnurse to watch over her all the time.

"You're awake?" Sansa asked him, her voice muffled.

"We both are," he said after a sigh. "You know how my sleep is shit."

"It seems you gave it to me."

They both chuckled nervously. A moment of silence went on. "I'm sorry for Jeyne," Tyrion finally said.

"It's not your fault."

"If I hadn't told Ramsay…"

"Ramsay killed her." She removed her head from his chest to lean over him. "He's dead now. Don't ever say it's your fault again, or I allow Arya to poke you full of holes like she did for him."

She had said it with a soft, but firm voice. Tyrion half-smirked and surrendered. "Your roof, your rules."

She smirked back at him and kissed him slowly. Her lips… It had been so long. She rested her head again in the crack of his neck and Tyrion resumed to wander his hand through her hair.

"Do you think Bran is alive, somewhere?" Sansa asked him.

What could he answer to that? A cripple boy north of the Wall, with White Walkers and wights looming everywhere. "I hope he is."
"I thought Rickon was dead, and he was alive. I abandoned him. I gave him up." One of her hands was wrapped around his arm. She squeezed it more strongly. Tyrion massaged her back and her neck, trying to calm her the best he could.

"We will find Bran. I promise." If Sansa's last brother was alive somewhere, they could find him, and they would bring him back home. Tyrion wouldn't let another Stark die because of his family. The Lannisters already made Sansa and her siblings suffer too much.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed Tyrion meeting his daughter for the first time, and the reunion of the two main characters of this fic after being apart for over twenty chapters.

Please review

Next chapter : Mira
Mira IX

Chapter Notes

Quite a long chapter, with a lot happening.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

MIRA IX

Mira had seen many godswoods through her life. She used to pray in the one at Ironrath as a child. It was a place of devotion, made for prayer and to honor the Old Gods. Their godswood was populated of ironwood trees, just like the grove behind their home. Even the Old Gods couldn't escape ironwood at Ironrath. Then she had gone to Highgarden. Its godswood was entirely different, a beautiful place, natural yet it had nothing to envy to the most wonderful gardens of the Reach, with three weirwoods. The godswood of King's Landing showed no great interest and Mira seldom spent time in it. To her regret and shame, she had neglected the Old Gods while she stayed in the south. Margaery followed the Seven and always prayed in the sept of Highgarden, and Mira followed her when she prayed as her handmaiden. Being risen in both faiths by her father and mother, Mira had no problem praying in a sept or a godswood. Still, in Highgarden, the godswood was such a marvelous place that people almost used it as a garden and Mira spent some time there with Sera and Margaery. She said short silent prayers whenever they went in it. However, in King's Landing, they seldom walked into it and Mira kept praying with the queen. When she had gone to the Hightower, she had continued to pray in the sept mostly. From time to time, she would visit the godswood to pray, but again it was rarely that she did it.

Now here she was, back in the North, and she prayed to the Old Gods in the godswood of Winterfell. She had stopped there on her way to Highgarden the first time, years ago, but since they had arrived late in the evening, she hadn't gotten the opportunity to meet Sansa or her brothers and sister. None had any memory of the Forrester child who stayed one night in their home. Mira didn't even have the time to visit the godswood on this occasion. Now she had. The godswood of Winterfell was renowned through all the North and now Mira could see why. You could feel the presence of the Old Gods here. She shouldn't have set them aside while she was in the south. She was a Northerner, and the Old Gods were part of her.

Snow was quietly falling all around her. She closed her eyes and let the natural smell of three acres of nature untouched for ten thousand years fill her lungs. She could almost imagine she was home, in the grove of Ironrath. There were ironwoods here in the godswood of Winterfell, which made it easier to believe. She prayed for her brothers and her sister, for Gared and Malcolm, for Gerold, for Sansa, for Margaery and the king, for her brother-in-law Garlan, for Elys, and even for her other brother-in-law, Altos, though she didn't forget the fist on her cheek.

They received news not long ago that Gerold and Asher had reached Ironrath. Their home was burned to the ground, and there were no Whitehills to be seen. They knew that there had been a garrison at Ironrath after Ludd Whitehill sacked it, but it seemed he abandoned the place after his son was killed at Winterfell. Now they were marching against Highpoint, where Ludd Whitehill and his last men were. She hoped everything would go well. Asher had fought in the thick of the battle here, and he had been injured. It was nothing serious, only a cut in the leg, but they were lucky it didn't fester. As soon as he had recovered enough, he had ridden to Ironrath with his men and Gerold.
Gwyn followed him.

Mira hadn't been sure how Gwyn would react when her brother died. Asher had killed him, and he didn't hide it. He didn't boast about it, especially when Gwyn was around, but he wasn't reluctant to say it either. Gwyn seemed to take it all with philosophy. Mira had gone to talk to her about it, a few days after the battle, and she had tried to apologize for the death of her brother. Mira didn't feel any regret over Torrhen Whitehill's death, especially after he declared he would marry her or Talia once the battle would be over, but she could understand Gwyn's grief all the same. She knew what it was to lose two brothers. Gwyn's answer surprised her.

"I knew it would come to that. I tried to make peace between our two families, and I failed. And they were wrong to support Ramsay. As soon as Roose Bolton died, they should have deserted, but they didn't. All I want now is to save my father, convince him to join the Night's Watch. If I can't… Then I hope Asher is not the one to kill him. If he was to kill my father… I don't know what I would do."

Mira knew how much Asher loved Gwyn. He almost started a war for her. He would go to war for her. But Asher also loved Ethan and Rodrik, and he would never forgive the Whitehills what they did. She knew her brother, and she knew he would kill Ludd Whitehill if he had the opportunity. If he did, then he could lose Gwyn. Mira was afraid of what her brother could do. Talia and Ryon were safe with her at Winterfell, but Asher was in danger. His rage could get himself in dangerous situation. He could lose his life, and his wife.

Gerold was the other person she was worried about. She hadn't seen the Battle of Winterfell. She stayed away with an escort that would bring her to safety if the battle was lost. Still, she had been glad to hear that the Hightowers were placed in the rear of the army. That meant her husband would be relatively safe. He had come back from the battle without a single graze. However, he had been gloomy after the battle. He hadn't wanted to discuss about it at the moment, so she hadn't pressed the matter, but she had asked him the night before he left for Ironrath and received an answer.

That night had been beautiful. At the time, Mira had thought that if she wasn't already pregnant, she would certainly be before the morning. However, she hadn't forgotten the sour mood of her husband these last days. She asked what troubled him, and this time she didn't leave him be. He finally confessed.

"Do you think I'm useless, Mira?"

The question had startled her. "Why would I think something like that?"

He had looked away from her face. "Altos always says that I'm useless, that there's nothing I can do. I wonder now if he's right."

"He's not!" Mira snapped. "How can you think that a single moment?"

"Can you tell me what I did during the battle?" He looked straight at her, frustration plain on his face. That wasn't the first time she saw him like that. "How did I contribute to the victory? I stayed behind while the others fought. Even when the cavalry charged, I didn't join the battle."

"You were in the reserves, Gerold. If they had needed reinforcements or cover for retreat, you would have been crucial in that eventuality."

"But it didn't happen," he retorted angrily. He turned his back on her. "I brought an army in the North to give you back your home, only to discover that you didn't need it, that your brother already had one. I sent my men to death at Moat Cailin. I stood there like a chump here, while your brother was risking his life in the vanguard. What am I? A useless third born son."
He told her that, speaking in the other direction. She didn't like to see him like this. She moved over
him and leaned on his back, burying her face into his neck. A beard had begun to grow on his jaw
during their campaign in the North, which made his face sharp to the touch, but he had shaved it after
their victory. She liked it more to be honest. That was how he was when they met. As she moved her
hand over his back and his chest, she felt the new muscles that appeared through their journey to
Winterfell.

"I don't care if you fought in the vanguard or were left out of the battle. Asher may have fought
bravely, but he was injured. He could have died. What's the use to be hailed a battle hero if you die?
They may sing songs about you for decades to come, maybe centuries, if you die heroically in battle,
but you'll be dead. A life is not worth a song. And if you die... I don't know what I'll do."

She felt water come to her eyes. Gerold took her hand wandering on his chest and brought to his lips
to kiss it. "I won't die. I promise."

They had remained in this position for a very long time. Mira never really thought she would cherish
these moments with her husband. Her parents always talked about marriage as a duty. Feelings were
never part of the discussion when they talked about it, and with Margaery, marriage was a question
of opportunity, not of duty or love. Mira's marriage had gone in a direction no one ever prepared her
for.

"I wonder what they're doing at the Hightower right now," her husband said.

"I suppose Elys is still preparing her scandal if it hasn't gotten out already."

Gerold made a sound between a chuckle and a scoff. "She shouldn't turn around that squire. I bet
she's not even in love with him." Mira knew she wasn't, but Elys wanted to bring life to the
Hightower with a small scandal of her own. "Anyway, my lord father would refuse to marry her to
him. He's not highborn enough." This brought the memory of another squire to Mira, one who
looked at her very often. Asher used to tease her about this. The squire couldn't look at her after she
left for Highgarden.

"I think they're probably laughing at me, thinking how I must be freezing here," Gerold said, bitter
again.

"Well, I know a few parts of you that remain warm."

He turned his head to look at her, they smiled and exchanged a quick laugh. Her husband turned on
himself to lie on his back and their chests found themselves against each other. They kissed and soon
they were doing it again. The night went in a blur. Mira hadn't felt good like this in a very long time.
She didn't want it to end, but it did. Day came.

On the morning, as he was getting dressed, she asked a favor to her husband. "Gerold, could you
keep an eye on Asher?"

Her husband looked unsure. "He seems to be able to look after himself."

"I know." She had sighed. "I'm not worried that he could die. He survived to so much... But I'm
afraid of what he could do in the heat of battle."

"What do you mean?" Gerold had frowned.

"He loves Gwyn, and she loves him, but he already killed two of her brothers. I can't imagine how
difficult it is for her to stay married with him. But this time, if he kills her father... I'm afraid he will
lose her, forever. I don't want that to happen. Asher wants to avenge Ethan and Rodrik, but I'm
afraid he could lose Gwyn to avenge our family. If that was to happen, it would destroy him."

She had witnessed the beginning, the evolution and the end of Asher's relationship with Gwyn before his exile, and she knew they both loved each other. Losing Gwyn a second time would kill him.

"I'll make sure he doesn't kill him. I promise," Gerold told her.

"Thank you." She looked at him, and he looked at her. That was the same way he looked at her the day they were wed, when they recited their vows. Many things had changed, but the way he looked at her hadn't changed in the slightest. "Be careful out there."

"I will." He closed the distance between and kissed her. Mira returned the kiss and took his face between her hands. That would be the last time she would see him before some time, and the first time she let him go. They had always been together so far. When they broke the kiss, after a very long time, he looked at her again.

"I love you," he said.

"I love you too." He kissed her one last time, then walked away, but before he reached the door, Mira told him one last thing. "Gerold, I'm sure your family is worrying about you right now. All of them."

"Even Altos?" he asked, doubtful.

She rolled her eyes. "I suppose he's the exception that confirms the rule."

They smiled at each other and he left. Weeks later, Mira was on her knees, praying for him in the godswood before the trials. In an hour or two, the trials of Theon Greyjoy and Harald Karstark would take place. Their fates would be decided today. They had waited for Sansa to come back. Her first action as Lady of Winterfell would be to judge the two men for their crimes against the North. Then they would discuss the dispositions to take for war, and in the evening all the lords of the North would pledge their houses to her as Wardeness of the North.

The godswood was all silence. You would hear a fly if there were any. Mira heard indistinct voices from afar, then the voices came close and she could understand what they said.

"You really saw him? The Night King?" She recognized Sansa's voice. Her brother answered.

"Aye. And they were all slaughtered. The Free Folk who are here are those who survived this battle."

"How many men…? How many of these things does he have in his army?"

"Tens of thousands. I'm not lying, Sansa."

"No, I don't think you're lying," she replied quickly. "Tyrion believes you, and he's not the sort to believe in these things."

"It's imperative to keep your men in the North. As soon as the Dreadfort and the Last Hearth have surrendered, we must go to the Wall and garrison the castles. Oakenshield, Greyguard, Icemark, the Nightfort, all of them. We must be prepared. We have to defend the Wall."

"I understand, Jon, but even if we can convince the northern lords and the wildlings, how will we do for the lords of the Westerland and the Riverlands? And what about the Vale? They won't believe us.
White Walkers haven't been seen for thousands of years. They are legends to them."

"We have to persuade them. If the dead get through the Wall, there won't be any safe place left in the Seven Kingdoms. They will invade the North, kill everyone living here and turn them into their own kind, and continue south until they reach Dorne and that there's nothing left of Westeros. Nothing living, at least."

A silence followed. "What about the Knights of the Vale? I don't trust them."

"We need all the help we can get."

"Can the White Walkers get through the Wall?"

"I don't know. I hope not."

"We don't have enough food for our own men already. We already have twenty thousand without the ten thousand the Vale brought. It should be more than enough to garrison all the Wall. I don't trust Harrold Arryn. Littlefinger is behind his presence here. We can't rely on them. Tyrion believes we should order them to go home as soon we're done today."

"You say that Littlefinger is dead. He's no longer a danger, and I don't think people like Yohn Royce…"

"Maybe not him, but others. I don't trust them. I don't trust them at all. They let Baelish bring Arya in the North. He plotted with the Manderlys to turn against us in the middle of battle. We have to get rid of them. We can trust the Lannisters and the Tullys, even the wildlings if you say so, but not the men of the Vale."

Another silence followed. "You're the Lady of Winterfell. It's your decision. We'll see each other later."

Mira heard footsteps on the ground covered with snow. After a moment, she saw Sansa emerge from the other side of the weirwood. She stopped when she noticed Mira on her knees.

"Did you hear us?" Sansa asked.

"I was praying here. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to eavesdrop your discussion." Sansa nodded in acknowledgement. "So, White Walkers?"

"Yes. That sounds completely… mad. As mad as my brother dying, then coming back to life. I can't believe everything I've heard since I arrived yesterday."

"There was someone at Ironrath. My father's squire. He went to the Wall after the Red Wedding, and he disappeared north of it. If the dead are really back…?" Mira couldn't complete her sentence.

She wasn't superstitious or the kind to believe in prophecies or myths, but Mira had grown up in the North and they were taught to respect these myths, like the one of Brandon the Builder. Jon Snow didn't strike her for a mad man, Lord Tyrion neither, and they both believed the White Walkers were back. Lady Lyanna Mormont told her that her uncle, Jeor Mormont, had died north of the Wall after a battle against the dead. Had Gared turned into a wight?

"My brother Bran may be there as well." Mira looked up at Sansa. She saw worry on her face. "Someone saw him going there. Who knows what happened to him?"

Brandon Stark north of the Wall? These were bad news. "I'm sorry, Sansa. Really, I am." Another
brother was lost.

Sansa looked down on the ground. She came to stand next to Mira and faced the tree. "I came here every day when I was a girl. I prayed to be somewhere else. Back then I only thought about what I wanted, never about what I had. I was a stupid girl."

Sansa almost spat the last words. "You were only a child, Sansa. We all have dreams when we are children. We think of what we could be, not who we are. About what we could have, not what we have," Mira told her as she stood up. Her legs were beginning to freeze in the snow. She thought of Asher who had wanted Gwyn, and this led to his exile.

"What did you dream about when you were young?" Sansa asked her.

Mira thought about it for a moment. "I don't really know. I was happy at Ironrath. I wanted to visit some places around the world, but I didn't really want to have another home. To be honest, I didn't know what to expect of Highgarden when my mother sent me there. I had never left the North before."

"But it turned out well."

"Yes, it did, mostly. I think that's a good thing I was sent away. My vision of the world was too limited at Ironrath. I was blind in some way, just like you." They exchanged a look, then faced the weirwood again. "How is Joanna?"

That brought a smile to Sansa's lips. "She's right. The wet nurse is keeping an eye on her."

Mira smiled in return. Joanna Lannister had brought joy to Winterfell since she arrived. At least she brought some to the Lannisters and to Sansa's family and friends. The same couldn't be said about a few lords of the North. Still, it allowed to lighten the mood and to clear their minds from all the worries they had from time to time. Lord Tyrion and Sansa were happy whenever their daughter was around. Mira couldn't wait to have her own child. Gerold would like it.

"She's very beautiful," Mira said.

"Thank you." Sansa's smile was wider than ever. "She already has shining blond hair. They shine more than Tyrion's. And she has his eyes." Sansa sighed, but the smile didn't leave her face. "I wish my father and my mother could see her."

Mira sympathized. She had wished a few times that her own lord father and lady mother could meet Gerold, but they were gone. Both their parents would never know that their daughter was married and that they had grandchildren.

"Tyrion loves her too," Sansa resumed. "I never saw him so happy. Except when I told him that I loved him for the first time." Her expression turned sad. "I wish we didn't have all these problems. The northern lords don't trust us, and the Knights of the Vale are still here. What am I to do to rule the North? They mistrust the Lannisters and everyone from the Westerlands even more than they hate the wildlings. Tyrion believes we should arrange marriages between the families of the Westerlands and the North, but I fear it might make things worse. I'm not sure what to do. Perhaps I shouldn't be the Lady of Winterfell."

"Why do you say that? You are the Wardeness of the North. Robb Stark is dead and you are his heir."

"Yes, but because of my marriage with Tyrion and all the time I spent in the south, they believe I am a Southerner. I'm afraid if Tyrion and I have a son and that he rules Winterfell, he might spend his
They remained silent for a moment. Then Mira spoke. "You are a Stark of Winterfell. You must show them and they will follow you."

"How?"

"I don't know. But you must show them." Snow kept coming on the ground around them. Mira looked at the sky and all she could see was white. "How long before the maesters of the Citadel say that winter is here?" Maester Ortengryn told her one day that the Citadel was deciding officially when winter began and when it ended. He explained her in detail how the Archmaesters took the decision together from the reports maesters sent through all the Seven Kingdoms, considering where the reports came from and the many details they gave.

"A raven came from the Citadel this morning." Mira turned to look at Sansa. "A white raven. Winter is here."

"Your family was right, as always."

They stayed together in the godswood for some more time, then they both returned to their rooms. Mira went to see Talia who just sat there, doing nothing, when she entered.

"Where is Ryon?" Mira asked.

"Riding outside with one of the patrols?"

"What?"

"He said he didn't want to be there for the trial. He said it's boring."

Mira sighed. Ryon should have been present as Asher's heir. "He has more of Asher than Rodrik in him."

Talia smiled as a timid smile formed on her lips. Asher couldn't suffer politics, and Ryon looked well engaged on the same path. "Beskha is with him. He's not in danger. I can be there in his stead."

"Thank you."

Someone from House Forrester had to be present for the trial, but Mira already represented House Hightower. If Ryon wasn’t there, the duty fell on Talia's shoulders. Mira still marveled at how her little sister had grown up. She was becoming a beautiful young woman, but she was also hardened by Ethan's death. Talia was present when Ethan died. Mira was not. They both lost the same brothers and parents, but Mira hadn't seen any of them die with her own eyes. It wasn't the same. She remained comfortable in King's Landing and at the Hightower while her kin were being slaughtered and chased all over the North. It was easy to not turn bloodthirsty when your family died far away.

"It's about to begin. We should go," Mira finally said. She and Talia walked to the Great Hall of Winterfell together. "Have you thought about what we talked a few days ago?"

"Oh. Yes, I have," Talia replied.

"And?"

"I don't know. What do you know of Gawen Glover?"

"Not much. We know more of his uncle. Father always said Galbart Glover was a good man, but"
this tells us nothing of his nephew. We should meet him at least to have a better idea, but right now he is at Deepwood Motte. We could go there once this is all over."

"Agree."

"Anyway, he must ask Asher first. We can use that as a reason to delay for the time being."

Lord Robett Glover had come to her a few days ago, proposing to betroth Talia to his son and heir, Gawen Glover. His son was still quite young, one or two years under Talia, so they could wait for the marriage, but he said no one was worthier to be the future Lady of Deepwood Motte than the daughter of Gregor Forrester, his late brother's friend and most loyal bannerman, and the sister of Asher Forrester, his only bannerman who did the right thing and followed Jon Snow to fight the Boltons. Mira assured him they would consider his offer, but reminded him that only Asher, as Lord of Ironrath, could accept the betrothal. Mira though with irony that her little sister might get a higher position than her as Lady of Deepwood Motte. Mira didn't envy her. She was happy with Gerold, and the Hightowers were a powerful house, even if she was married with someone who didn't have much chance to inherit anything. She only wanted to be sure that Talia would marry a good man before Asher accept any offer from Lord Glover.

The Great Hall was crowded with people from all over the Seven Kingdoms and beyond. The wildlings were completely on the right side, with the lords of the Westerlands and the Riverlands. On the other side were the lords of the Vale and the North. Mira and Talia joined their fellow Northerners. Mira bowed to Lord Glover when they passed before him. They found a place between him and Alys Karstark. They only sat for a few minutes when Lord Tyrion, Sansa, Jon Snow, Arya and Ser Brynden emerged together from the back door behind the platform. They took place at the high table, Sansa in the middle, Jon Snow at her left and Tyrion Lannister at her right. Ser Brynden sat next to Lord Tyrion at one extremity of the table while Arya sat besides her half-brother at the other end. The Hall went silent. Sansa stood up.

"My lords, my ladies," she said, "we are gathered here today for the trial of two men. Two men who betrayed the North, who turned against their people and committed crimes that no true man of the North would do. They will be judged and sentenced accordingly to their crimes. Justice will be given. Bring the first of the accused."

They heard shackles rattling and scraping against the floor as Theon Greyjoy was brought forward. He had a horrible appearance and Mira saw that everyone could smell him as much as she could. Only the wildlings didn't look shocked by his presence. However, there was more than discomfort in everyone's eyes. There was hatred. The son of Balon Greyjoy had betrayed the North, fought with Robb Stark before he turned against him, seized Winterfell and pretended he killed Sansa's brothers. Mira couldn't say she had much pity for the Ironman herself. Robb Stark trusted him and as a reward, he betrayed him. Worse, he killed innocent children. It didn't matter they were not Bran and Rickon Stark. She had visited many poorhouses and orphanages with Margaery in King's Landing. The two boys he killed could have been among them.

The two guards who brought the traitor sat him without caution on a chair that was placed before the high table. They attached his wrists and ankles to the chair and left him there. Mira looked at Sansa. She looked straight at her father's former ward, a man she knew most of her life. If there was any pity, any compassion in her heart for the atrocities he endured under Ramsay's hand, she didn't show it. Her eyes were unyielding, merciless, hateful.

"Theon Greyjoy," Sansa started. Her voice said the same than her eyes. "You are accused of treason against the North, of reaving, of murder and of rape. How do you plead?"

It took time before the accused spoke. When he did, only one word came out of his mouth. "Guilty."
Then more words came out before Sansa could speak again. "I wish to confess. I wish to confess."

"You wish to confess?" Sansa said, hard as the stones of the walls.

"I do."

Theon Greyjoy told the whole story from the moment Robb Stark sent him to the Iron Islands to negotiate a treaty with his father. According to him, it was his idea to recognize Balon Greyjoy King of the Iron Islands in exchange for his help against the Lannisters. Balon Greyjoy had flatly refused the offer, saying he would take his own crown. He decided to invade the North against Theon's advice, barely acknowledging him as his son. Theon had tried to convince him to attack the Westerlands instead of the North, to no avail. He also wrote a letter to Robb Stark to warn him of his father's intentions, but burned the message in the end and decided to follow his family. He recognized he raided fishing villages, then decided to take Winterfell since it seemed a worthier prize. He made Brandon and Rickon prisoners and killed Ser Rodrik to prove to his men that he was a true Ironborn. He burned two farm boys on one of his men's advice when he couldn't find the Stark boys, then he was betrayed by his own men when Ramsay besieged Winterfell. Ramsay had his men burn the castle once it had fallen. He described the torture he endured, how Ramsay made him think that his name was Reek and not Theon Greyjoy, how he used him to make the Ironborn holding Moat Cailin surrender before skinning them alive. He told them about Ramsay's marriage with Jeyne, how she pleaded him to help her to escape, and how he refused because it would only have made things worse when Ramsay would catch them. He told them everything Jeyne went through, how she spent her days weeping in her chamber, locked from the outside, cut out from the rest of the world, waiting for Ramsay to come at night to hurt her. He told them about Rickon's captivity. He confessed everything he did, and everything he did not.

As he made his confessions, expressions of horror, disgust, hatred, and pity sometimes, came and left people's face. Even Lord Tyrion seemed to pity the Greyjoy in some way, though his face was hard as well. Sansa, however, strangely looked like her sister in this very moment. She was unflinching, looked down on Theon as if he was some trash, worse than a monster. The lords and knights had shouted him accusations and insults as he spoke and Ser Brynden, Jon Snow and Lord Tyrion had to intervene more than once to have silence. Sansa never said a word. She kept looking at Theon Greyjoy, the man who betrayed her brother.

When she spoke, the whole room was silent. "I recall something Lord Tyrion once told me. He was on his way back from the Wall and he stopped at Winterfell. You had a little discussion with him then, Greyjoy. When he talked about how your uncles burned the fleet at Lannisport during the last rebellion, you said that it must have been a pretty sight. Tell me. Did you find it pretty to watch two children burn to death?"

As fitting, the silence that followed was a death's silence. Theon Greyjoy had his head bowed down and didn't dare to look up.

"You say you're sorry about my brothers, about Jeyne, about Robb, about Ser Rodrik. You say you are sorry about everything, but I'm going to tell you what I think. You're only sorry because you were tortured after everything you did. You're sorry because of the things you endured. If Ramsay Bolton hadn't tortured you, you would still be prancing around, calling yourself the son and heir of Balon Greyjoy and saying you managed to take a castle full of servants and children with thirty men. You are arrogant, a coward, a traitor. You deserve what Ramsay did to you. Without you, my brothers would still be alive, and many more people would still be alive. If you were truly sorry about what you did, you would have tried to save Jeyne and Rickon. Instead, you did nothing. You didn't rape Jeyne, but it's as if you raped her. You didn't kill Rickon, but you might as well have killed him yourself. You made yourself a partner in Ramsay Bolton's crimes with your inaction. My
family welcomed you at our table when your own abandoned you, we shared our bread with you. You trained with Robb in the courtyard, he welcomed you at his war councils, and you rewarded his trust with treason. You were among the first to declare my brother King in the North. You haven't broken the guest rights, you're not a kinslayer or a kingslayer, it's true, but you committed all the other crimes a man can commit in life."

Sansa remained seated from the moment Theon Greyjoy was brought forward. Now she stood up. Everyone was looking at her, but she only looked at the accused, who didn't dare to return her stare. "Theon Greyjoy, son of Balon Greyjoy, in the name of my brother, Robb Stark, the Lord of Winterfell and the King in the North you betrayed, and in the name of Tommen of the House Baratheon, First of His Name, King of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, and Lord of the Seven Kingdoms, I, Sansa Stark, Lady of Winterfell, Lady of Casterly Rock, Lady of the Westerlands and Wardeness of the North, I hereby sentence you to death. You will be executed as soon as the trial for Harald Karstark is over. Get him out of my sight now."

So ended the trial for Theon Turncloak. The lords cheered, but they also spat at the son of Balon Greyjoy as he was brought outside by his men. Some hit him as well. Mira didn't join them. She wouldn't bring herself down to that level. She looked at Sansa, and for a moment she saw uncertainty on her face. Her husband seemed to be holding her hand under the table.

The assembly didn't have time to calm when they brought in the fallen Lord of Karhold, chained just like his predecessor. Well chosen shouts were prepared for him as well, and they needed some time to bring back order when he was attached to the chair. Once it was brought, Harald Karstark broke it.

"So here she is, the Lannister whore."

One of the guards near him hit his cheek with his fist. Sansa looked hard at him, like she looked at Theon Greyjoy. "You will not speak unless you're asked to, Harald Karstark," Sansa said.

"I do not obey to the Lannisters and their lackeys."

Another fist. Sansa made a sign to the guard who did this, and he stepped back. "You are in Winterfell, Lord Karstark. You are in my home, and you will do as I say."

"Why? Else you will kill me, like your brother killed my father? You would turn yourself into a kinslayer like the King who lost the North? You would kill the son after your brother killed the father?"

Sansa smiled, but her smile was cruel. "You speak boldly, Harald Karstark. I wonder, did you speak so boldly when you were with Ramsay Bolton? Did you speak to him on this tone? I'm surprised he didn't skin you alive."

He smiled in return. "You will never understand Ramsay Bolton."

"What I understand is that he was a monster and that you conspired with him. You are accused of treason. How do you plead?"

"I committed no treason. Roose Bolton was the Warden of the North. Have you forgotten? Your own nephew gave him the title."

Sansa's face was stone. There was no sign that his words affected her. "Bring forward Maester Wolkan." The maester who had been in service to Roose Bolton at Winterfell came to face Sansa, but remained at good distance from Harald Karstark. "Do you swear by all the gods that your
testimony will be true and honest?"

"I swear, my lady," replied the maester.

"Maester Wolkan, it has come to our knowledge that you were there when Roose Bolton died. Can you tell us how he died?"

"He was murdered, my lady."

"How?"

"He was stabbed in the heart by his son, Ramsay. Then he ordered me to write to every house and tell them he was poisoned by his enemies. I had no choice…"

"You're not the one on trial, maester. Was there someone else present when Roose Bolton, the Warden of the North…" she emphasized on the words, looking at Lord Karstark, "was assassinated?"

"Yes. Lord Karstark was there. He didn't look surprised. He did nothing as Lord Bolton died. He ordered me to show respect to Lord Ramsay immediately. Then Lord Ramsay ordered me to bring him Lady Bolton and her son. She had just given birth. He fed them to his dogs."

"Did Lod Karstark do anything to prevent that to happen?"

"No, my lady."

"Thank you, maester."

Maester Wolkan left. Harald Karstark snickered. "Don't tell me you're going to execute me for the death of Roose Bolton. You hated the man. He killed your brother," he said.

"You just said you served the Warden of the North, and yet you conspired to have him killed. You helped a man killed his father, his mother-in-law and his brother in the same day. In my opinion, helping someone to commit kinslaying is no better than being a kinslayer ourselves."

The Lord of Karhold burst. "You dare to call me kinslayer? Your brother killed my father. We are of the same blood. Stark and Karstark."

"You share no blood with me, Harald Karstark. I am a Stark, and I know a Stark would never murder children. Your father forfeited his blood links with my family the day he murdered innocent boys."

"It was vengeance, not murder. Just like it would have been vengeance if your brother had killed Joffrey."

"It wouldn't have been vengeance. It would have been justice." Sansa's declaration brought a silence in the Hall as she didn't speak for a moment afterwards. "Joffrey murdered my lord father. I was there when he was executed. I saw his head roll from the steps of the Great Sept of Baelor on Joffrey's order. He had agreed to let Lord Eddard Stark live if he confessed his crimes. My lord father did so, and Joffrey ordered his execution all the same. Everyone else who was present this day opposed the decision. The queen, the Grand Maester, the High Septon, the Master of Whisperers, everyone but Joffrey. What Joffrey did was murder, and my brother waged war to bring justice to him. He didn't fight to kill all the Lannisters, he fought to execute the man who killed our father. Your father decided to murder children because they were cousins of Ser Jaime Lannister. My brother did right when he executed him. He executed an assassin." The Lord of Karhold was
"You conspired with Ramsay Bolton. You conspired to kill an innocent woman and a baby still at her breast, and you betrayed the North. You raped innocent boys while your father and brothers were away at war. Your sister, Lady Karstark, can testify about this."

"I can," the young woman sitting next to Mira interrupted. "He did it very often."

"You are no better than Joffrey. When I was a hostage in King's Landing, I often wished I could kill him, but someone else took care of that. I will take care of you myself. Harald Karstark, I sentence you to death. Bring him in the courtyard, he will be executed immediately."

Two guards grabbed the Lord of Karhold and brought him without care to the courtyard. Sansa left the high table, accompanied by her husband, her brother and sister, and her granduncle. An execution block was already in place in the yard and the condemned was brought and forced to place his head on it. The lords and ladies gathered around to see the execution. Lady Brienne was at Sansa's side now. She took the sword she had at her belt and gave it to Sansa who brought it to Jon Snow. She told him something, but Mira couldn't hear what it was from there. Jon Snow unsheathed the sword. It was a Valyrian steel sword.

"You're not going to kill me the Old Way? The man who passes the sentence should swing the sword," the man with his head on the block mocked.

"I'm not a man," Sansa replied. "I suppose women are not expected to swing a sword in your house. Do you have any last words, Harald Karstark?"

"BETTER TO DIE FREE THAN SERVE A LANNISTER BITCH!"

Jon Snow brought the sword up and down, and the head left the shoulders. Harald Karstark, Lord of Karhold, last living son of Rickard Karstark, was dead. Theon Greyjoy was brought forward right after and placed in a similar position. Sansa asked him the same thing that she asked to the other man a moment ago.

"What is dead may never die," Theon Greyjoy said. Then the sword was brought down and the last son of Balon Greyjoy was no more.

Normally, the executions took place outside castles, so that only selected people could witness them, but this time they were carried out before everyone's eyes. Mira's parents had always kept her away from the sight of these executions, keeping it for Rodrik and Asher. The sight of the headless bodies was shocking, but Mira had already seen people dead or injured on a battlefield before, both here and at Moat Cailin. Still, an execution was different. She saw these dead people after the battle was done. She didn't actually witness them die. Now she did. She knew these two men deserved what they got, but it still shook her. Sansa looked shaken as well as her brother gave her back the sword. Mira noticed the handle made of gold with a lion's head.

A few minutes later, they were all gathered again in the Great Hall. Mira was again with her sister between Lord Glover and Lady Karstark. The Lord of Deepwood Motte was speaking to Talia about his son. Mira turned to Lady Alys.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

"I'm fine," the lady replied. "Don't worry about me. Harald was my brother, yes, but he did so many horrible things… I will regret my last brother, but not Harald himself. Or at least not who he became these last years," she added, seeing Mira's concerned look.

"I lost brothers in this war me too, and my father as well."
"I know, but now this is over." Alys Karstark. "I wish Eddard and Torrhen hadn't both gone to war. They wouldn't have died."

"In peace sons bury their fathers, but in war fathers bury their sons. War violates the order of nature." A Braavosi historian named Herodotus once wrote that. She read it while she was at Oldtown.

"True, unless war is the natural order of things," Alys Karstark replied bitterly.

"Silence, everyone." Jon Snow called the people to order and they obeyed. The Northerners respected Jon Snow, as former Lord Commander of the Night's Watch and because he fought with them on the battlefield. It was mostly thanks to him that Northerners and wildlings didn't fight more than they actually did.

"My lords, my ladies," Sansa started, "it's time to address a few matters of importance for the North. After discussions with my brother Jon Snow and the leaders of the Free Folk, I decided to honor the alliance forged between them and the Night's Watch. Ramsay Bolton threatened to kill the Free Folk when they lived on the lands of the Gift, lands that are not under the responsibility of the North. I will allow the men and women of the Free Folk to settle on the Gift in peace, as long as they do not trouble the people living out of the Gift. If any of them is found violating laws on the lands of any lord of the North, he will have full authority to punish them accordingly to their crimes."

"Wait a minute, my lady." For the first time today, Harrold Arryn, Lord of the Eyrie, intervened. "You cannot allow wildling invaders to settle on your lands."

"We didn't invade. We were invited," Tormund Giantsbane, leader of the wildlings, said.

"Not by me," the Warden of the East retorted.

"They didn't need to be invited by you, Lord Arryn," Sansa said sharply. "These are not your lands. The people who settle on the Gift are none of your concerns."

"I brought my men here to give back Winterfell to you, my lady. Not to see your lands taken away by monsters."

Jon Snow stood up at this moment. "The Free Folk, the Northerners, the men of the Riverlands, the Westerlands and the Reach fought bravely, fought together, and we won. My father used to say we find our true friends on the battlefield. The Free Folk bled with us for Winterfell and the North, so don't come and tell us how to behave with our friends, Lord Arryn. You didn't fight for Winterfell."

"We wanted to. We were late, that's all."

"You always seem to be late, Lord Arryn," Sansa said. "If you can't arrive in time to a battle, perhaps it would be time for you to go back and hide behind your mountains like you did during the war. Your lords allowed Petyr Baelish to bring my sister to Ramsay Bolton. I defend you from speaking here. You are no friend of mine."

That shut the mouth of the Lord of the Eyrie quite efficiently. He sat back. Some of the lords of the Vale seemed angry, but others looked ashamed. Not far from Mira, Lord Cerwyn rose.

"The Boltons are defeated. The war is over. Winter has come. If the maesters are right, it'll be the coldest one in a thousand years. We should ride home and wait out the coming storms."

"The war is not over," Jon Snow declared, his voice dark. "And I promise you, friend, the true enemy won't wait out the storm. He brings the storm."
Men began to murmur immediately. Mira saw Sansa speak to her brother. She didn't seem happy. It was obvious many people were skeptical about Jon Snow's declaration.

"What is he talking about?" Alys Karstark asked.

"White Walkers," Mira replied, almost reluctantly.

"White Walkers?" She didn't believe it.

"Jon Snow claims he fought them at Hardhome. They slaughtered tens of thousand wildlings and added them to their army."

"White Walkers?" She didn't sound convinced in any way.

"I know, it sounds completely impossible, but Lord Tyrion Lannister believes they are real as well, and he's not superstitious, believe me. And Jon Snow doesn't strike me for a liar."

The Lady of Karhold looked at the bastard son of Eddard Stark who now spoke with his brother-in-law. "Me neither. The Starks are known for their honesty," she conceded.

"Did you receive any raven from Castle Black about that?" Mira asked her.

"Yes." She looked back at Mira. "So it is true."

A girl of ten stood up at this moment. "Your ward, Domerick Bolton, was killed by Ramsay Bolton, Lady Dustin, and you lost men at the Red Wedding, but despite this, you fought for Roose Bolton against the Starks at the beginning," Lyanna Mormont declared. Her voice was powerful and everyone went silent as she spoke. She turned her head in Mira's direction. "You swore allegiance to House Stark, Lord Glover, but in their hour of greatest need, you refused to answer their call. And you, Lord Cerwyn, your father was skinned alive by Ramsay Bolton. Still, you fought for him before Lady Sansa's forces besieged you."

The Lord of Cerwyn lowered his head. Mira had seen many people lower their head like this in King's Landing, before Joffrey and Tommen, but they did it because they were afraid of Joffrey or because they were forced to do so before Tommen. They did it before Lyanna Mormont because they felt ashamed and because they actually respected her. If only she had been one of Cersei's children. All this war would never have happened.

"But House Mormont remembers," she resumed. "The North remembers. We know no king but the King in the North whose name is Stark." Mira felt something fall in her throat. Did she hear well? "I don't care if he's a bastard. Ned Stark's blood runs through his veins. He's my king, from this day until his last day."

New murmurs erupted. *What is she doing?* She just said Jon Snow was her king. At the high table, they didn't seem to know how to react, and things were no better on the benches and seats down below.

"Wait a minute." Ser Daven Lannister was the first one to intervene. His long hair and beard almost gave him the appearance of a Northerner. "We brought men from the Westerlands and the Riverlands, with winter at our doors, to give back Winterfell to its proper lady. Now you want to replace her with a bastard? Sansa Lannister is the Wardeness of the North."

Mira immediately knew nothing good would come out from that. He just called Sansa by the name Lannister. Lord Manderly got on his feet immediately. "Lady Mormont speaks harshly and truly. My son died for Robb Stark, the Young Wolf. I thought his brother Rickon could be our next king, a
worthy successor. When he died, I feared there was no chance for us to find another king in my lifetime. But I was wrong. Jon Snow avenged the Red Wedding. He is the White Wolf. The King in the North."

The Lord of White Harbor unsheathed his word and went on his knees as he said the last words. Shouts followed, some approving Lord Manderly, many others opposing. Out of all this, the Lord of the Eyrie decided to say something again.

"You can't exchange the legitimate daughter of Eddard Stark for a bastard!"

"Better a bastard who fought with us on the battlefield than a knight hiding behind mountains," the lord of White Harbor replied before turning to Ser Daven. "Or butchers who hide behind trees while we die by the thousands."

"Lady Mormont's men were with us in these woods," the Lannister knight countered. "They watched you fight from afar as much as we did. And maybe if your king hadn't charged the Bolton lines mindlessly, you wouldn't have been caught in his trap and slaughtered."

The hall went into confusion. Everything was shouts, cures, insults, yells. Fists were brandished. Ser Brynden, Jon Snow, Lord Tyrion and even Sansa tried to bring back the order but they couldn't. There was too much hatred between everyone here. This would end up in another war. Another war that would cost the life to thousands of people, right at the moment they could less afford it.

There was a decrease in the shouting at one moment, and Mira seized the opportunity. She had to do something. "Lord Manderly," she said clearly. The Lord of White Harbor looked at her, and a few other people as well, though many kept arguing between themselves. "You lost your son Wendel in the last war. Ser Daven, you lost your father at Oxcross. Lord Glover, your lost your brother in the war as well. You, Lady Karstark, lost your father and your three brothers. Ser Davos Seaworth’s son died on the Blackwater." Almost everyone was looking at her now. "And you, Lady Mormont." She stared at the child of ten who held her gaze. "Your mother Maege and your sister Dacey both died in the war. I lost my parents and two brothers. The War of the Five Kings only brought death to the North, and to everyone. We started a war because Joffrey Baratheon murdered Eddard Stark. He was a monster. I know it. I was a handmaiden for Margaery Tyrell, his betrothed, and she told me herself one day. Joffrey is a monster. But Joffrey is dead. Tywin Lannister is dead. The Freys and the Boltons behind the Red Wedding are dead. We have no more reasons to fight. Tommen Baratheon is the opposite of his brother. He’s not a tyrant. Torrhen Stark bent the knee to Aegon Targaryen three hundred years ago because he couldn’t defeat him, because fighting would have been useless. If we are to believe Jon Snow, we have a new enemy, much more dangerous than any king or lord of the south. We have been weakened by the wars. We don’t have enough men to fight this enemy on our own, and even less the means to fight it and to fight the southern kingdoms at the same time. To choose our independence right now wouldn’t be to choose freedom. It would be to choose death. It would be to choose to lose everything we have left. It would be to choose the destruction of the North."

She sat back, shaking from the words she just said. She couldn’t allow to lose anyone else from her family. Fighting Tommen, Margaery and Lord Tyrion was as stupid as it was useless. Lord Glover rose from his seat and looked at her.

"Lady Hightower, you speak wisely, I’ll give you that, but you spent all these last years in the south. You weren’t with us while our brothers and sisters of the North died in the hands of the Lannisters and the Boltons. You cannot understand what we feel. You haven’t been in the North for years."

"I lost people I loved all the same, Lord Glover. I know how you feel. It was as painful for me to hear that the people I loved were dead from a great distance than if I had seen them die with my own
eyes. I remained loyal to the North through all these years. My service for Queen Margaery Tyrell and my marriage into House Hightower didn't change that. I am a Forrester, and I will always be a Forrester."

The Lord of Deepwood Motte looked at her sternly, and he had a sorry expression on his face as well. "I don't doubt it a second, my lady, but there is something every one of you must know. Something I hid so far, and that I shouldn't have." He looked straight before him, in the direction of the high table. "I was wrong to deny you help in your time of need. I know Robb Stark would have wanted me to do it." He produced something from his cloak. It was a sealed parchment. "This is the last decree Robb Stark wrote before he died. He made it before he learned that his wife was pregnant, to name his successor. He entrusted the decree to my brother, and Galbart gave it to me not long before his death."

Everyone was looking at Lord Glover and the scroll in his hand. Robb Stark's last decree. Her father had ridden with him. He and Rodrik were supposed to ride in the vanguard when they would march on Casterly Rock. Ser Brynden Tully left the high table and walked to Lord Glover.

"Show it to me," he said.

Lord Glover slowly gave it to the knight of House Tully who looked at the scroll very carefully. He looked behind to his grandniece. "Robb Stark's seal. Unbroken." He broke it and began to read it aloud. "I, Robb Stark, Lord of Winterfell and King in the North, hereby proclaim my half-brother, Jon Snow, heir to all my titles and lands in the eventuality that I was to die without child. I release him from his vows to the Night's Watch and promise fair and appropriate compensation to the Watch in return. Signed by Lady Maege Mormont of Bear Island and Lord Galbart Glover of Deepwood Motte as witnesses. This is the signature of the king."

Murmurs started all over again. Ser Brynden Tully was well known by everyone here, and Mira knew him for a man of honor. He wouldn't lie about such a thing. She looked at Sansa, who seemed lost. Lord Tyrion had a grave expression. Lord Glover stepped forward to stand right before Sansa's brother and next to Lord Manderly. The words he said were meant for Jon Snow.

"I did not fight beside you on the field and I will regret that until my dying day. A man can only admit when he was wrong and ask forgiveness."

"There's nothing to forgive, my lord." Jon Snow looked as lost as everyone else.

"There will be more fights to come. House Glover will stand behind House Stark as we have for a thousand years. And I will stand behind Jon Snow…" He unsheathed his sword and held it up. "The King in the North!"

He knelt. "The King on the North!" someone followed. Then many swords were drawn in the air. All the lords of the North were cheering together.

"THE KING IN THE NORTH! THE KING IN THE NORTH! THE KING IN THE NORTH!
THE KING IN THE NORTH! THE KING IN THE NORTH!"

Mira heard her sister join the common outcry. She stood up to see better. There were lords from the Riverlands who began to shout the same. The Blackfish remained in the middle of the Hall, silent, still holding Robb Stark's last decree, while everyone was confused at the high table. No one from the Westerlands or the Vale of Arryn joined the Northerners. She saw Lord Tyrion whispering something in his wife's ear. He and Sansa left the high table and walked off the room, getting through the alley in the center of the room, followed by the knights and lords of the Westerlands, then by Harrold Arryn and his bannermen. When they were gone, only the Riverlands and the North
were still present. Mira noticed Ser Davos who was hailing Jon Snow as well. Ser Brynden Tully the Blackfish remained in the alley. He had given way to let the Lannisters and the Arryns leave the Hall, but hadn't left it himself. Not yet, since he carefully placed the scroll on the table next to Lord Glover, then walked away with a resigned look. As he did, some river lords followed him, and soon the hailing was over as everyone realized how empty the Great Hall of Winterfell had become.

Mira had done nothing all this time. She just remained here, standing. She didn't hail Jon Snow, but she didn't turn her back on him either. Robb Stark's last decree wasn't far from her. She looked at it and saw the first lines. *I, Robb Stark, Lord of Winterfell and King in the North, hereby proclaim my half-brother, Jon Snow, heir to all my titles and lands…* The direwolf sigil was next to his signature. Without any doubt, the decree was from Robb Stark. It was his last decree, his will. The will of the man her family served. The will of the man her father hailed as his king. What was she going to do? She didn't know. So far, she did nothing.

Chapter End Notes

Last chapter before a while. I'm sorry. My master's thesis takes too much of my time and I will only come back at the beginning of July. I'm at the end of my studies at the university and I must really focus on it.

We've reached the equivalent of the end of Season 6 in the timeline. The events that will follow will be entirely original and not based on the events of the next seasons, since the outline of the future events of this fic are already decided.

Let me know what you think of this fic so far. Don't fall back if you want to criticize it.

Please review
Sansa XXIX

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone! I'm back, with two chapters every week!

Previously, in "A Shadow and a Wolf":
Jon Snow was hailed King in the North after the Second Battle of Winterfell. However, his situation is far from being strong, the lords of the Westerlands and the Vale opposing him for Sansa. In the meantime, Daenerys finally defeated the slavers in Slaver's Bay and is sailing back to Westeros with Prince Trystane Martell, Ser Jorah Mormont, Varys and the High Priestess Kinvara by her side, along with a powerful army. Cersei Lannister believes she eliminated all her enemies in King's Landing when she blew up the Great Sept of Baelor, but someone survived. With the death of King Tommen who committed suicide, war and chaos is spreading through Westeros. Winter has come, and no one is safe.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

SANSA XXIX

"I sent a raven to Edmure. I'm waiting for his answer. Until I receive one, I can't do anything."

Sansa kept rocking Joanna as her granduncle spoke. Taking care of her daughter was her only way to escape all her worries for the last two days. She envied her little child. She slept peacefully now, ignoring what was going on out there, unaware of all the suspicion and tension that gained Winterfell since the day Jon was hailed King in the North by the Northerners.

"Don't you think the lords of the North could abandon their idea of making Jon king if they saw that no river lord supported them?" she asked.

"Northerners are proud, Sansa, and they just chose Jon Snow for their king, just as they chose your brother Robb before. That's not a choice that can be undone easily, and I'm not sure this choice must be undone."

"What do you mean?"

"These were the last words of your brother, Sansa," Ser Brynden explained to her very carefully. "The last wishes of Robb Stark, of the king I served. Can I go against them?"

Sansa couldn't believe what she heard. "Don't you realize what this will do? The North just declared its independence. That's a rebellion against the Crown."

"The Crown that killed your father. Tommen Baratheon may not have killed Eddard Stark, but his brother did."

"That's not it. There's going to be a war. Margaery is a good person, but she will never let the North rebel against her and Tommen. They will order us to put it down. I will have to fight against my own brother."

She said so in despair. They had come here in the hope to end this war once and for all, and instead
the northern lords decided to start it all over again. Sansa felt betrayed by her father's men. She was his daughter, and they chose Jon, a bastard, because she was married to a Lannister. It was so unfair. They brought their men, risked their lives for the North, and now she was set aside and they would to go to war again.

Winterfell and all its surroundings had become like a battlefield. There had been no battle so far, luckily enough, but each camp was entrenched and each army eyed the others closely, waiting for someone to make the first move. It was as if they were in peace, but on the brink of war. A single spark and everything would go aflame, like wildfire. Winterfell itself was divided between the sections controlled by the Lannisters, the Northerners, the wildlings and the Tullys. There were guards everywhere from every kingdom. The wildlings and the Northerners supported Jon while the lords of the Westerlands and the Vale supported Sansa. The river lords were divided.

"You said the queen is your friend," her granduncle said. "Do you think you could convince her to allow the North to remain independent? I think Edmure would accept to stay in the Seven Kingdoms in exchange, I can arrange that."

Sansa shook her head. "Margaery will not let one of the kingdoms leave the Realm. She is kind, but she wants to be queen of all the Seven Kingdoms, not six of them." Sansa looked at her daughter. She slept peacefully. If she knew everything that was going on right now… "Was the decree from Robb, really?"

"It was," the Blackfish confirmed. "It had his seal and his signature, and when your husband and I went to see Jon Snow, he showed us the decree. Lord Tyrion himself recognized this was from Robb Stark. He said he recognized the writing from the declaration of independence he sent to King's Landing and that his sister tore off when they received it."

"I hope he didn't do like her."

"No, he didn't."

Sansa allowed half a smile to appear on her lips for a very short moment. She kept rocking Joanna. "Why did Robb make Jon his heir?"

"For the same reason his bannermen chose Jon as their king instead of you as their Wardeness. Because you're married to the Imp." His voice wasn't hard. It was soft, and sorry as well.

"He disinherited me because he thought I was a Lannister?" Her voice was weak.

"He believed the Lannisters were going to kill you as soon as as they would have a son from you."

"Tyrion would never have done that!" she shouted.

Wailing followed her outcry. Sansa was immediately sorry. She just woke up Joanna. She hushed and brought her in the other room, singing a lullaby. Once she was asleep, Sansa left her there in her cradle with the wet nurse and a guard. She didn't want to trouble her daughter's first months with all this.

When she came back, her mother's uncle was still there. "I'm sorry that Robb disinherited you, Sansa, but you have to understand he wasn't the only one to think the same about your husband. Even I and your mother thought that Tyrion Lannister was going to get rid of you someday. We agreed with Robb's decision to name another heir."

"My mother should have known he wouldn't do it. Tyrion saved her life on the Eastern Road, after she arrested him. Without him, she would have died long before the Red Wedding."
"We were at war with the Lannisters, Sansa. We couldn't allow them to take the North if Robb was to die childless. Your sister and your other brothers were supposed dead. Jon Snow was the only option, aside from some distant cousins in the Vale."

Sansa remained silent for a moment. Then a question came to her mind. "Tell me, Uncle. When Tyrion offered to exchange me for Ser Jaime, what did Robb do?"

"He refused. He sent men to capture the Kingslayer again when your mother set him free."

Sansa's breathing came quickly. "He refused to get me back… to keep the Kingslayer his prisoner." Sansa felt broken, betrayed. "Tyrion and I brought a whole army in the North, we risked our lives and thousands of other lives, only to save Arya. And you tell me that my own family, when they had the chance to save me, refused?"

Her own blood… Her mother… Robb… They abandoned her. As soon as they learnt she was married with Tyrion, and even before that, they abandoned her. They gave up on her. Now her half-brother turned on her, was declared King in the North, took the North that should have gone to her, and Arya was on his side. All her family had turned on her.

"Your brother didn't have an easy choice to make," explained a man who had Tully blood in his veins, just like her. "We were at war. His bannermen had declared him king. He had duties."

"So he put his crown before me." Sansa sat. Tears were rolling on her cheeks. "I loved Robb. He was my brother, and you say he could save me and he didn't, all that to keep an useless prisoner."

"Ser Jaime Lannister was the son of Tywin Lannister," he countered.

"Tywin Lannister never did anything to save his son. I prayed every day so that my brother would come and save me from that hell where I was, and you say he gave up on me the moment he heard I was forced to marry into another family, and even before?" She was yelling now, but she didn't care.

"Your brother loved you, but he thought you were lost, Sansa. I'm sorry. He did what he thought was the best for the North."

"Not for his family it seems. Or did he think I was a Lannister now, like you thought when you saw me at Riverrun? Like all the northern lords seem to think now? I was no longer his sister?"

"He always thought of you as his sister. But you must admit it is difficult for everyone who sees you to see the daughter of Eddard Stark, when you arrive dressed in the fashions of the south and with a golden necklace displaying a lion. I know it hides a direwolf, but they don't know it. They don't see the direwolf. They only see the lion and the gold. Lannister gold."

Sansa looked at the necklace she always wore. The golden lion was as shining as usual. She thought about opening the necklace to look at the direwolf, but she couldn't bring herself to do it. Tears kept streaming from her eyes as she thought about her father who killed Lady, about Robb who refused to exchange Ser Jaime Lannister for her safe return, about her mother who approved Robb's decision to disinherit her, about Jon, her bastard brother, who just turned their father's bannermen against her, about Arya who almost killed her in the Neck… She knew she was being unfair, but right now she could only think about that. They only saw the golden lion. She was abandoned by her own family.

She thought about Tyrion who refused to share her bed as long as she didn't want on their wedding night. She thought of Genna who showed her Tyrion's mother on the tapestry. She thought of Dorna who she prayed with in the sept at Casterly Rock. She thought of Janei playing with her hair. She thought of Ser Kevan, asking her to take care of Tyrion. She thought of Cerenna, playing the harp
with her. She thought of Joy, how she taught the little girl to pray to the Old Gods. She even thought of Ser Jaime, who helped her to free his brother.

She kept looking at the golden lion, and something she read at White Harbor came back to her mind. *The king (very much in his cups) asked her if giving suck to them had “ruined your breasts, which were so high and proud”*. The question greatly amused Lord Tywin’s rivals, who were always pleased to see the Hand slighted or made mock of, but Lady Joanna was humiliated. Her mother had never been humiliated in public. She didn’t marry in the Great Sept of Baelor. She didn’t marry a Lannister. She never was Lady of Casterly Rock. She didn’t marry a man older than her. She never lived in King’s Landing. She was never friend with a queen. Sansa may look like her lady mother, but the life she had was more similar to the one of the late Lady of Casterly Rock and her husband’s mother, the woman her only child was named after.

She didn’t open the necklace. The golden lion was all that was needed to be seen. That was the only thing to see. Her own family hadn’t tried to help her. Was she a Stark if the other Starks didn’t believe she was one of them? She had held the necklace in her hand all this time. She let it fall under her collarbone. She was wearing gold, a lion made of gold. She was Sansa Lannister, Lady of Casterly Rock and Lady of the Westerlands.

Tyrion came into the room at this moment. Her true family was here. Tyrion didn't look at her as he entered. He closed the door, walked past her and her granduncle, threw a paper on the desk and went to the wall, placing a hand on it. Something was wrong.

"Tyrion?" she asked him, worried.

He slowly turned to face her and was about to speak, but he stopped. "Have you cried?"

Sansa realized she still had dried tears on her cheeks. She wiped them out of her face with her sleeve. "That's nothing. What's going on?"

Tyrion looked queerly at her, then to the Blackfish, but her granduncle seemed to tell him silently to leave her be. Tyrion looked back at her and gulped before he spoke. "Tommen is dead."

After everything she went through, Sansa thought nothing could surprise her anymore, but she was wrong. "What happened?" she asked quietly.

"If we are to believe my sweet sister, the fanatics who call themselves the Sparrows killed him. They also destroyed the Great Sept of Baelor according to the raven I just received."

Tommen was gone. Sansa remembered him riding against a quintain during Joffrey's name day after her father died. He had always been a sweet boy. First Myrcella, now Tommen. Margaery just lost her third husband. *Margaery."

"Wait. You say the raven was sent by Cersei?" she asked.

"Yes." Tyrion obviously wasn't happy about this fact.

"But what is she doing in King’s Landing?"

"She found a way to come back, it seems."

"But Margaery would never have allowed that," Sansa opposed. Her husband looked down. "Tyrion?" She feared the answer he might give her.

"Margaery is dead as well. And her brother too." This hit much more than the news of Tommen’s
death. "I'm sorry, Sansa."

*Margaery.* She was dead. Margaery, who managed to control Joffrey, who was prepared to face King's Landing. Her friend. The person who tried to reassure her when she was betrothed to Tyrion, who helped to free him later, who was her main ally in the capital. Gone. She was gone. First Jeyne, now Margaery.

"The king and the queen," her granduncle slowly said from far away. "Both dead, within the same day?"

Tyrion scoffed. "And that's not the best. Cersei proclaimed herself queen."

This brought Sansa back to the reality she drifted away from for a moment. "Queen?" she said.

"Yes. Since there was no one else to occupy the throne, she decided to seize it and to declare she was queen of all the Seven Kingdoms."

Her husband didn't enjoy this prospect anymore than her. "On what ground did she do that?" Ser Brynden Tully wore an expression that clearly showed he didn't understand how the situation could have come to this. "She has absolutely no claim on the Iron Throne. She was a queen consort and her husband and all her children are dead."

"That kind of things never stopped Cersei. She removed Ser Barristan from the Kingsguard to have my brother as Lord Commander. She's wanted the Iron Throne all her life. Now she won't hesitate to do anything to keep it. I wouldn't be surprised she's the one behind Tommen's and Margaery's deaths."

"She killed her own son?!" If killing your king was a horrible crime, killing someone of your own blood was worse than anything. The one who did this was accused by all the gods of the north and the south. Her mother's uncle displayed very well what everyone would think of Cersei if they knew it.

"Not on purpose, but it wouldn't surprise me if she plotted to have his wife killed and that somehow Tommen got caught between two fires. You can say whatever you want about my sister, she loves her children. That's her one redeeming quality. And now they're all gone. I'm afraid her sole redeeming quality went into smoke." Sadness was plain on Tyrion's face. Sansa knew how much he loved his youngest nephew and his niece, to the opposite of Joffrey. "But it doesn't matter now. My sister is sitting on the Iron Throne, and she has wanted me dead for longer than I can remember. She will try again soon, if she hasn't planned something already."

"Well, I will never bend the knee to that woman. Edmure can say what he wants, I won't follow the woman who imprisoned Eddard Stark and had him executed, and who killed her own son. On purpose or not, it doesn't matter, she did it, the whore."

Tyrion nodded in approval. "Very appropriate word. When we left King's Landing, the people were calling her the Whore Queen in the streets." Ser Brynden let escape a muffled laugh. "It's out of question that I bend the knee to her me neither, not after she tried to have me killed. And now that she killed the two children of Mace Tyrell, I imagine the Reach will go to war against her, just like Dorne already did. I don't intend to follow her to her grave when she would gladly push me in that grave before she's pushed in her turn. Anyway, as soon as she learns that Jon Snow was hailed King in the North, she will use it as an excuse to brand me a traitor and order my death. And she will make sure Sansa dies as well. And our daughter."

"She will never do that!" Sansa said all of a sudden. "I won't allow her." Cersei wouldn't touch her
daughter.

"I don't doubt it", the Blackfish said. "However, we have another problem now. If we refuse to bend
the knee before Cersei Lannister, we need another king."

"It's a good thing we have one then," replied her husband.

Sansa looked at him. "You want to support Jon?" she asked.

"I don't think we have another option. I wouldn't call a choice between my sister and your half-
brother a choice."

"You're right." Sansa had to recognize this was true. "Jon is my brother. He will fight for us against
Cersei."

"I think I can convince Edmure to side with Jon Snow as well. My nephew is not the most brilliant
man in Westeros, but he's not stupid either. He'll see that he can't lend his support to Cersei. That
would be foolish and dishonorable," the knight said.

"Good," Tyrion declared. He tried to sound cheerful, but Sansa knew he wasn't. That was his black
humor that returned. "Now we only have to convince Harrold Arryn and maybe we'll have a chance
to overthrow my sister and place Jon Snow on the Iron Throne in her stead."

A heavy silence followed his declaration. Then her granduncle spoke the question she was about to.
"Wait a minute. You want Jon Snow to sit on the Iron Throne?"

Tyrion shrugged. "Don't you think he would make a better king than Cersei? I think a crown suits
him better."

"Maybe," her mother's uncle recognized, though he still sounded skeptical, "but that won't work.
You heard the Knights of the Vale, or at least their lord paramount. He will never accept a bastard of
the North as his king, and I doubt the Reach and Dorne will accept it either. Jon Snow, King, in the
North, aye, but Lord of the Seven Kingdoms? I don't think so. Robb was a trueborn son, and even
him never thought of ruling all of Westeros. His bastard brother will never succeed there either."

He was right. Sansa didn't see Mace Tyrell bend the knee before Jon, and from what she saw of
Oberyn Martell and the other lords of Dorne in King's Landing, they would doubtfully accept a
bastard from the other side of the world. Margaery's father would sooner proclaim himself king
instead of seeing the crown fall on Jon's head. Tyrion told her Doran Martell was a very cautious
man, so he may accept Jon if all the other kingdoms did, but the Stormlands and the Vale? Harrold
Arryn had been unflinching on that point. He said clearly the North should be hers, but he was
wrong. The North couldn't be hers. She was a Lannister. Everyone knew it.

"No, it's true." Tyrion acknowledged the truth of her granduncle's words with a very low voice.
"They will never accept a bastard of the North." Tyrion seemed lost in his mind. He was pacing near
the table. He did it sometimes, when he was thinking very hardly and was already standing. When it
happened while he sat, he would only look down and frown for a long moment. "But they could
accept someone else."

He wasn't talking to them now. He was talking to himself. He was lost in his thoughts. He walked to
the door and called for Podrick. He whispered something into the squire's ear. Podrick had to stoop
to hear it. He nodded and left with a yes, my lord. Tyrion shut the door behind.

"What did you tell him?" she asked.
"I ordered him to fetch someone who could solve the problem of Jon-Snow-not-being-able-to-be-king."

"Who?"

"You'll find out soon. In the meantime, I suppose we could drink to our sovereigns' deaths. It will make us pass the time."

As a man of his word, Tyrion took the decanter on the table and poured three glasses of wine. Sansa accepted it. She needed it, after hearing about her friend's death. She hadn't been close to Tommen, but she regretted his death too. To her relief, Ser Brynden took the cup her husband was offering him.

"To King Tommen," Tyrion said as he took his own glass.

"To Queen Margaery," Sansa added, imitating his movement.

"To Ser Loras," finished their uncle in the same gesture. They all drank. Sansa inhaled deeply once she gulped her first sip.

"I'm sorry for your nephew," her granduncle said at the attention of Tyrion. "Bastard or not, he was still your nephew."

That reminded her of what Tyrion replied to Joffrey the day they met. Her father was a confessed traitor. Tyrion had replied but still her father.

"Before you ask, Blackfish, I will answer you. My nephews and my niece were bastards born of incest. My brother was their father. He laid with my sister on several occasions, even before she was wed to the king. Stannis Baratheon told the truth from the beginning."

Tyrion's confession sank deep in the room. Sansa didn't think he would say that so openly, despite the moderate friendship he established with her granduncle. Ser Brynden's face was even as he spoke. "That was no secret for anybody." That was all he said.

"Before you judge me, ask yourself what you would have done in my stead, if two members of your family, of your own blood, did the same. Would you have turned against them?"

"I'm not judging you," he replied after a moment. "Family, duty, honor. Family comes first. I would have done the same if, I don't know, if Edmure and Lysa had been laying together. Though I can't imagine them doing such a thing."

"No, your youngest niece preferred the company of Littlefinger."

Her granduncle was displeased by the comment, but he said nothing. They remained silent for a long time until Podrick knocked on the door and announced Lord Howland Reed and Lady Arya Stark. Sansa didn't see her little sister since Jon was hailed king. She supported Jon, and how could Sansa blame her. Jon had been a good brother to Arya whenever Sansa was at best an inappropriate sister. Arya barely acknowledged her presence. It was Tyrion she looked at, and her gaze was everything but benevolent.

"I don't remember asking for your presence, Lady Arya." He did it on purpose. He knew Arya hated to be called this way. Sansa appreciated Tyrion's sense of humor, but this wasn't the time for this. Not when everyone's nerves were on edge and that Arya had Needle at her belt. Jon had told her about how she killed Ramsay and Sansa didn't want to see her sister repeat her feat with Tyrion.
"She came here because she doesn't trust you," Howland Reed answered in her sister's place. "I couldn't refuse her."

Tyrion made a face that showed it didn't matter. "It's probably for the better. She might want to hear what we're about to discuss."

"If you summoned me to try and convince me again to support the Lady Sansa, then I must warn you that my answer is still the same than the last time. I will not fight against my best friend's son, not when all my compatriots chose him as their king, and when this was the last wish of Robb Stark. He was my king, whether you like it or not."

Howland Reed had been more hesitary to hail Jon king at the summit two days ago, but he had hailed him all the same in the end. Tyrion and Sansa had tried to turn him on their side the following day. They didn't want to start a war against Jon, only rally enough northern lords on her side to convince the others that there was no point supporting Jon. They had miserably failed. Every lord they asked had refused, some with courtesy, saying they regretted the situation but that it was the last wish of her brother and that they had to obey it. Others, however, almost insulted them, claiming they would stand behind a true son of Eddard Stark.

"Are you with him?" Arya was asking this question to her. "You want to fight against Jon? You want to take his place?"

"Not at all." Tyrion answered before Sansa could. "Quite the opposite. I asked you to come, Lord Reed, because I decided not only to recognize Jon Snow as King in the North, but also to recognize him as my king."

Arya was speechless, eyes and mouth all round. The Lord of Greywater Watch was no better. They regained their composure after some time and looked at Tyrion with curiosity.

"Is this some joke, Lannister?" Arya asked.

"No, it's not." Her granduncle stepped into the conversation. He put the scroll Tyrion had brought with him under the nose of her father's friend. "Read, Reed. Tommen Baratheon and Margaery Tyrell are dead. And the Lannister bitch decided to take the empty place they left." He explained it as Howland Reed read the message Tyrion received.

"And since my sister tried to have me killed several times in the past, and will certainly try again now, I'm not in a great hurry to run to King's Landing and to pledge my house to her," Tyrion added.

"But she's your sister," Arya said.

"A sister who tried to kill me. And not by mistake. My sister did want to kill me."

Sansa saw shame on Arya's face as she looked at her after Tyrion said those words.

"So now you want to support Jon Snow?" Lord Reed asked as he gave back the small scroll to her granduncle.

"Yes. I think King of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm would sound much better with Jon Snow before it. As for me, my ears bleed when I hear my sister's name instead."

"You want Jon Snow to rule the Seven Kingdoms?" Howland Reed asked, all bewildered.

"Yes, though we have a certain problem with that. Ser Brynden kindly observed that Jon Snow was
unlikely to be accepted by some people, like the Dornishmen. I hoped you could help us with that."

"Me?" Sansa was as confused as the Lord of Greywater Watch as he spoke. "How could I help with that?"

"You could begin by telling us what really happened at the Tower of Joy twenty years ago."

For a reason totally unknown to Sansa, Lord Reed first froze, then he went blank as a sheet. "I don't know what you're talking about," the lord spat.

"Very well." Tyrion began to walk to the door. "I'll go and tell the king myself."

The Lord of Greywater was in the way and he stopped him with a quick move, holding Tyrion by the shoulder. "What are you going to tell him? What do you know?" She had never seen her father's friend so panicked.

"Oh, so there is something to know," Tyrion said. His back was turned on her, but she knew from his voice that he was smirking.

"Tyrion, what is it about? What is it with the Tower of Joy?" Sansa asked.

The Tower of Joy was a place in Dorne where one of the most famous sword fight of history took place. All children in Westeros were told about this. That was where her father had killed Ser Arthur Dayne, the Sword in the Morning. It was also there that her aunt Lyanna had died at the end of the war. Tyrion didn't reply to her. He kept staring at the Lord of Greywater Watch.

"There is nothing to know," the lord in question quickly said. Sansa didn't understand his behavior. It was as if he saw a White Walker.

Tyrion inclined his head. She knew he was smiling wickedly. "Lord Reed, I visited the Wall years ago before the war and I travelled to the Wall with Jon Snow. I asked him indirectly at the time if he ever made dreams of dragons. He didn't answer, but his reaction told me everything. There's one kind of people in Westeros who often dream of dragons, and there aren't many left."

Howland Reed looked entirely lost. Sansa didn't understand why, but what her husband told him seemed to have taken him unaware.

"Lord Reed," he resumed, "maybe it's time to tell the truth."

"Why should I tell you?" the crannogman almost spat.

"Because I want to help Jon Snow to take the Iron Throne. Some lords will not accept a bastard of the North, but they might accept someone else."

"By the Seven Hells, can someone tell me what's going on?" Sansa's granduncle asked. "What's the link between dragons, Jon Snow and the Tower of Joy?" Sansa and Arya were as lost as he was. Only Tyrion and Howland Reed seemed to understand what they were talking about.

"I swore to never talk about it," Lord Reed said after a moment.

"Why? To protect him? I'm afraid it's too late for that. He's King in the North now, and if history can teach us something, it's that ever since Aegon came to Westeros with his sisters, there's only enough place for one king in the Seven Kingdoms. My sister will try to have my half-brother-in-law killed before long. The truth could help us to overthrow her. Don't you think?" Howland Reed's face was hard, indecipherable. "And don't you think it's time he knew the truth? He doesn't know, does he?"
The Lord of Greywater Watch turned his back on her husband and walked to the wall, his hand wandering on his jaw. Arya looked at him for a moment, then turned to Tyrion, a hostile attitude. "What are you talking about? What do you want with Jon?"

"Stop, Arya," the crannogman said. "Lord Tyrion may be right this time."

"Right about what?"

Sansa didn't understand what was going on. She was as clueless as everyone else in this room, except for Tyrion and Howland Reed. Only they seemed to understand what they were talking about.

"There's something you should know, but I want you to promise me that you won't repeat it to anybody before I speak to Jon Snow," the lord said slowly and firmly.

"You have my word," replied Tyrion. He went to a chair and sat comfortably in it.

"But what is it you're talking about?" Sansa asked. What was going on? Tyrion kept his eyes locked on Howland Reed. He wouldn't look at her for a second. She couldn't get to understand the matter he spoke with Howland Reed. What could have caused such a reaction with Howland Reed when dreams of dragon, the Tower of Joy, Jon and the Iron Throne were concerned?

"You must give me your word," Lord Reed repeated. “All of you.”

"Very well, you have my word," Sansa finally said. If that was the price to know what they were talking about.

"You have mine," her granduncle said, who looked intrigued at both men.

"All right," Arya just said.

The Lord of Greywater Watch looked to the floor, then sighed a few times, before he looked at each of them in turn. "What I'm about to tell you is something that I've hidden for years, and for very good reasons. But considering the recent developments, it might be appropriate to reveal it now. Anyway, there's no one left to hurt with the truth." He inhaled deeply. "You all know how Robert's Rebellion started?"

"Of course," her mother's uncle scoffed. "It's difficult to forget how he burned the Lord of Winterfell and strangled his son."

"No. The events that led to the war took place a year before, at the Tourney of Harrenhal."

"Yes, I know." Sansa may not have focused on the most important things in her education, but she had learned the essential facts about the history of the Seven Kingdoms and the history of her family. "Rhaegar Targaryen won the final tilt against Ser Barristan Selmy, and instead of crowning his wife queen of love and beauty, he crowned our aunt Lyanna."

"Aye," Ser Brynden confirmed. "I was there. One moment everyone was cheerful after the prince won, and the next moment everyone was silent as death. I never saw so many people silent. Your aunt was already betrothed to Robert Baratheon. He was there, and your father and your uncles as well. You can imagine the atmosphere."

"And later he kidnapped her and raped her," Sansa concluded.

"So much for a crown," Tyrion said bitterly. "Though normally this is no the kind of crown that
How many people wouldn't have died if Rhaegar Targaryen hadn't chosen her aunt this day? Though she didn't see what was the link with Jon.

"Yes," Howland Reed resumed. "Rhaegar Targaryen kidnapped her and raped her. That's what everyone believes, and that's what I believed at the time too. But you don't know the whole story. You may have heard that a mystery knight participated to the lists."

"Oh yes. The Mad King believed it was my brother, but I'm afraid once again he was wrong. Jaime was not at Harrenhal at the time," Tyrion said.

"It wasn't him," Arya said sharply. "It was my aunt."

Sansa looked at her sister. "What? Aunt Lyanna? She rode in the tourney?"

"Aye, she did."

"It's the truth," Howland Reed confirmed. "I was there as well and I arrived in the middle of the tourney. I was ambushed and beaten by three squires and Lyanna saved me. She beat them with a tourney sword. Then she rode in the lists under a false appearance and defeated the knights these squires were serving, and forced them to teach a lesson to their squires. She only did that to defend me. She didn't participate to the rest of the tourney. All she wanted was to have the squires punished. Only her shield was found abandoned in a tree. But…"

Sansa's father never spoke of his sister. Sansa found it strange, even if she died almost when he found her at the end of the war. Maybe he considered himself responsible for not rescuing her in time and speaking of her brought back memories too painful to bear.

"But what?" Ser Brynden abruptly said. "What does it have to do with Jon Snow?" He was growing impatient. Lord Reed raised a hand to ask for patience.

"I believe," he began to say, "I believe it is possible that Lyanna wasn't abducted by Prince Rhaegar."

"What are you saying?" Her granduncle was more bewildered than ever, and Sansa was too.

"I was there at Harrenhal. Lyanna was betrothed to Robert, but she never spent time with him, except when she was forced to, and each time she didn't seem to enjoy it. At feasts, Robert would join in drinking contests and dance with almost every lady in the room, all but Lyanna. She didn't seem to give him the slightest attention. But the first day I was here, the prince performed a song and I saw Lyanna cry as he played, and I know the king sent Rhaegar after the mysterious knight. Maybe he found out who she was. The thing is… I believe it's possible that Lyanna escaped with Rhaegar Targaryen later. Maybe she wanted to avert her marriage with Robert, maybe she was in love with the prince…"

"That's impossible," Ser Brynden declared. "Lyanna was a Stark. Ladies of great houses don't flee like that."

"You didn't know Lyanna Stark. I did. I look at Arya and I almost have the impression that her aunt came back to life. They have the same behavior. She would have been capable of fleeing. Maybe later Rhaegar kept her against her will, but I believe it's possible that she wasn't kidnapped first."

Sansa would never have thought such a thing possible, but she had to admit it wasn't totally unlikely. She remembered Robert Baratheon, a fat man who spent his time drinking and eating, making...
bawdy jokes, and who brought whores into his bed all the time. Sansa had thought of escaping King's Landing, of abandoning her husband. Thinking of how things turned out, she was glad she didn't. That had been one of the best decisions in her life. However, imagining herself married with Robert… She could easily picture that any woman would try to flee from him if that was possible, and if their aunt had been like Arya, Sansa had no difficulty to believe she could do it.

"You know what happened afterwards," the Lord of Greywater Watch resumed. "Brandon and Rickard Stark were killed by the Mad King in King's Landing, and Ned, Jon Arryn, Hoster Tully and Robert Baratheon raised their banners against him. Rhaegar Targaryen was slain at the Trident, the Mad King was murdered and Robert was crowned king. Ned continued on his way south and lifted the siege of Storm's End, but after that we went to Dorne, to a place called the Tower of Joy. That was where Lyanna was being held. We were six. Ned, me, William Dustin, Ethan Glover, Martyn Cassel and Mark Ryswell. Ser Arthur Dayne and Ser Gerold Hightower were guarding the tower. There was a combat. Ned and I were the only ones to survive, but I was injured. I stayed behind to look at the others who were dead. Ned climbed in the tower alone. He found his sister, but she was dying already. We couldn't save her."

Lord Howland seemed close to tears. Sansa knew he was a great friend of her father, and he seemed to have loved her aunt as well.

"Only…" He started again, but stopped before he tried again. "Only… When Ned came back from the tower, he wasn't alone. There were two women with him, servants of House Dayne. One of them had a baby in her arms."

"A baby?" Sansa asked, surprised.

"Yes, the son of your aunt Lyanna." A moment passed. "She didn't die of a disease. She died in childbirth."

A deep silence sank into the room again. "Just like my own lady mother," Tyrion said in a very low voice after a long moment.

"Who was the father?" Ser Brynden Tully asked.

"I think you already know, ser."

No, that couldn't be. "Rhaegar Targaryen." Her granduncle said what she thought. "Why did Eddard Stark never tell?"

"Because he promised to never talk about this. Lyanna made him swear to never talk about the boy. If he had revealed the truth, that Rhaegar Targaryen still had one living child, the baby would have died."

"My father would have made sure of that," Tyrion commented without any hint of enthusiasm. Sansa knew it was true. Everyone knew how Tywin Lannister's men murdered Rhaenys and Aegon Targaryen. Aegon was still a babe in the cradle, maybe no older than Sansa's own daughter was right now.

"We went to Starfall after that. Ned wanted to bring back Dawn, the sword of Ser Arthur, to his sister, the Lady Ashara. She and Ned had met at Harrenhal. They knew each other. The thing is… Ser Arthur Dayne was there at the Tower of Joy to defend Prince Rhaegar's son. That was his mission. That was why they kept Lyanna there. Ned had the intention to leave the baby in Ashara’s care so she could raise him like her son, but the day after we arrived, she jumped from one the towers of Starfall into the sea. We never found her body."
"What happened to Aunt Lyanna's son then?" Arya asked.

Howland Reed looked very tired now. He looked at Tyrion who returned the gaze. He looked down one last time, then said it. "Ned did the only thing he could do to honor the promise he made to Lyanna. He brought the boy back with him to Winterfell, and he said he was his."

This time, the silence lasted longer than ever. He said he was his. He said he was his son. Apart from the children he had with her lady mother, her lord father had only claimed one other son.

"Jon?" Sansa barely managed to articulate this simple word of three letters. How could that be?

"Are you really telling us that Jon Snow is the son of Rhaegar Targaryen?" her granduncle asked. Howland Reed nodded.

"That's impossible!" Arya shouted. "Jon is our brother. Father told us all the time."

"He lied to you," Lord Reed said flatly.

"No, he didn't. I know he didn't. When I was with the Brotherhood without Banners, Lord Beric had a squire with him, Edric Dayne. He told me Jon's mother was his wet nurse, a woman named Wylla. He swore it on his honor."

"Because that's what people say at Starfall, and they believe it is the truth. That's the official version, the one Ned gave to Robert Baratheon when they met again in the capital at the end of the war. Wylla was a servant close to Ashara Dayne. She was the servant who held Jon in her arms when Ned left the Tower of Joy. She accepted to make everyone believe she was his mother. She was only a servant. No one would pay any attention to her. You were not the only ones to who Ned lied about the boy. He lied to his king. He lied to the other lords, to his bannermen, to his friends, to his family. He even lied to his wife."

"Wait. Catelyn never knew about it?" Ser Brynden asked. "Her husband never told her?"

"No, as far as I know, she never knew."

Sansa knew her father certainly never told her. Her mother had always hated Jon. When Sansa was young, she assumed her mother only kept her distance from him because he wasn't her son and because he was a bastard. She was naïve. Sansa had been cruel with Jon as well, putting him aside, calling him half-brother all the time instead of calling him by his name, when he was her brother. Now she knew he never was her brother, but still. She had no reason at the time to treat him any different than Robb or Bran or Rickon, but her mother convinced her that since he was a bastard, she had to stay away from him.

"He lied to her," her granduncle said angrily.

"He lied to everyone. Even Benjen Stark was never told about this," Lord Reed replied.

"She was his wife! She had the right to know this, instead of thinking her husband cheated on her."

"And if he told her, she could have told her father, her brother, her sister, or you, and the word would have spread."

"He could have made her swear to never talk about this to anyone else."

"We couldn't take the risk," the Lord of Greywater Watch finally shouted. "We only needed one wrong ear to hear about it and the Spider would have known it immediately. Robert Baratheon
would have asked for the boy's head right away, and Tywin Lannister would have given it to him. Ned and I were present in King's Landing when the children of the prince were murdered. We saw them all wrapped in red cloaks to hide the blood on their body. They were barely recognizable. Robert Baratheon said nothing before that. He just turned away. Lyanna died begging Ned to protect her son. His life was too important to risk everything by telling one person, even his wife.

No one said anything for a long time. Lord Reed and her granduncle were staring at each other, both angry. Sansa had gone numb. She looked at Arya, who looked just the same. Jon wasn't their brother. He wasn't their brother.

"Now, since we know, perhaps it's time for the main interested party to be made aware of the situation," Tyrion stated.

Lord Reed turned his gaze away from Ser Brynden. "I'm going to see him right away. I'm sorry."

He addressed the last words to Sansa and Arya, but before he left, Tyrion asked one last thing. "My lord, I doubt Jon Snow is his real name."

"I don't know his real name." Then he opened and was gone.

Sansa looked at her husband. "You knew?" she asked.

"I suspected," he answered. "Sorry I didn't tell you before, but I had no proof, and anyway it would have been of no use to tell the truth about it when someone could have ordered your brother's death… even if he's not really your brother. My family had already killed more than enough."

"When the northern lords learn who Jon Snow really is… They will never accept a Targaryen bastard as their king. Even less when they hear that his father raped Lyanna Stark," her mother's uncle said.

"We don't know if he raped her. According to Howland Reed, she may have fled with him."

"Maybe, but to be honest I have a hard time thinking that, and the other lords will probably not believe it either. Jon Snow cannot be King in the North."

"The northern lords already hailed him," Tyrion countered very calmly. "And although he's not the son of Eddard Stark, he is his nephew. He is still a Stark through his mother. And now, since all the Baratheons, true or supposed, are dead, Jon Snow's real parentage might be our solution to the Cersei problem."

Sansa understood now. All Robert Baratheon's brothers and supposed children were dead, and Jon was the last living son of Rhaegar Targaryen. And before he died, Rhaegar Targaryen was the heir to the Iron Throne.

"Jon has a stronger claim on the Iron Throne than anyone else in the Seven Kingdoms," Sansa said.

"Exactly," her husband confirmed. "The only one who could oppose him would be his aunt, but she's in Essos and the last time I heard of her, Daenerys Targaryen had disappeared in Meereen and her city was being attacked by an alliance of the Free Cities of Volantis, Astapor and Yunkai. She doesn't seem about to come back to Westeros."
From now on, since we outstriped Season 6 and that I cannot be sure of what will happen in Season 7 (despite all the leaks), the events that will take place from now on in this story will not take into consideration what will happen in Season 7. Anyway, more than enough already changed from the canon.

Please review

Next chapter : Jon
JON IX

Jon IX

Chapter Notes

The sequel to Sansa XXIX. Happens right after Howland Reed's revelations.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

JON IX

Jon stood there, motionless. Lord Howland Reed had spent the last half-hour explaining him that he wasn't the son of Eddard Stark. You are a Stark. You might not have my name, but you have my blood. His father didn't tell him he was his son. Because he wasn't his father. He looked at the Lord of Greywater Watch.

"This is not some kind of joke, Lord Reed?" Jon asked.

"No, it's not. I'm sorry." How could that be? "I know this is a lot to take. I know you must wonder why Ned never told you…"

"Of course, I'm wondering! Why did he never tell me?" Jon shouted.

"He couldn't tell you while you were a child. When you left for the Wall, you were still barely a man. Perhaps he wanted to tell you later, when he thought you would be old enough to understand, to deal with it." Howland Reed answered very calmly.

The next time we see each other… "The day I left for the Wall, he told me the next time we'd meet, we would talk about my mother. He promised."

"I'm sorry." Howland Reed looked sincere, and although Jon tried to find a reason for him to lie, he couldn't find any. He had been among the lords to hail him king two days ago, and his father had been a great friend of this man. And this man said that Lord Eddard Stark wasn't Jon's father.

Jon dropped himself into the chair behind the desk. He covered his face with his hands. He had wondered all his life who his mother was. He grew up without her, he had dreamed of her sometimes, always wished he knew her, but his father always refused to tell him who she was. All he had instead were the scowls and disapproving glares of Lady Stark every time he did something slightly bad or that he was better than Robb at anything. And when he left Winterfell, instead of a woman who hugged him before he left, he had the mother of his half-siblings telling him she wanted him to go. The mother of the people he thought were his half-siblings.

"Please, leave me alone. Go," Jon ordered to Lord Reed.

The Lord of Greywater Watch walked to the door, but before he left, he said one last thing. "For what it's worth, your mother died asking Ned to protect you. I can't speak for your father, I didn't know him, but your mother loved you. And I'm sure Ned loved you like his own son."

When Jon was alone, he couldn't think clearly for a very long time. He cried, too. I am the son of Rhaegar Targaryen and Lyanna Stark. He repeated the words in his head over and over. He had thought about all the possibilities concerning his lady mother. He considered she could be higborn or lowborn, a great lady or a tavern girl, a knight's daughter or a girl from a whorehouse. Maybe she
had been a camp follower. He never expected his mother was in reality the sister of the man who called himself his father, and that his real father was a prince, a man who abducted her and kept her prisoner and raped her. He never considered that eventuality. That was the one thing he could be certain of, that his father was Eddard Stark. If Lady Stark had known, would she have despised him the way she did? Maybe that would have made no difference. After all, his father raped his mother. She may not have looked at him of a more favorable eye. He would still have been a bastard, the cause of the war that burned the Seven Kingdoms for an entire year. His grandfather was the one to kill Brandon Stark, her first betrothed, and to burn the grandfather of her children, who also happened to be Jon's own grandfather.

And now here he was, King in the North, bearing a title he had no right upon. He wasn't a Stark, not even before he learned the truth. He hadn't known how to react when Lady Mormont said he was her king. Strange now that Jon thought about it, but she was named after his real mother. And then Lord Manderly and after that Lord Glover had supported her. There had been strong exchanges, and of course Lady Mira's speech against naming a new King in the North. Jon knew she was right. They couldn't hope to defeat the White Walkers on their own if they got through the Wall. The Free Folk and the Northerners wouldn't be enough. Robb's will had changed everything. Jon had never thought that his brother... no, his cousin, would name him his heir. At the time, Bran and Rickon were thought to be dead, so Sansa was Robb's heir. His discussions with the northern lords these last days taught him that Robb didn't want the Lannisters to get a hold on the North. However, he doubted Lady Stark had approved Robb in his choice. He had looked at the decree, and this was Robb's signature and writing without any doubt. Could he go against Robb's last wish? Then, Robb didn't know Tyrion Lannister well enough, and his friend wanted to name his son who would get Winterfell after Sansa's name. He would be a Stark, not a Lannister.

Someone burst into the room. It was Arya, as dishevelled as always, her face red too. His little sister. Not anymore. He forced a smile on his face.

"Hi."

Arya didn't smile. "Howland Reed told you?"

"Aye, he did. Seems we're not brother and sister."

"Of course, we are," she protested.

Jon let a laugh without humor escape his throat. "We're still relatives. My mother was your aunt, and your father was my uncle, but we're not siblings. We are cousins."

She slowly turned around the desk and came to stand next to him. She had grown up a lot and stood taller than him when he was sitting, just like now. She looked at him for a moment, straight into his eyes. "I don't care who your father or your mother is. You're my brother. You'll always be."

Then she threw herself against him and wrapped her arms around his neck, just like before they left Winterfell years ago. The chair almost fell behind under the force of the impact. He wrapped his arms around her as well and tousled her hair like he used to do. He heard her laugh.

"You should let your hair grow again," he said as he put her back onto the floor. "It's better for ruffling, and your mother wouldn't approve. It's not fitting for a lady."

"I'm not a lady." That was his sister for sure.

"You reassure me. I won't have to find you a husband."
They both laughed. Arya had grown up, but she would never be a lady like Sansa. That made Jon think about the woman, Brienne of Tarth, who was Sansa's personal shield. That was someone Arya surely admired.

It was the moment Tyrion Lannister chose to come in. He looked at the scene before him, probably surprised to find them both laughing madly.

"Did I interrupt something funny?" he asked.

"What do you want?" Arya asked. All laugh was gone from her face. She had a similar expression to the one she had when they talked about how she killed Ramsay Bolton.

"Only a little conversation with your… brother. Alone, if possible."

Arya obviously didn't want to leave, so Jon put an end to this. "It's all right, Arya. You may leave us."

Arya left, not without looking in the same hostile way she always looked at Tyrion. She slammed the door behind her.

"I pity whoever will marry her," Jon's friend said.

"I decided to not force her into a marriage," Jon said with a smile.

"You did well. There's someone who will be much happier in life for it," the small lord said with a grin. He came to sit in front of Jon. The desk was still separating them though. "So, how does it feel, your Grace?"

"It depends. Being a king, or discovering that you're not at all who you believed to be?"

"Well, I suppose it's more about how you feel after learning that for years you thought you knew who were your parents, or at least one of them, and suddenly you discover that other people were your real parents. I can claim to know what it is to be a bastard, but I'm afraid I have no idea how I would feel if I were to discover tomorrow that my father wasn't my actual father. Who knows, maybe my mother slept with another man and that's why my father hated me so much."

The movements he made with his arms and his face displayed very well the ridicule of the suggestion. Tyrion Lannister was a dwarf, but he was the son of Tywin Lannister without any doubt. If he had been a bastard, his father would have had no hesitation to acknowledge him as such.

"Not only my parents weren't who I thought," Jon said, "but my father kidnapped and raped my mother."

"Oh, we can't be sure about that. Howland Reed believes your mother might have fled with him."

"And she would have stayed away while her own family was at risk?"

"She was pregnant, with you," Tyrion offered as an explanation.

"What am I to do now?"

"A bastard must assume who he is. A dwarf must assume who he is. And everyone must assume who his parents are."

As always, Tyrion Lannister's advice were very helpful. "I'm sorry I did nothing to stop it, two days ago." Especially now that he knew his true origins, Jon regretted he did nothing.
"It's difficult to refuse when people offer you a crown and you didn't expect it."

"But now, I cannot be King in the North."

His friend frowned. "How so?"

"I'm a lie. I'm not the son of Eddard Stark. I shouldn't be king. Robb chose me without knowing who I really was. I'm not his brother."

"True, but you're his cousin. He might have chosen you even if he had known the truth. You'd still be his only relative he believed to be still alive apart from Sansa at the time."

"Winterfell belongs to Sansa. She is Lord Stark's daughter. I'm only a nephew, and a bastard nephew with that."

Tyrion Lannister joined his hands. "Listen to me carefully, Jon Snow. You saw the lords of the North a few days ago. They didn't want Sansa as their lady. They jumped on the first reason to name you king. She is a Lannister for them. Even if you give up the crown of the North, they won't accept her, or if they do, they will rebel at the first opportunity. The only way to make sure the North would remain in the hands of our son, even if we give him the Stark name, would be to place knights and lords of the Westerlands at key positions in the North, like giving one the Dreadfort and marrying other to ladies like Alys Karstark or Lord Manderly's granddaughters. This will never be possible. The North will be impossible to rule for Sansa and I, and for our children as well. We need someone the northern lords will respect and follow willingly, and they just chose you."

"They don't know who I am. The moment they hear about it, they won't want me anymore for their king. If that's really impossible for Sansa, then give up any claim on the North and make Arya Lady of Winterfell. They will accept her. And if we find Bran somewhere, she will step aside without a word. She will never turn against him."

"We both know your brother Bran is very unlikely to ever come back again, and you just said your sister wouldn't marry. That will be a major complication. If she dies childless, Sansa's children will be next in line and we'll have exactly the same problem. The North doesn't want any tie with House Lannister."

"So what do I do? We keep lying to them? We hide the truth and make them believe a true Stark is ruling from Winterfell?"

"You are a true Stark. Have you heard this girl of ten two days ago? Ned Stark's blood runs through your veins. Maybe not in the way they all thought, but it runs all the same. Your mother was a Stark."

"I'm not the son of the Warden of the North, and my father's family slaughtered and abducted Starks. And why are you so keen to convince me to remain king? Not long ago, you were still defending Sansa's rights on Winterfell."

Tyrion took a moment to answer. "A new situation arose. My nephew is dead, and his wife too."

"I'm sorry," Jon said after the initial shock. He didn't remember Tommen Baratheon well, but as far he could say, he hadn't seemed spoiled or cruel like his older brother when he visited Winterfell. He thought he remembered seeing him and Bran spar with wooden swords. His friend had lost the last of his nephews and niece, right when he just had a daughter.

"The problem is, my sister decided to declare herself queen. If you doubt my word, read this." He tossed a raven's scroll to him and Jon read. This was no joke. Cersei Lannister proclaimed herself
Queen of the Andals and the First Men, Protector of the Seven Kingdoms. "All the Baratheons are dead, true or false. And there's only one other family who ever sat on the Iron Throne since it was forged."

Jon looked at him. He couldn't believe what he just heard. "You want me to sit on the Iron Throne?" Tyrion's expression showed he wasn't japing. "I can't."

"You are the last living son of Rhaegar Targaryen."

"I'm still a bastard."

"You're still his last son. When no legitimate children can be found, we must look on the side of the illegitimate ones."

"Then why not look at the bastard sons of Robert Baratheon? I heard he has dozens."

"He never acknowledged any of them and we don't know where they are. Besides, they're all born from lowborn girls from what we know. You are the son of a prince and a lady, Jon Snow, and your father's family ruled the Seven Kingdoms for over two hundred years. The Baratheons ruled them for twenty at most. Your claim is far stronger than any Baratheon bastard there could be, and I think Dorne and the Reach would like you much more than Cersei. Would you rather have the woman who arrested your uncle on the Iron Throne? To that, I might add she will try to have you killed soon enough, and she will try the same for me, Sansa and Joanna. She may let your sister Arya live, but that will be to marry her to some man she trusts and make him her Warden of the North. Is that what you want, Jon Snow?"

That was too much. In a single hour, he learnt that he was the son of a Targaryen prince and a lady he kidnapped, and now someone was sitting there asking him to become Lord of the Seven Kingdoms. Jon never asked for this. He never wanted this.

"Leave me. I'll think about that. One thing is sure, I will tell the other lords. They must know."

"As you wish, your Grace."

Tyrion left. Jon mostly wanted to get rid of him this time. He, Jon Snow, king not only of the North, but of all the Seven Kingdoms? That was absurd. He was a bastard. He had refused Stannis's offer to become Lord of Winterfell. He wouldn't use the fact that his father kidnapped his mother, or may have kidnapped her, to be crowned. With being King in the North, it had been different. Robb wanted him to succeed him. This was entirely different. He didn't want Cersei Lannister to rule the Seven Kingdoms, but he wasn't the man to replace her. His place wasn't in King's Landing. He didn't know where it was, but it wasn't there.

Surely they could find a cousin of Robert Baratheon to take his place, or someone else with Targaryen blood. They chose Robert Baratheon for king after the war because his grandmother was a Targaryen. Jon knew there were also Targaryens among the ancestors of the current Lord of Sunspear. He thought about something else as well. Tyrion Lannister was Lord of Casterly Rock, a good and clever man, the uncle of two previous kings, and he was very powerful. Jon remembered a time at Winterfell, when he saw the little lord enter the Great Hall. It was night and the light from the inside had thrown his shadow clear across the yard. For just a moment, Tyrion Lannister had stood tall as a king. He would make a far better king than Jon. His own place was here, in the North, to fight the White Walkers.

A few hours later, all the lords and leaders of the Free Folk were gathered in the Great Hall. Jon had called a great meeting to solve the problem of who would rule the North. He managed to convince
the northern lords and the Free Folk to attend, while Tyrion and the Blackfish did the same for their own men. The Knights of the Vale participated as well, probably to not be left aside. Everyone was on edge. Jon sat alone at the high table. He wouldn't be there for long.

"Everyone, please listen," he said loudly. "I asked you all to come here because I have news of great importance to tell you. First, some of you are already aware of that, but Tommen Baratheon and Margaery Tyrell, his wife, are dead." People started to talk immediately. Jon kept speaking more loudly. "Cersei Lannister proclaimed herself queen. She's the one who arrested Lord Eddard Stark, and for myself I will never bend the knee to this woman."

"Nor will I!" The shout came from someone of the North and was picked up by many more, not only from the North but also from the Riverlands and the Vale of Arryn. Even among Tyrion's men, many didn't seem very happy about it.

"There's also something else," Jon resumed. That was the hardest part. "Something I learnt today, and I think you ought to know."

He told them everything Howland Reed said. He omitted no detail. From the abduction of Lyanna Stark to his arrival at Winterfell, he hid nothing. The reactions were different from one person to another, but everyone was dismayed, except the few ones who already knew. Jon saw Ser Daven Lannister speak in murmurs to Tyrion.

"If you want any more precision or if you doubt what I say, I can only ask for the testimony of Lord Howland Reed. He was with Lord Stark when all those events took place and he saw everything. He can testify that everything I said is true." Everyone was looking at him now. Only the Free Folk seemed unaffected by what he said, but it wasn't a surprise since among them kidnapping a woman was as common as hunting. "Now, you know the truth. Some of you chose me to be their king, but you did so as you assumed that my father was Lord Eddard Stark. He's not. I'm not his son. And when my b… Robb Stark chose me as his heir, he believed as well that I was his brother. I give you a chance to change your mind. If you don’t want of me as your king, then I won't try to convince you otherwise."

The lords all began to speak to each other. Jon waited. He looked at Lord Manderly and Lord Glover more than anyone else, and also to Lady Mormont. They were the first ones to hail him king. Lyanna Mormont was of the few to speak with no one. She was only looking at him. She said nothing. She just stared.

The first intervention came from the last person he expected. "It doesn't matter who are Jon's parents," Arya declared. "He grew up at Winterfell with us. I saw him spar with Robb in the yards every day. They learned to shoot arrows together, went to the executions with our father at the same time, he followed the same lessons than Robb with Maester Luwin. He ate at our table, shared the same bread than us every day. And I remember very well what my father told us all one day, when Sansa said Jon shouldn't be at the high table with us because he was a bastard." She looked at Sansa while she said it. "Jon is of the same blood than you. He is a Stark as much as you all are. Our father brought him up like his own son. The only person who really ever asked that Jon was sent away was our lady mother, and our father always refused. He saw Jon like his own son. It's not important that he's the son of my aunt Lyanna. He will always be my brother, until the day I die and after."

Jon was touched by Arya's words. He had been touched by her words in his solar before, but this time he was even more since she said it in public, before half of Westeros. He looked at her, and she smiled. You’re my brother. You’ll always be.

"I think the Lady Arya is right," Alys Karstark said. "I didn't know Robb Stark personally. I was six
the last time we met, but from what I heard of him, I don't believe he would have made a different
decision if he had known that Jon Snow was his cousin and not his brother. They are still kin. As for
me, I won't change my decision. Jon Snow is our king."

Many northern lords approved. Was this really happening? Did the lords of the North really want to
keep him as their king, knowing who he was? This surprise was nothing compared to what came
next.

"My lords," Tyrion Lannister said loudly, "as we all know now, my sister, Cersei Lannister, is sitting
on the Iron Throne. I know my sister very well. I only have one advice to give you. Never ever bend
the knee or make an alliance with her. She will stab you in the back the first chance she gets." There
were shouts of surprise all over the Hall. "She was the one who had Eddard Stark arrested. She took
his daughter, my wife, the Lady Sansa, hostage, and slaughtered all his men in King's Landing. I
disapproved of her actions before, but I kept protecting her because she was of my blood. Now,
however, I'm afraid nothing can stop her. My family tried to keep her away from King's Landing and
the politics, and we failed. Within a few months, I lost my niece, my uncle, my nephew and his wife.
And I can tell you my sister wouldn't hesitate to murder people of her own family. I don't believe this
is a coincidence that so many people died while she was in the capital. And when I stood for trial
after my lord father died, we discovered she plotted with a cousin of ours to murder Robert
Baratheon." Many reactions of horror followed. "So far, I tried to protect her while keeping her away
from power because she was my sister, but I will not follow her after everything she's done, and may
have done. I will not stand for a woman who may have murdered her own son."

The small lord turned to face Jon Snow. "If you would have us, your Grace, as Lord of Casterly
Rock and Lord of the Westerlands, I pledge my armies to your service and ask you to accept the
Westerlands as part of the Kingdom of the North."

To Jon's utter surprise, his friend bent the knee, and Sansa and his bannermen imitated him. Most
drew their swords, just like Lord Manderly and Lord Glover did two days ago. They had opposed
them at the time, but now they wanted him to be their king.

The fat Lord of White Harbor rose from his seat at this moment. "I never thought I would agree with
a Lannister, but I do. The North will never bend the knee to a Lannister whore."

The Lord of White Harbor looked straight at Tyrion Lannister. The Lord of Casterly Rock only
shrugged. "That's a very good way to describe my sister, I won't argue with this."

Many laughed across the room, though many others seemed to not know what to think about it.

"The North will fight for his freedom and against everyone who dares to attack us," Lord Manderly
resumed. "And we will stand behind Jon Snow, our king. We will all stand behind him, whether we
are from the North, from the Riverlands, the Westerlands, or the Vale. We will stand behind the King
in the North!"

"THE KING IN THE NORTH! THE KING IN THE NORTH!"

Jon looked at all the lords in the room who raised their swords. All those from the North, from the
Riverlands and the Westerlands did the same. Some from the Vale of Arryn joined them as well,
including Yohn Royce. Soon, all the Vale lords stood as well, repeating the same words than
everybody else. Harrold Arryn joined his bannermen after some time, and even the Blackfish
unsheathed his sword. Arya was brandishing Needle in the air. Jon stood up.

He looked at Tyrion Lannister, who was grinning towards him like he always did. At this moment, as he took the entire scene with his eyes, Jon understood. He was king, and there was nothing he could do against it, just like there was nothing Robb could have done when his men hailed him years ago. The fight against the dead was coming, and he would lead this fight. As a king.

Chapter End Notes

Please review.

Next chapter: Cersei
Cersei VII

Chapter Notes

Before the first episode of Season 7 is broadcasted, I offer you a chapter digging deeply into Cersei after her children’s death and how she rules. We also get to see Jaime’s reaction to his sister’s actions.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CERSEI VII

The Great Hall was empty. She could feel the sharp edges of the thousand melted blades against her legs, her back and her arms. It was said that the Iron Throne was made to remind the king to always remain vigilant. Cersei was no king, she was the queen. She hadn’t needed the Iron Throne to remain vigilant. She had been vigilant all her life, expecting and looking for treason everywhere. Now, with the blades against her skin, only thread and silk separating the two, Cersei was more aware than ever of the dangers surrounding her. This is what ruling was: lying on a bed of weeds, ripping them out by the root, one by one, before they strangle you in your sleep. Every time she thought someone couldn't pose a threat, she proved to be wrong. These people had turned against her. Each time this happened, they made her stronger. She showed them what the Lannisters did to their enemies.

Now here she was, Cersei of the House Lannister, First of Her Name, Queen of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, Protector of the Seven Kingdoms. Her coronation took place two weeks ago. It hadn't been like she always imagined it. There were barely enough people to fill the room as Qyburn placed the crown upon her head. Everyone was silent as guards in crimson and her Queensguard watched them closely. Still, she was the queen. She had all she ever wanted. All she ever wanted.

Her children were buried under the Great Sept, or more precisely once were buried there. Nothing was left of it. The explosion destroyed all the district around the Great Sept of Baelor, including the tombs below it. After her walk of shame, Cersei had sworn to take her revenge on all those who wronged her. With the help of Qyburn, who knew some of the secret passages in the Red Keep and under city and who managed to control some of Varys's little birds, they found an ancient hide of wildfire left under the Great Sept at the time of the Mad King. They put fire to it and destroyed the Great Sept, with most of the Sparrows and the High Sparrow inside, alongside the Tyrell whore and her brother. Then they waited for Randyll Tarly's forces to storm the city, and when all his forces were inside, Qyburn started a new series of fires that destroyed everything around the main streets, killing Tarly and all his men. They hadn't found the body of the Lord of Horn Hill yet, but it wouldn't take long.

This had been a great victory for Cersei. She had been confined to her rooms after she left the Great Sept by Selwyn Tarth, who had arrived to serve as Master of Laws not long after the Sparrows imprisoned her. He used the situation to usurp the power and almost acted as Hand of the King, with the help of Harys Swyft the Master of Coin. It was a chance that among the few secret tunnels Qyburn knew there was one that gave directly into her chambers. This way they met without anyone noticing. Cersei could think about her plan and execute it without problem, and once the Sparrows and the Tarlys were dealt with, she rallied the Lannister guards still in the Red Keep and went after her enemies inside the castle. They betrayed her. They betrayed Tommen, their king, and she made
them pay. First, she dealt with Harys Swyft and had him executed on the spot for treason. Tarth proved more difficult since his own guards were as many as her own. Among the chaos, the Tyrell guards didn't know what to do. She was surprised when Lannister soldiers arrived in the Red Keep, but she used them nonetheless against both men from the Reach and the Stormlands. It was chaos and many died, but in the end her men prevailed and she had Selwyn Tarth executed right in front of her eyes, to her great satisfaction. It was then that Jaime had entered the Great Hall with the body in his arms.

Her last son was dead. At the thought, tears threatened to break into her eyes. Gold will be their crowns. Gold their shrouds. The witch told her. It was fate. She told her she would lose her children. She told her she would marry the king but have no children from him. You'll be queen. For a time. Then comes another, younger, more beautiful, to cast you down and take all you hold dear. She was queen now. And when your tears have drowned you, the valonqar shall wrap his hands about your pale white throat and choke the life from you. She had been right all the time. Cersei had tried to make the prophecy untrue, but to no avail. Joffrey, Myrcella, Tommen, they were all dead now, their ashes under the ruins of the Great Sept. The witch never lied to her like she thought back then. Her little brother would kill her. Tyrion would kill her. She had the confirmation of what she suspected for many years now.

She thought about Sansa. She had never thought it could be her. She thought Margaery was the queen the witch told her about, but Margaery was dead. She had never found Margaery beautiful. She was pretty, in some sort of way, but that was mostly youth. Sansa, however… Her hand gripped the arms of the throne. She had welcomed her as her daughter-in-law back when she was Joffrey's betrothed, and the little whore who married her little monster of a brother rewarded her trust by turning against her. She should have known. She suspected, for a very short time, during the trial. She thought about Maggy's words, but she should have known Sansa was the real danger then. Cersei was queen now, and Tyrion would want to overthrow her, to become king with his little wife by her side. She was more dangerous than Margaery. Cersei should have her killed immediately after her father was arrested. She wouldn't make the same mistake twice.

Her children were all dead, and Tyrion had killed them. He killed their father to have the freedom of action he needed. After he failed to have Joffrey killed during the Battle of Blackwater, he decided to have him poisoned on his wedding night. Then he arranged for the Martells to murder Myrcella in Dorne. As for Tommen… his actions led to Tommen's death. If her father had been alive, Tommen would never be dead, and Tyrion killed her father. He killed her son, her last son. Now he wanted the Iron Throne for himself. She wouldn't let him have it. The throne was hers, and only hers. She wouldn't let the Imp and his filthy cow wife take what was hers, and she wouldn't allow the offspring of a dwarf and a whore to have the Rock one day. All this belonged to her and only to her. It would have belonged to her children as well if they were alive, but Tyrion killed them. She would have his head for that, and the head of his wife, his daughter, and everyone who helped them.

"Your Grace, your brother is waiting in the small council chamber," he informed her.

Slowly, careful to not scratch herself with the blades of the throne, Cersei stood up and walked towards the room where the small council used to meet. No small council had ever been of any help to her. Its members were always traitors or incompetent. Whatever people tried to help her on it had proved themselves to be useless. Among them were Gyles Rosby, Pycelle and Janos Slynt. Varys, Littlefinger, Kevan, Tyrion and even Harys Swyft, all of them worked against her, and her lord father never deigned to listen to what she had to say. Instead, when she neutralized the Starks, he
sent Tyrion to serve as Hand of the King and to set her aside. She was his daughter, and the great Tywin Lannister sentenced her to the life of a married woman, to be ridden by a man like a horse. If he had listened to her, her father wouldn't be dead by the hand of the Imp who murdered her mother.

Jaime was waiting for her at the long table. He still wore his uniform of Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, now the Queensguard. Cersei had also named him Lord Commander of the City Watch after the Sparrows were defeated. The previous Commander died in the fires that ravaged the city or before. She wasn't sure. The Sparrows might have killed him as far as she was concerned. Cersei wore a long dress made of leather, similar to one of the doublets her lord father used to wear. She never understood why she was forced to dress like a woman. She had more balls than many men. She was the daughter of Tywin Lannister and she would display it to the face of the whole world to see. She sat at the head of the long table, Qyburn on her right. Jaime was almost at the other end of the table. They seldom spoke to each other in the last few days, since he appeared with Tommen's body in the Great Hall.

"I don't remember seeing the small council so small. It was much bigger before," Jaime said dryly.

"This is no small council. I appointed people to take care of the duties the former members of the council were in charge of. From now on, there will be no small council," Cersei said. She didn't need people to advise her.

"No small council? What is this then?"

"A private reunion with the only two people I trust in this city."

"No wonder. Half the city burned." Jaime's face was hard.

"The Sparrows did this," she stated plainly.

"The Sparrows? How did they learn there was wildfire under the city?"

"That is none of your concern as Lord Commander of the Queensguard."

"I still wonder. Why would the Sparrows destroy the Great Sept of Baelor? And the rest of the city? If they wanted to blow up something, I think they would destroy the Red Keep. Strangely, the flames never reached it. And why would they kill themselves?"

Cersei was growing impatient with this argument. "The Sparrows are fanatics and mad men. They didn't know how to use wildfire. They used it the wrong way," she said in a voice that allowed no argument.

"Of course, Cersei." He almost spat her name.

She turned to Qyburn. "What news?"

"So far, my spies are telling me that Lord Mace Tyrell is gathering an army near Highgarden. We can assume it is meant to attack King's Landing. He'll have heard about his daughter's death by now," her Hand said.

"What about Dorne?"

"No news from there. As far as we know, the Martells and the Tyrells may still be fighting each other, but I wouldn't be too much confident about it. However, I received word that a great fleet was spotted near Meereen…"
"It doesn't concern us. What are the odds that the Martells will keep fighting the Tyrells?" The two families were known for hating each other, and Cersei worried much more about them two than about some movement of ships at the other side of the world.

"I couldn't say, your Grace. Maybe they will keep fighting, maybe not, but I do believe the Tyrells will move against us, that is beyond doubt. Still, I think we should concern ourselves with the fleet in Slaver's Bay. My spies..."

"I don't want to hear another single word about the other continent!" she snapped. "We have enemies here, and that's all that matters. I want them all dead!"

"As you wish, your Grace." Qyburn bowed his head. She had more than enough people who opposed and disobeyed her all her life because she was a woman. She wouldn't have any of it now. She was the queen. *Then comes another, younger, more beautiful, to cast you down and take all you hold dear.* She had no need to take interest in what happened in the Free Cities. Her lord father always held them in contempt. Their wars didn't concern her. She had her own wars to win.

Cersei turned to her brother. "How many men do we have in the City Watch?"

He looked back at her. He seemed to have looked away while she talked with Qyburn. "The City Watch? There is no City Watch left. All the gold cloaks have abandoned their post. We are locked inside the Red Keep as if we were under siege. The five hundred men we have barely dare to leave the compound. Five have been murdered in the streets or in taverns as they walked alone. The city is in chaos since you destroyed it."

His look was challenging. Cersei felt anger grow in her stomach. She forced herself to speak calmly. "The Sparrows destroyed the city. I was locked up in a cell, then forced to walk naked all the way between the Great Sept and the Red Keep by those beggars, only to be locked again in my own rooms by Selwyn Tarth. Then the explosions took place. I was as surprised as you. I managed to convince our men to let me go when that happened, and I saw Selwyn Tarth have Harys Swyft die, our own aunt's father. He betrayed us. He conspired against us. I did what I had to do to protect the family!"

She did what was necessary to protect her son. And he died. "Too bad you didn't think about that before you tried to have Tyrion killed."

"Don't talk about him!"

"Why? He is family, and you tried to have him killed. That's no good way to protect the family, from what I know."

"This monster is a traitor!"

"Oh, really? What did he do this time? I suppose he's the one who pushed Tommen. I wonder how he managed to travel all the way from Winterfell to here within only a few days."

She had enough of this. She wouldn't let Jaime contradict her. It wouldn't surprise her that Tyrion hired someone to kill Tommen. She had all the servants who went into the king's rooms in the twenty-four hours preceding his death put to the sword for more safety the day after he died.

"Qyburn, show him," she said more softly that she should have. Her Hand produced a raven scroll that arrived two hours ago and gave it to Jaime. Cersei didn't wait for him to read. "This little worm turned against us. He gave our banners to that bastard boy that his wife's father had from some wench."
"We have good reasons to believe that this message was sent all over the Seven Kingdoms, to every great house. The Imp and his allies made their position very clear," Qyburn added.

Jaime's brow dug as he looked at the small piece of paper. When he looked up to her, he asked the last thing she expected. "Do you think he's telling the truth when he claims that Ned Stark's bastard is in fact the son of Rhaegar Targaryen and Lyanna Stark?"

Couldn't her brother be serious for a moment? Even if he didn't smirk, this was no time for jokes. "Don't you understand? He betrayed us!"

"No, Cersei. I fear you're the one to not understand. Is it possible that Jon Snow is Rhaegar's son?"

She scoffed. How could her brother be so ridicule? "Of course not. I saw him at Winterfell. He's got nothing to see with that prince." The Starks had done well to hide him when they visited, but she saw him all the same. He was Ned Stark's bastard without any doubt, nothing to see with the prince she dreamed of marrying thirty years ago.

"I have to admit he didn't strike me as a Targaryen bastard when I talked to him, but… Ned Stark did go at the Tower of Joy at the end of the war, and Rhaegar Targaryen left the two best swordsmen in the Kingsguard to guard that tower. Why?" Jaime looked thoughtful. "That could explain a lot of things. And if Tyrion says that…"

"Tyrion is lying!" Cersei stated angrily.

"How can you be so sure?"

"He always lies. That's in his nature. He's a little monster who lies at every turn. He wants me dead!" She shouted the last sentence. A moment of silence passed.

"Who could blame him?" Jaime finally said.

Cersei stared in shock at her twin. "What?"

"Who could blame him?" Her brother stood up and started to pace near the table. "How many times have you tried to kill him?" he asked angrily. She had never seen Jaime with that look of hatred, not directed towards her.

"I tried to save the family."

"Family? You wanted to save family by killing a member of our family?"

"He killed our mother, our father, Joffrey…"

"Oh, shut up, Cersei! Everyone knows you killed Joffrey."

"I didn't!"

"Of course, you did. You gave Ser Meryn the poison. It doesn't matter the target was Margaery Tyrell, it was Joffrey that the poison killed in the end."

"No. That's false." She never gave any poison to Ser Meryn. She didn't try to kill Margaery that night, though she wished she had, for it would have saved her son.

"And you killed Tommen," her brother added accusingly.

"I didn't. He… He killed himself. He committed suicide," she said faintly. Her last sweet boy had
killed himself.

"Because you murdered his wife. You killed him when you killed Margaery."

"No, I didn't kill him." That wasn't her fault. "Tyrion did this. Without him and that whore, none of this would ever have happened."

"Oh yes, of course. It's always Tyrion's fault. It's never yours." He was mocking her.

"Tyrion is a traitor. He turned against us. He wants the throne for himself."

"Come on, sister. If Tyrion wanted the Iron Throne for himself, he would have declared himself king. He wouldn't give his support to a bastard and pretend he is Rhaegar's son."

"He would. That bastard is his wife's brother."

"Half-brother," Jaime corrected. "And according to Tyrion, he's more a cousin than a brother."

"Once they place him on the Iron Throne, Tyrion only has to kill him and he will be king with Sansa, that bitch, next to him!" He would make Sansa his queen. *Then comes another, younger, more beautiful, to cast you down and take all you hold dear.* "We must gather our forces. We have to defeat them."

"How? With what forces? According to that raven, the North, the Vale of Arryn, and the Westerlands already declared for Jon Snow. It's only a matter of time before Riverrun follows. Who will fight for us? We are at war with Dorne. We just killed the children of Lord Tyrell and you executed Selwyn Tarth. None of the Seven Kingdoms will help us and half of them are already at war with us. We can barely levy a few thousand men from the Crownlands and they will desert the moment they realize we cannot win."

"We can find more men." She looked at Qyburn.

"We sent a raven to Euron Greyjoy," the Hand of the Queen declared.

"Euron Greyjoy?" Jaime asked in bewilderment.

"Balon Greyjoy's brother, and now the King of the Iron Islands. We will let him plunder the territories he wants against his help and let him rule these tiny islands he calls a kingdom."

Cersei was very happy of the effect her words had on her brother. He was speechless for a moment. She had the idea herself. "Have you gone mad?"

He asked the question very slowly, detaching each word very carefully. Anger boiled in Cersei. "What did you say?"

"Euron Greyjoy is the man who burned Father's fleet during the last rebellion. You're going to make an alliance with that man?"

"Why not? The enemies of our enemies are our friends." And the Greyjoys were enemies of the Reach and the North. If Cersei gave to that Euron his crown, his petty kingdom and the right to plunder her enemies' lands without constraint, he would help her. No one could offer him better.

"Robb Stark tried to make an alliance with the Greyjoys. Have you forgotten where he is now?"

"I'm not Robb Stark," she replied coldly. "And I'm not the one who was defeated by Robb Stark."
Jaime had nothing to reply for a moment. "No," he admitted. "You're the woman who tried to murder the Lord of Casterly Rock."

She frowned. "What do you mean?" She never tried to kill their father. "Tyrion killed him."

"No, but you did try to kill Tyrion after our father died. And unless you forgot, Tyrion was Father's heir. After he died, you attempted to kill Tyrion as he was the rightful Lord of Casterly Rock."

"He's not." Jaime was really stupid, but he was one of the few she could trust. "You are the Lord of Casterly Rock. Father always wanted you to be his heir. You should be there, ruling."

"I'm sorry, Cersei, but I am a kingsguard. Kingsguards can't inherit."

"Queensguard, now. You're no longer a kingsguard either way. I released you from your vows and named you Warden of the West."

Jaime took a quizzical expression. "How?"

"I am the queen," she reminded him.

"Can I see the decree then?" She turned to Qyburn who gave him the parchment in question. Jaime read it. "Jaime Lannister, Lord of Casterly Rock and Warden of the West." He chuckled. To her utter surprise, he tore off the paper in two, then in four, and finally into eight parts and let them drop onto the floor. "These words are as valuable as those Robert wrote when he made Ned Stark Joffrey's regent."

That was too much. "Stop being an imbecile and do what you should always have done for the family. It's no longer time for you to play the honorable fool. You must become who you were meant to be. The family needs you. I need you."

"You sound like Father."

"I am his daughter, and you are his son."

"Maybe, but unlike you think, you are not Tywin Lannister with tits. Father and Kevan tried to force me into becoming Lord of Casterly Rock and I refused. Do you think you'll succeed where they failed? That I will accept only because you're the one asking? And weren't you the one who convinced Aerys to make me a kingsguard at the beginning? Now you want to remove me?"

"You would turn your back on your family when it needs you the most?!" She couldn't contain her anger anymore.

"I'm not the one this family needs. We need Tyrion right now, but he decided to swear his banners to someone else. We have no chance to win against all the other kingdoms, even if Euron Greyjoy helps us. If you want to live, then I suggest you abdicate and ride to Casterly Rock right now. Drop that crown on your head. Tyrion and Genna will send you to live your life in exile very comfortably across the Narrow Sea."

"You would have your sister live as an exile?"

"Better to be exiled than to be dead, and after all the people you've killed, you can consider yourself lucky if we get this for you."

He dared to oppose her. He was her brother, she was the queen, and he dared to question her. "Leave. Now!"
Jaime smirked and left. "I love you too, sister."

As he walked away and left the small council chamber, Cersei glared at his back. She gave him the lordship of Casterly Rock and he flatly refused her. Their father had been wrong all this time. He should never have made Jaime his heir. If only he made her his heir. She wouldn't have burned that will so long ago, and she could use it to claim the Rock for herself. Instead, she was stuck with her stupid twin who refused to take his responsibilities. All fell on her shoulders, as always.

"Shall we proceed with the other matters at hand, your Grace?"

She turned to her Hand. "Of course," she said.

"Although Ser Jaime proved to be quite insulting, he was right about a few things. The City Watch no longer exists, except in name. Most of the officers died in the... recent events, and Ser Jaime didn't replace them."

"Replace them yourself, then. We don't need Jaime. He is a bloody fool who laughs about everything and takes nothing seriously. He will be of no help to us."

"Still, without Ser Jaime, it will be much more difficult to take control of Casterly Rock..."

"We don't need him. Since my brother refuses to be Lord of Casterly Rock, this means I am my father's heir. Send a raven to the Rock and tell that I am their lady now. From this day on, men and women will be equal in succession. The first child will be the heir, no matter if it's a boy or a girl." This way she would even stand before Jaime as Lord Tywin's heir. Successions already worked that way in Dorne, and she never understood why it didn't work the same in the rest of the Seven Kingdoms. But now, she was the queen, and if she wanted to be Lady of Casterly Rock at the same time, she bloody well could be. No one could stop her.

"What about Lord Tyrion? He will oppose this."

"Put a reward on his head. Make it a hundred thousand golden dragons for whoever brings me his head. And send a raven to Winterfell. Warn his officers and soldiers of the reward and that I strip him of all his titles. Strip also his wife and their daughter. Offer fifty thousand for Sansa and their child." When Tyrion's men... her men, would learn how much she offered for his death, they would turn against him immediately and fight for their real lady. And if they didn't, then she had nothing to lose.

"Since we are on the matters of money, your Grace, we should concern ourselves with that. There isn't enough left even for the reward you placed on your brother, his wife and their daughter. We don't even have enough to pay the gold cloaks."

"Casterly Rock is full of gold. It will provide everything we need."

"Maybe, but in the meantime, we barely have anything. To bring gold from Casterly Rock will take time."

"Don't worry, Qyburn. I know where to find gold. Any news from Casterly Rock?" She sent a raven there after she was crowned to have all the men the Westerlands could provide to come here in King's Landing.

"No reply yet, your Grace. It takes some time for a raven to go and come back."

"I know." Then she would wait. "In the meantime, keep the gates of the Red Keep closed. No one is to enter or leave the castle without my permission."
"As you wish, your Grace." She stood up, making it clear that their meeting was over, but Qyburn had something else to tell her. "Your Grace, it may be too soon for that kind of measures, but if we lack any fund in the near future, a possible temporary solution could be to persuade some of the few wealthy merchants and lords in King's Landing to change their will in your favor just before they die. We could begin with a few ones, to not bring too much attention, then proceed at a larger scale later."

Cersei waved her hand in the air. "Do as you like. You may dispose of these men as you like afterwards, for your experiments." That's not as if anyone in King's Landing could love her anyway, or could hate her more than they already did. Cersei knew she would always be despised. Let them hate me as long as they fear me. She would make them fear her, always, and they would respect her and fear her more than they ever feared or respected her lord father.

She went to her chambers, accompanied by Ser Boros Blount. He may be the worst swordsman in the Queensguard, but at least he was loyal. The same couldn't be said of most of his former colleagues. Cersei had removed Alyn Stackspear, Arys Oakheart and Balon Swann. Cersei had named three men from Jaime's troops, Cedric Lantell, Arwyn Myatt and Aeron Foote, to replace them. Jaime had complained that she couldn't remove the kingsguards as she pleased like that. Of course, she could. Jaime should consider she was merciful to these men, all traitors or incompetents, when she decided to keep them alive as hostages instead of giving them to Qyburn for his experiments. She may use them to make their houses think twice before rebelling against her. If they rebelled all the same, then she would show them that a Lannister always pays her debts.

"Bring me the prisoner," she told the queensguard, and he went to do as he was told immediately.

Cersei poured herself a cup of Arbor Gold and walked to the balcony. Down below, she could see the whole city, or more precisely the part of the city that was left. Qyburn had done a very good job with Varys's former little birds. Everything around the main street was blown up by the explosions, and a great part of the city was gone as well in the fire that spread. Rain wasn't strong enough to extinguish wildfire. Flea Bottom was gone, and good riddance. It was a good thing as well that the Great Sept was entirely destroyed. It would make everyone understand that gods couldn't force the crown to kneel, and that the crown didn't need the gods. However, there were more serious losses. The Guildhall of the Alchemists had been destroyed. Why did those fools place themselves so close to the Great Sept? They couldn't produce wildfire anymore. Qyburn said they still had several caches, but it wouldn't last forever. There were also the walls. Large sections were gone, including all the gates. They wouldn't be able to defend the city from the battlements. Cersei already kept most of her men inside the Red Keep and only opened its gates to let patrols in and out. The Red Keep should be well defended enough with the men she had. Her enemies couldn't hope to besiege her so easily among all these ruins.

Cersei would rebuild this city, larger and more beautiful than before, and this time she wouldn't allow the usual scum to build their homes like they wanted. Only those she authorized would come to live here, and the city would consist of mansions and palaces with paved streets, not of hovels and muddy alleys. The gold of Casterly Rock would allow her to shape it the way she wanted.

That wasn't her main concern for now, however. She had to deal with her enemies first. The Tyrells, the Martells, the Starks, they would all pay for their treachery. Once the Greyjoys would plunder the Reach and Dorne and that she would have Casterly Rock, she would have everything she needed to get her revenge.

Ser Boros came back at this moment, the shackles clicking as his prisoner moved. He was all dirty like the late High Sparrow now, and looked much humbler than the last time. Pride and smirk had left his face and he looked thinner than before, which said a lot since he was already very slim at the
beginning. Still, he seemed to have enough pride left to look at her straight in the eyes.

"Ser Boros, make him show the respect a queen deserves," she ordered.

Without any hesitation, Ser Boros Blount kicked the thin man's leg and he collapsed on the floor, then the knight punched him in the face with his iron gauntlet. Blood came out of the mouth.

"Leave us, ser." The queensguard had done everything he was needed for. Cersei was now alone with the former Master of Coin. "You've looked better in the past, Lord Baelish."

Lysa Arryn's widower looked at her, blood still running on his lips. "If you want me dead, you might as well kill me now. I'm in no state to resist."

Cersei laughed. "Kill you now? Certainly not. If I wanted you dead, I would leave you in Qyburn's hands. He needs a lot of people for his experiments. You would make a fine addition to his subjects." Right now, Qyburn was experiencing with all the members of Margaery's household who weren't highborn enough or who were of House Tyrell.

"I have no doubt about it. I could hear the previous subjects scream from my cell," he said, humourless.

"No doubt, indeed." However, she may still find some utility to Littlefinger. "But you've been a great help to my family in the past. Perhaps you can still be useful."

She saw the glimmer of hope in his eyes. "How might I be useful?"

"First, by telling me how you happened to bring Arya Stark to Roose Bolton."

He didn't show any sign of surprise. "I never brought her there."

"That's not what Sansa Stark is saying." She read the letter that arrived with Baelish to King's Landing. She knew the accusations against him.

"Sansa Stark believes what she wants to believe, your Grace. I'm afraid your brother told her about my… participation to Lord Stark's demise, and as a consequence she started to imagine all types of crime against me. When we met at White Harbor, she had gone completely mad. She looked very much like her aunt."

So that was who Sansa became. Good. "My brother might have made her believe that you were the cause of all her ordeals. Considering the lies you told Catelyn Stark, who couldn't understand his motives?"

"A regretful accident, his arrest," he said. Cersei regretted less the arrest than the fact Tyrion escaped alive from the Eyrie.

"Was the dagger used against Bran Stark really his?"

"To my knowledge, yes. He gave the dagger to an assassin without telling anyone else."

She smiled. That was what she needed. "Good. As for Ser Dontos Hollard, do you believe he could have been working for the Tyrells when he tried to abduct Sansa Stark?"

"It's a clear possibility. If you allowed me to investigate the matter, I could bring you the necessary elements to prove their involvement."

"Very well. Sansa Stark is mad and blames you for everything that happened to her and her family,
my brother Tyrion tried to murder a child of ten in his bed, and the Tyrells tried to kidnap a prisoner of the Crown to marry her to Ser Loras and gain a claim on the North this way."

"It is well summarized, your Grace." His smirk had come back.

"At least, that's the truth we will tell if you keep devoting yourself to your queen."

"Of course, your Grace."

"Then in this case, you must know that the Crown is in dire need of money. You will give everything you have, every golden dragon, every silver stag, to the last copper coin, to the Crown."

She saw an hesitation on his face. "I would, if I could, but if I am to serve the Crown the best I can, I will need some money to maintain my network of informers and spies and give you what you want."

"And what is it that I want?" she asked him, as if he knew what she wanted.

"Your brother's head. The death of Tyrion Lannister." Her smile left her face. He knew her better than she thought. She didn't like to be seen through, but on the other side…

"How?" she asked.

"I still have friends, allies, contacts, men among the lords of the Vale and their households. I can use them, but I will need some means in order to achieve our goals. Without gold, it will be impossible to obtain your brother’s death."

Cersei thought about it for a moment. Littlefinger had been able to deliver Ned Stark to her, and he brought the Tyrells to their side at Blackwater. He was ambitious, cunning, and thought highly of himself. He was also prickly. With the right promises, he would do as she told.

"My little brother once promised you Harrenhal, which we granted to you, but he also promised you the Riverlands as well, didn't he?"

"He did. I'm afraid not all Lannisters always pay their debts."

"I do. I will give you the Riverlands, You'll have Harrenhal and Riverrun. We will forget about your past actions against the Crown's interests… if you bring me my brother's head, his wife's head, and the small body of their dead daughter. Am I clear?"

"Of course. I live to serve."

"Good. Then you will bring all your riches here to be disposed by the Crown at its will."

She caught him by surprise. "But I thought…"

"You thought wrong. You will give everything you have to your queen. In exchange, I will give you back your position as Master of Coin and let you use the Crown's money to fulfill the objectives I gave you. I will even grant you the reward I placed on Tyrion and Sansa's heads when you bring them to me. If you refuse, you'll be given to Qyburn as a specimen, for treason. You have ten seconds to decide."

He used the ten seconds, but at the end, he complied. "Yes, your Grace."

"Good. I was sure we could find an agreement."

"May I beg for these chains to be removed?" He raised his arms to emphasize his meaning, his
shackles still rattling.

"Ser Boros!" she called. The knight opened the door. "Remove his chains to Petyr Baelish, Master of Coin, and bring him to his apartments. Position four guards before his doors and make sure they follow him everywhere."

"Yes, your Grace," he said. He took a key from his pocket and began to remove Littlefinger's shackles.

"Lord Baelish, remember that you said you were loyal to the Crown," she warned him. "If I ever find out that you lied, you will meet an end worse than everything you can imagine."

"Your Grace." He bowed and left, roughly escorted by Ser Boros.

Cersei was alone. This day exhausted her. There were so many problems. She wished she didn't have to expect traitors at every corner, but that was power. She wouldn't give it away. That was all she had now.

She filled a new cup of wine for herself, and swigged it. Then she filled her cup again and repeated the process. She had discovered these past weeks why Tyrion and Robert drank so much. It helped to forget, up to a point. She needed to drink whenever she thought of her children. This way she wouldn't think about them for too long. She emptied cup after cup, allowing her mind to be washed from every thought she could have of Joffrey, Tommen or Myrcella. She couldn't think about them. It would only make her weak. Yet, she couldn't help but think about them. Joffrey, strong, courageous, poisoned by cowards the day of his marriage. Myrcella, beautiful, good from the very moment she came into the world, murdered by Dornish scum. Tommen, sweet, innocent, frail. She couldn't forget them. They were her children. Still, she had to try. She couldn't rule as a mother. She had to rule as a queen. She had to rule like her father would have ruled. No, she had to rule better than her father ever did.

She was in the Throne Room, kneeling before the dead bodies of her children. Huge tears kept rolling from her eyes. Shadows were dancing around her. She knew who these shadows were. One was her friend Melara, another was Margaery, one was her brother, and the shadows of the High Sparrow, the two High Septons who came before him, Harys Swyft, Selwyn Tarth turned around her. There were many other shadows, but she didn't recognize them. She tried to ignore them, but they kept coming closer. She called for her Queensguard, for Jaime, for her father, for her mother to save her, but no one came. A great shadow came. The great shadow of the valonqar loomed over her. Someone took her from behind, almost gently, and wrapped his arms around her neck. Then life choked from her.

She woke up, panting and sweating like every night. She made the same dream all the time now. The *valonqar shall wrap his hands about your pale white throat and choke the life from you*. A man stood before her with a candle. Cersei was about to take anything at hand to kill him before he strangled her, but he spoke before.

"Forgive me, your Grace." It wasn't the valonqar. He was much too tall, and it wasn't his voice. The valonqar was far away, in the North.

"What is it, Qyburn?" she asked angrily. She was in her bed. She didn't remember climbing into it.

"We just received a raven, your Grace."

"Couldn't it wait the morning?"
"Maybe, but I thought you would want to know. It was from Casterly Rock. The Ironborn attacked Lannisport. Your family's fleet has been destroyed, and the city was plundered. It's been destroyed."

Chapter End Notes

For Cersei's government, I got a lot of inspiration from the Roman emperor Nero, known for his madness. He forced rich people all around the empire to commit suicide, but not before forcing them to make a will by which they gave everything they owned to the emperor. After a fire that destroyed more than half the city of Rome, he built for himself a huge palace that almost caused the ruin of the Empire, so much that he was suspected to have started the fire to give him the necessary space to build his palace. The words "Let them hate me as long as they fear me" come from another Roman Emperor known for his madness, Caligula. I think the comparison between Cersei and these historical characters is quite appropriate, considering her latest actions.

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
TYRION XXVIII

Tyrion gasped, breathing the air around the crack of his wife's neck. Sansa didn't put any perfume since she arrived in Winterfell, but it didn't matter. Truth be told he preferred her natural scent. She was panting as well from the effort they just made. They needed to do some catch-up after all the time they spent away from each other. Gods, he missed her.

"I see being a father didn't make you less of a pervert," Sansa told him between two quick breaths. "Neither motherhood did for you," he replied. He was rewarded by the sight of his wife blushing. He loved to see her cheeks turn red. He leaned forward to kiss her. Gods, she was sweet. Their kiss lingered. He didn't want to break it, not when he had his wife for him all alone. Still, they had to break it at a given moment.

"We should get up," Sansa said in a hushed voice. He didn't have the impression that she wanted to. He kissed her one more long time. In these moments, he could forget all the problems they had. Sansa didn't break it, and they just enjoyed the joining of their lips for a very long time. He was the one to end their kiss this time, and all the troubles came back to his mind immediately.

"I'm afraid you're right." He kissed her one last time, lightly, then got up, wishing he could spend more time with his wife.

"And I thought it would all be over when we would take Winterfell," Sansa complained. She got up too and began to prepare for the day, telling the guards to ask for her handmaiden at the door. "When will that war end?"

"Once we've taken care of Cersei," Tyrion replied, "and of the Greyjoys, of course," he added on an even darker tone.

To learn that Tommen had died was already hard, as well as the uncertainty surrounding Jaime's situation, but the recent news that Lannisport was destroyed didn't make things better for Tyrion. He hoped no one in his family died in the attack. Genna's raven gave no detail about it, only that the whole city was sacked by the Iron Fleet and the new self-proclaimed king of the Iron Islands, Euron Greyjoy, and that their fleet was all gone but a few useless ships that needed so much repairs that it would be cheaper to rebuild them from scratch.

Tyrion wondered if the city would have resisted better if he didn't leave for the North. He let the city in the shadow of the Rock burn, just like his father did. The history was repeating itself, but worse this time. Fifteen years ago, he saw the Greyjoy fleet attack Lannisport, but they only had time to
burn the Lannister fleet. The city itself wasn't quite touched. He could still remember the smell of the burning sailors and ships. This time, however, the Ironmen plundered Lannisport. The destruction wasn't limited to the docks. They should have taken care of the Iron Islands long ago, but it seemed the invasion was delayed by the war against Dorne and some of his sister's foolish decisions. With Tommen and Margaery's deaths, the alliance between his house and the Tyrells was dead. Tyrion lost his fleet and he couldn't rely on the Redwynes anymore to do anything against the Iron Islands.

"I'm sorry for Lannisport," Sansa said, as if reading his mind. "Do you think it was a mistake to kill Theon? We could have used him to bargain with his people."

"We couldn't know," Tyrion reassured her. "The Redwynes were supposed to take the Iron Islands with the help of our fleet, but they didn't. We couldn't foresee that, and after everything Theon Greyjoy did, and what Ramsay did to him, I don't think the Ironborn would have given him much value. If Cersei hadn't decided to mess everything, none of this would have happened."

The information they had about the events that took place in King's Landing were still unclear, but it seemed the Great Sept of Baelor went in flames. It blew up. Tyrion knew only one thing that could make the Great Sept go in such a way. Wildfire. Cersei was among the few who knew of the stocks of wildfire there were in the capital. Tyrion already knew the fanatics had arrested Lady Margaery, her brother and Cersei. It couldn't be a coincidence that Cersei was the only one to survive the explosion. The Sparrows were fanatics who believed in the Seven. Fanatics wouldn't destroy the holy places of their gods. Cersei was behind this. She was the one to have Margaery and Loras Tyrell die. Tommen may have been killed by the Sparrows like she pretended, but there was no way to verify it, and Tyrion knew better than to believe a single word of his sister. If Tommen was killed by the Sparrows, Tyrion wouldn't be surprised if theydid it in reprisals to the destruction of the Great Sept of Baelor. Somehow, Tyrion could feel it, Cersei had played a role in Tommen's death. He didn't believe a single moment Cersei was the one to kill Tommen, or that she ordered his death, and that she wanted it. For all her flaws, his sister loved her children. However, he thought it was very likely that Cersei's actions led to the death of his last nephew. Tyrion was trying to know about Jaime's situation, but so far he got no answer. News travelled slowly.

"We have to get rid of her," Sansa said. "We won't be safe as long as she lives. This time, she must die."

"I agree." Cersei may be of his blood, but she had gone too far. No one would want her to live now, anyway.

"She killed Margaery." His wife's voice was filled with sadness and hatred at the same time.

"I'm sorry. I know you were friends." He took her hand to comfort her.

Tyrion didn't know the queen very well, but she was kind with Sansa and with almost everyone. He even owed his life to her in part, for her testimony in his favor at his trial. She would have made a wonderful queen, much better than Cersei ever was. It was a good thing that Joffrey died before he could consummate their marriage. She could have gone through the horrors that were once destined to Sansa. Now she was dead.

"What do you think will happen to the people in her retinue?" Sansa asked.

Tyrion sighed. "Considering how Cersei dealt with your father's household, I don't give them much chance or much time to live."

Sansa closed her eyes. "Many of her cousins attended her, and some were only children. Mira had friends among them."
Tyrion knew that only too well. He surprised Lady Mira Hightower the day after they told everyone at Winterfell that Margaery Tyrell was dead. She was going to the godswood, her eyes all red. He never saw her like that in King's Landing, not even after her father died at the Red Wedding. He had offered her his sympathies when he saw her, but she barely acknowledged his presence. She was probably very close to Margaery Tyrell. Tyrion knew from his sources in the capital that the deceased queen was very close to her handmaidens, and that she considered them as her friends more than servants. Tyrion also suspected that Lady Hightower mourned someone else. Sansa once mentioned a dear friend she had in Lady Margaery's retinue. It may be the other handmaiden he surprised with her drinking wine long ago. He wished the northern lady was still at Winterfell. She and Sansa could have helped each other through this, but all the Forresters left a few days after Jon Snow was declared King in the North, when news arrived that their brother had freed Ironrath. He was now marching on Highpoint, and probably besieging it. Tyrion didn't give much time to live to any Whitehill who could still stand on his feet.

"We should have executed Cersei after we revealed she murdered the king," Tyrion voiced aloud. "Even before that. A lot of pain would have been avoided, and the Seven Kingdoms would have been a far better place."

"Well, she doesn't have long to live. Who will fight for her? Margaery's family will want their revenge on her, and we have the North, the Vale, the Riverlands and the Westerlands on our side," Sansa said.

"Cersei won't remain in power for long. Everyone will find out very soon what she did to get the throne. She has no claim on it, and no powerful ally. Everyone in the Seven Kingdoms wants her head. She will not keep the Iron Throne for long, especially not with the army we sent south."

Tyrion had sent to the Riverlands half his forces with Daven to command them, since he was Lord of Darry. As much as they needed men here in the North to fight the White Walkers and conquer the last strongholds that resisted, they needed to deal with Cersei as quickly as possible. They would be joined by a few forces raised by the Tullys. Tyrion had wanted to send more men in the south, but Jon Snow brought so many with him at the Wall, including all the troops of the Vale, that Tyrion needed to maintain a strong army in the North under his orders. He couldn't send more men from the Westerlands against Cersei either, since they were under the constant threat of the raiders of the Iron Islands. Every man left in the Westerlands was needed to defend the shores.

"Do you think all the other kingdoms will join us?" his wife asked. "Dorne fought against our two families during Robert's Rebellion, and the storm lords… I have no idea which side they will take. Even the Tyrells… Without Margaery, I'm not sure they will want to fight with us."

"The Tyrells are not the ones to worry me the most," Tyrion confessed. "It's the Vale." He exchanged a knowing look with Sansa. They didn't need to say anything. If Littlefinger was still alive, they couldn't be sure of the loyalty of the Vale to Jon Snow. "I think the Tyrells will side with us. So far, we have officially four of the Seven Kingdoms on our side. The Tyrells will never side with someone who might lose, and who else would they side with? Euron Greyjoy, who is most likely to plunder their lands very soon? The Martells, who they fought wars against for centuries? The Stormlands, who have no lord paramount and were spent in the last war? They will want revenge against Cersei. They will make a taciturn alliance with us at least. I'm more worried about their position once Cersei is defeated."

"You think they wouldn't accept Jon as king?"

Tyrion shook his head, more to show he wasn't sure than to show he didn't think it would be the case. "They have no reason to oppose him, but not many reasons to support him either. They would
get rid of Cersei this way, but they could decide to push forward someone else once Cersei is gone, though I don't see who. The only other person who has a strong claim on the Iron Throne is on the other side of the Narrow Sea. The Martells could claim the Iron Throne through their Targaryen ancestors, but the Tyrells will never accept them. Your brother… I mean, your cousin, would be the most logical choice for them, but as soon as a better choice would be before them, the Tyrells would choose it immediately. In the long term, I think it's better to give them a reason to stay at Jon Snow's side. And the best way to forge such an alliance is marriage."

"I still believe we should marry Jon to a northern lady. The loyalty of the North is still not sure," Sansa argued.

"He didn't help his cause when he chose you and Arya to rule from Winterfell together while he was out fighting. And the decision to give you the Dreadfort made things worse," he commented dryly.

"You were the one to insist that I got the Dreadfort," Sansa pointed out. "I didn't want it."

"I brought my men in the North, with winter close, with the idea that they were fighting to give Winterfell to their lady," Tyrion explained softly. "I had to get something for you, or else they would believe they fought for nothing, and I may end up with a mutiny. That's not what we need right now."

"We could have waited for the Dreadfort to be taken before announcing it."

"I needed to show my men that they fought for something immediately."

Tyrion knew it hadn't been an ideal solution, but to keep his men on his side, he had no choice but to demand the Dreadfort to Jon Snow. Before the King in the North left for the Wall, he held a reunion of all the lords present at Winterfell and officially granted the Dreadfort to Sansa. He and Tyrion had discussed the details through and through before the announcement. In order to cause fewer discontent among the Northerners, the Dreadfort was specifically and only granted to Sansa, not to her and Tyrion. It wouldn't make much difference in the end, since their children would get the castle and its lands all the same in the end, and they would still be Lannisters, but it gave a slightly better impression. Sansa was still more from the North than Tyrion. This way they would create a new minor branch of House Lannister in the North, one that would be sworn to House Stark of Winterfell.

Tyrion had tried to make things look in the best way possible to the Northerners. Sansa had publicly given up any claim she had on Winterfell, acknowledging Jon as the only true Lord of Winterfell. Their second son would become Lord of the Dreadfort when he came of age. Right now, the castle was besieged by combined forces from the Westerlands and the Riverlands led by Ser Brynden Tully. When it would be taken, the Lord of Winterfell would name a man he trusted to rule the castle until its lord was born and old enough to rule it himself. Jon Snow omitted to mention that although he would name himself the man who would rule the lands dependant of the Dreadfort and that he would be a Northerner, the garrison would be mostly composed of Lannister men. The northern lords didn't need to know it. Another concession to the North would be that at the age of six, the future Lord of the Dreadfort would be fostered at Winterfell. Finally, if he and Sansa never had a second son, one of their daughters would be Lady of the Dreadfort and her husband would be chosen by the Lord of Winterfell. Despite these concessions and compromises, the northern lords were still angry to see one of the main castles in the North being given to Lannisters, especially those who considered they had a claim on the former seat of House Bolton or who hoped Jon Snow may give it to them at the end of the war. Still, they would have been angrier if the fortress and its lands were given to Tyrion and Sansa without any condition.

"We should have gotten Jon betrothed to someone from the North," Sansa insisted. "It would have
made things more acceptable for his bannermen. Lady Karstark was open to the possibility. It would have put an end to the feud between House Stark and House Karstark. Even better, we could have betrothed Jon with one of Lord Manderly's granddaughter. It would have ensured their loyalty to us. They are the most powerful house in the North, and we'll need them against the White Walkers."

"It's true, Sansa, we can't be sure of the loyalty of some houses, but most of them believe Jon Snow when he speaks of the White Walkers. This threat should be enough to keep them in line, and their forces are inferior to those we have with the river lords. A marriage with Alys Karstark or Wynafryd Manderly would make his rule more secure in the short run, but if we manage to keep the dead out of the Seven Kingdoms, there will come a day when your… cousin will have to take the Iron Throne." Tyrion still had difficulty to call Jon Snow Sansa's cousin instead of her brother. "When the time comes, a bride from the south will be necessary. Some southern kingdoms will hardly accept a king from the North already married to a northern lady."

"Margaery is dead. Mace Tyrell has no other daughter, and his wife is past the time when she can have other children. Even if, like you think, Lord Tyrell agrees to marry one of his cousins to Jon, it will be a distant cousin. She will be part of the minor branches of House Tyrell."

"I know this alliance will be weaker, Sansa, but the Tyrells are our best hope all the same. The Stormlands are without lord paramount since all the Baratheons are dead. Even Stannis's daughter is gone. And the Martells will never bind their family to a son that Rhaegar Targaryen had with another woman than Elia Martell. The Reach is still our best chance."

They made sure to send letters everywhere through the Seven Kingdoms to make Jon Snow's claim clear to everybody, revealing his true parentage. The letters also accused Cersei of murdering not only Margaery and Loras Tyrell, but also Tommen. Tyrion also wrote to the Lord of Highgarden, telling him that they were ready to fight together to avenge his children's death and promised to bring them Cersei's head for her crimes, but he also subtly pointed out that the family who would swear fealty to Jon Snow the sooner would be considered first for a royal match. By offering him the revenge for his son and his daughter, Tyrion already gave Mace Tyrell enough reason to side with Jon Snow, but the prospect to see a Tyrell, even it she wasn't his daughter, be one day the queen, could destroy the few doubts he would have.

"Furthermore," Tyrion continued, "there's another reason why a marriage between your cousin and a Tyrell would be preferable. It would maintain the stability of the Reach."

"Why?" Sansa frowned.

"The Tyrell's hold on the Reach is not as powerful as the one the Lannisters have on the Westerlands."

"Yes, I remember. There are houses that still see them as up-jumped stewards."

"Quite right. The Oakhearts, the Tarlys, the Florents, the Hightowers, they will all be interested in claiming Highgarden for themselves. House Tyrell lost its heir and its queen in one swift blow and they are completely isolated. Their position is weakened. And now that the Greyjoys have taken everything they could from Lannisport, they will threaten the Reach. The whole kingdom could fall into chaos. That's not something we can allow. We need a stable realm."

"If the Tyrells are in a weak position… perhaps we should arrange a marriage for Jon with another house from the Reach," Sansa said hesitantly. "Mira has contacts at the Hightower, and she says Elys Hightower is of an age with Jon. She is the only daughter of the future lord of the house. She could arrange something for us."
"Eventually, it could be useful, Sansa, but I would rather keep the Reach united, or else your brother might find the Seven Kingdoms impossible to rule by the time he goes to King's Landing. Marrying him to a Hightower will weaken the Tyrells further and bring even more instability. For now, let's wait to see what the Tyrells will do. If they refuse to side with us, we'll look what the other houses in the Reach have to offer."

Sansa nodded. They had discussed about it quite often recently, especially before Jon Snow left. Almost everyone wanted him to marry as quickly as possible. Tyrion suspected the northern lords wanted a new heir to Winterfell, to eliminate Sansa's claim once and for all. The bastard hadn't wanted to marry however. He finally followed Tyrion's proposition, to keep his hand free for a future marriage once the time to take the Iron Throne would come. He even allowed Tyrion to send ravens to Highgarden, making them hope a future betrothal without making any promise. Tyrion didn't have any illusion. Jon Snow agreed with his plan because it allowed him to take no engagement yet, but it followed Tyrion's plans all the same. He would convince Jon Snow of the necessity of getting married later.

In the meantime, other weddings were arranged and other privileges were given by the new king before he left. Highpoint was officially given to Gwyn Whitehill, the wife of Asher Forrester, and Lord Ludd Whitehill was branded a traitor to the North for his collaboration with Ramsay Bolton and his role in the murder of Ethan Forrester. Other bannermen of House Bolton lost lands for taking part in Ramsay's horrible crimes. Jon Snow still allowed them the choice to take the black instead of dying if they surrendered. A marriage was arranged between a grandson of Lord Ryswell and a daughter of Lord Clement Piper. Talia Forrester was officially betrothed to Gawen Glover. Jon Snow gave the fortress of Moat Cailin to House Reed, a symbolic gesture to thank them for fighting the Boltons early in the war. House Mormont was awarded a few territories on the Umber lands.

Now Tyrion was here, at Winterfell while the younger or taller fellows were off to war against the remaining Umber and Bolton forces, or against his sister. Officially, the Stark sisters, Sansa and Arya, were supposed to rule Winterfell together while their cousin and king was out. They sat together in the Great Hall to receive petitioners, but in reality, it was Tyrion and Sansa who truly ruled Winterfell. Tyrion remained in the shadows, but he took a look at the ledgers and advised Sansa on the decisions to take. As for Arya Stark, she was mostly frustrated that she wasn't allowed to follow her brother to the Wall, and she had no interest in ruling. She wasn't interested by that.

Tyrion was left behind to deal with any problem coming from the south, since he had more experience than anyone else to handle the politics of the Realm. So here he was, at Winterfell, waiting for news to come from every part of the Seven Kingdoms and helping Sansa to rule the North while her cousin fought for it. He was proud of Sansa. She managed Winterfell very well. She had nothing to see with the shy girl he saw when he came to Winterfell for the first time.

Sansa's handmaiden came in. "I'll leave you. We see each other later," Tyrion told his wife.

"Good day, Tyrion."

He left her and went to the other room where Podrick helped him to dress for the day, donning clothes that were appropriate for the northern weather in winter. He also paid a visit to his daughter. He always went to see her at the beginning of the day, and at the end of it. Today, she was sleeping, and he didn't want to wake her, so he only looked into her cradle to verify she was well. When Sansa was ready, they went to break their fast in the Great Hall with everyone else, then Tyrion went to see
his men, Podrick on his trails.

On his way out, he saw Arya Stark practicing on a dummy in the main courtyard. She was skilled with a sword, he had to admit it, whether it was with the slim blade that Jon Snow gave her or a blunted sword that was like those the men used in battle. Right now she used the latter. Tyrion approached her from behind.

"Is he dead yet?"

She turned swiftly to face him, her sword brandished toward him. Tyrion was glad he kept some distance with his sister-in-law. Some said she was sleeping with her sword, ready to react whenever someone would try to attack her.

"Oh, it's you." She lowered her sword.

"So, is he dead?"

"It's a dummy. It can't die," she replied on a boring tone.

"Well, do you think he would be dead if he was alive?"

She looked at him for a moment, then turned her back on him to start again to hit her false opponent. Arya Stark had stopped hating him, or at least Tyrion hoped that she stopped, but she still despised him. He feared that in her eyes, he would always be a Lannister who took part in her family's destruction, even if he helped to bring the three living Starks left in this world together. Still, he once believed Sansa would always see him as a Lannister and would never come to love him. Now she loved him, and she thought she was more a Lannister than a Stark.

"I never had the chance to learn how to wield a sword," he continued, trying to make some small talk, but Arya Stark kept her back turned on him and kept practicing. "I saw my brother fighting with the other knights in the courtyard, and my cousins do the same, but I couldn't join them." He thought he saw Arya Stark hesitate a little between two strikes, but she resumed as if he said nothing. "At the Battle of Blackwater, I wielded an axe for the first time. At the beginning of the battle, Bronn asked me if I ever used one, and I replied that I chopped wood once. Then I realized that I only watched my brother chopping wood." He thought he heard a little snigger. "I heard you used to put sheep shift into Sansa's bed."

She turned with a large frown. "Sheep shift?"

"She says that's the vulgar word for dung." They looked at each other for a moment, then they both burst into laughs.

"Sansa was always insufferable," her sister said after she regained her seriousness. "I couldn't suffer her. She was boring."

"Well, I know she thought the same about you, except for the boring part, maybe."

"She was always telling me how I should behave, and showing she could dance, and sing, and sew better than me."

"Well, my brother was better at fighting and shooting and riding than me. But I was better whenever it came to use my mind. My brother's weapon was his sword, just like yours, and mine was the mind."

"And Sansa? What is her weapon?" Arya Stark asked in a mocking way.
"Her mind is quite sharp now. And of course she has her beauty."

She scoffed. "Her beauty."

He said something he shouldn't have. How to diffuse the situation without talking to her in an awkward way? Sansa was more beautiful than her sister, for sure. No one could say the opposite. Arya Stark was looking at the pommel of her sword. Finally, Tyrion spoke, choosing his words carefully.

"I think Sansa would have given up her beauty any time when she was Joffrey's prisoner. It got her into more trouble than anything else."

"Aye, I'm sure." Her sister didn't seem convinced at all. "That doesn't seem to bother her, now."

"She is no longer Joffrey's prisoner." His sister-in-law didn't look at him with hostility, but there was no kindness in her eyes either. He saw her back when she killed Ramsay Bolton. "Look, I know you've been through the Seven Hells, but Sansa had her share of them too. What matters now is that you are both safe, and you still have a brother, or a cousin, whatever you like. I only wish you stopped quarreling with each other and started working together instead. My lord father, despite all his flaws, told me one day that Lannisters must stand together, united against their foes, if they are to survive in this world. On that he wasn't wrong. My family is weakened by our quarrels among ourselves, thanks to my sister's repeated attempts to have me killed."

Arya looked at him queerly. "My father told me something like that one day. He told me we had to stick together, that in winter, the lone wolf died, but the pack survived. That we couldn't allow to have a war among ourselves."

Tyrion found it funny. "I wonder what your father would have thought of this, that he agreed with Tywin Lannister on something." The young Stark looked thoughtful. After a moment, Tyrion decided it was time to leave. "Don't try to kill your sister again," he said with a smirk, and he walked away.

He went to the barracks to visit his men. The Lannister army at Winterfell was much smaller than before. Half his men had gone south, where they would be joined by new levies from the Riverlands and the Vale. Most of the others, led by Ser Prester, were gone to the Dreadfort, to claim it for Sansa, along with most of the forces of the Riverlands led by the Blackfish. The men of the Vale, the North and the wildlings were gone with Jon Snow, with the task to make the Last Hearth surrender, then to make it to the Wall, where they would prepare its defenses against the White Walkers. They would have enough to reopen all the castles, hopefully. Only two hundred men stayed behind as a garrison, plus a few from the North and the Vale. They had enough space to house them all. Bronn commanded the garrison.

He found his friend in a corner, drinking, without surprise. "Hello, Bronn."

"Oh, hi."

"How are our men doing?"

"Quite well," he said with a shrug. "It's quiet and warm here, and there aren't as many brawls as when the wildlings were here. Not much action, but it is welcomed after the tensed months we had. Let's hope it will last. If all the armies come back, we'll be back to the start."

"Then let's hope they will stay far away for some time, or that we'll head back south soon." An empty wish.
"That's what the men want. Go back south. Winter is here, and the North is already cold in summer. They spent months here, including a few stuck in the swamps of the Neck. The word that the Greyjoys attacked has spread. Some had family in Lannisport. They want to go back and defend their homes. Or they want to fight Cersei, like you said you wanted, not some imagined white devils."

Tyrion knew that was problematic. The Northerners may believe the White Walkers were back for real for the most, but the men south of the Neck didn't believe it for the most. They saw Jon Snow's march on the Wall as futile. Many, including Daven, Prester and the lords of the Vale, were of an opinion to march south to take back the Iron Throne immediately and place Jon Snow on it. The soldiers thought the same, and they wanted to go home, especially those from the Westerlands and the Riverlands, who spent the last years in war. Everyone was tired of war. What they didn't understand was that, if the Wall fell and the dead invaded Westeros, it wouldn't matter who sat on the Iron Throne. They had to reinforce the Wall first, station enough men to make sure the wights wouldn't get through, then they may eventually all go south.

He spent some time talking with Bronn about the security of Winterfell. Tyrion didn't trust the garrisons of Northerners and Vale men that occupied Winterfell along with his own men. He then went to help the maester verify the granaries and ledgers. It wasn't a job he hated, and it would be crucial with winter there now. It would take time before they were able to get food from the other kingdoms, with the new war coming.

He knew Sansa was holding court right now, but he decided, despite Sansa's objections, that it would be better if he didn't attend the court sessions. Northerners would grind their teeth less, this way, and it may somehow weaken the beliefs that he was using Sansa to rule the North. He was becoming the invisible Lord of Casterly Rock.

The day went on without great incident or event worthy of notice. After the dinner, Sansa went to pray in the godswood. Tyrion began to read in their room, but after a moment he decided to go and see his daughter earlier than usual. He slowly pushed the door that gave way to the chamber where Joanna was sleeping.

"You may go," he told the midwife.

She left with a bow and without a word. Sansa preferred to breastfeed their daughter herself, but with the many responsibilities she had, she sometimes didn't have the time for this, hence the reason they had a midwife. Tyrion knew Sansa wished they had more time to spend together and with Joanna, but they were at war, a war they couldn't lose. They couldn't give all the time they wanted to their child. He used the stool near the cradle to look at his little daughter. Her eyes were wide open. She smiled and agitated her arms towards him when she noticed his presence.

Slowly, still feeling awkward and even stupid whenever he did this, Tyrion took her into his arms. He was always afraid he could drop her by accident whenever he held her. Sansa was much better at this than him. He walked her around the room for a time. She was squealing all the time. She really was beautiful, and he was afraid he could hurt her. If he held her too tightly in the fear to let her fall, he could hurt her all the same. He was never prepared to have children. Finally, he sat on the chair next to the cradle and let her rest on his thighs, her head leaning in the lap of his arm. She kept agitating her hands and Tyrion offered her his fingers to grab, which she did, switching from one to another frantically.

"You're beautiful, you know," he told her. She looked at him, still smiling. "You have the features of my family. I wonder if Cersei looked like you when she was born."
Imagining Cersei as a baby was difficult for him, but she certainly had been one a long time ago. Most of the people were babies at the beginning of their life, at the beginning of their life. He had difficulty to imagine that the person who once was a little girl with blond hair and green eyes had become a cruel and vain bitch.

"My father surely held her in his arms, like I do for you. I'm sure he never held me, the monster who killed his wife. Surely he held your uncle and your aunt. They were his golden children, what he wanted to build his dynasty. He never wanted me. I killed my mother, and you are named after her." He took a pause. Joanna was still grabbing his fingers, though with less excitement than before. "I won't lie to you. You've come into a dangerous world. If you only knew…" Her parents' families had been at war, killing each other for two years. Her grandfather had her grandmother and one of her uncles murdered at a wedding, and one of her cousins beat her mother. "We have dead people who want to kill us all so we would join them. We have your grandmother who wants you dead as well. I can't promise you will have a wonderful life. It would be lying. But I'll do everything to protect you. I won't let anyone hurt you, and if they manage… they will pay. I won't abandon you like my father abandoned me. I will love you until the day I die."

Joanna had strangely grown quieter as Tyrion talked. Perhaps it was the expression on his face. He tried to smile to her again once he was done with his dark thinking aloud, and she smiled immediately, taking his thumb with her small wrist. She was growing, he could see it. She had gained some weight since she arrived. He wished he had been there for her birth. He would be there the next time.

Without realizing it, Tyrion started to sing The Seasons of My Love. After a minute or two, his little daughter was sleeping. Sansa was right. You only needed to sing to get Joanna to sleep. She was a calm child, a very calm one. Tyrion wondered how she would look like when she would grow up. He hoped she would look like Sansa. She didn't have her hair or her eyes, but could she have her face? Her neck? Her cheeks? If she inherited her height from Sansa, which was very likely, she would quickly be taller than him. How would it feel, to have your own children look down on you? There were so many questions running through his mind, questions he never asked himself before, because he never thought he would have children.

He kept whistling, his daughter on his lap, until the door opened and his wife came in. She stopped when she saw him holding Joanna and smiled. "That's not something I see every day. Is she sleeping?" she asked.

"Yes, sorry." Tyrion lowered his voice immediately. He spoke too loudly. "I sang without thinking about it." Sansa laughed sweetly. Tyrion stood up and brought Joanna to her. "I think it's your turn. I held her long enough."

Sansa took Joanna into her arms and admired her. Tyrion was a little envious. He was happy to be a father, especially of such a beautiful little girl, but the disadvantage was that Sansa's attention was no longer only over him. He didn't blame her, and in fact it didn't cause him much problem. The servants took care of Joanna most of the time, and she was so quiet that Sansa seldom had to wake up in the night to see how Joanna was. They still had most of their nights for them alone. Still, there were moments he was almost jealous of his daughter and the attention she received from her mother. He would have to learn to live with the fact that he was no longer the only object of attention of his wife.

Sansa kept her daughter into her arms, walking slowly all around the room, managing to not wake her up. Tyrion only stood there, watching them. He loved to look at Sansa, and to look at his daughter too, so to look at both of them was even better. Sometimes Sansa shot him a smile, sweet and wicked at the same time, but her focus quickly returned to Joanna every time.
There was a knock on the door. "My lord, Maester Wolkan needs a word. He said he received an urgent message. From the Wall." Podrick kept his voice down from the other side of the door. His squire never forgot to be careful around Joanna.

Tyrion stood up and, with one last smile at Sansa that she returned, he walked without a noise to the door, silently opened and closed it. Podrick was there with Wolkan. They allowed him to remain Maester of Winterfell, after determining he only served Ramsay because he was forced to and even tried to prevent him from committing certain atrocities.

"My lord, please forgive me," the old maester said. "We received a raven from Castle Black, addressed to the king." The ravens addressed to the king were directed to Sansa since he wasn't there.

"I'll take it."

The maester gave it to Tyrion without reluctance. He was one of the few in the North to not show any disdain towards the Lannisters. Perhaps he thought there couldn't be anything worse after the Boltons. Wolkan walked away and Tyrion unrolled the small paper.

Podrick yawned. "Are you tired, Podrik? You can go to sleep. We already have four guards at our doors." Tyrion began to read.

"Very well, my lord. Is there anything you need me to do for tomorrow? My lord?"

Podrik asked the latter because Tyrion hadn't answered him. The Starks had a gift to make him speechless. He burst into the room, slamming the door.

"Be careful, you're going to wake her up!" Sansa protested immediately.

Tyrion ignored her protest. "Sansa, they found him. They found your brother. Bran."

Chapter End Notes

I must warn you that sadly, we won't get to see Tyrion and Sansa for a while. The reason is simple, there are too many events happening in multiple storylines. Several characters took different paths once more (Jon is going back to the Wall, Mira to Ironrath, Asher is at Highpoint, Cersei and Jaime are in King's Landing, Daenerys/Trystane/Kinvara are coming to Westeros but landing in different places, and there's the survivor of the Great Sept as well). The next few chapters are mostly setup chapters for all the storylines, before the real action begins. To be honest, I'm eager to be done with these chapters so I can write and publish the events to which the whole story is leading. Battles are coming, and they're coming everywhere. Tyrion and Sansa will return as more proeminent POV after the setup is done.

Please review

Next chapter : a queen
Daenerys IV

Chapter Notes

Daenerys comes back home.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

DAENERYS IV

A blow of wind struck her hard in the face, but she didn't flinch. It was nothing compared to how it hit her when she rode Drogon, and she managed to stay on his back in two battles. Daenerys Targaryen could claim her first victory in Westeros a few hours ago when they met the fleet of Dragonstone. It was a small fleet, just like hers, but she had dragons. Just like in Meereen, that was all she needed. She flew against the enemy with her three children and burned three ships at the front of their little armada, then three more at the rear. The battle didn't last long. Of the thirty ships their enemies had, she captured ten, sunk more and only a few escaped. She didn't lose a single ship.

Now she was waiting on the deck on her command ship, looking at the small boat slowly approaching. She sent the captain of the ship to the island two hours ago to ask whoever commanded the garrison of Dragonstone to come for a parley on her ship. She wouldn’t go on an enemy territory. She didn’t trust them to hold their promises. Now the boat that left with the captain was coming back.

“Remind me who is ruling Dragonstone,” Daenerys ordered.

“When I left, Dragonstone was being held by Ser Atos Myatt, a knight in service of House Lannister. Initially, he was to hold it until the time Prince Trystane and Princess Myrcella were to claim it. He may still be the one leading its garrison,” Lord Varys explained.

Myrcella Baratheon would never hold Dragonstone now that she was dead. “No matter who’s leading now, he will have to bend the knee.”

“Indeed, it would be in his interest.”

She always gave a chance to surrender to her enemies. However, if they refused to surrender, they were to face her wrath, like the masters in Essos. She knew nothing of House Myatt, except that they were bannermen to the Lannisters. After some reflection, Daenerys had come to the decision that she would give a chance to the Lannisters, to the Starks, to the Baratheons and to whoever had fought against her father to surrender to her rule and proclaim her queen. If they refused, she would burn their castles and place people she trusted to rule their territories, but only if they refused to acknowledge her as their queen. After all, the leaders of the rebellion who destroyed her family were all dead. Robert Baratheon, Tywin Lannister, Eddard Stark, Jon Arryn, they were all gone. It was their children now who held their castles and their lands, and if Daenerys couldn’t hold children responsible for their parents’ crimes back in Meereen, she couldn’t do it either. She would never forget the wrongs committed against her family, but she wouldn’t make innocents pay for that. Still, there were some she would have no choice to execute. Varys believed there would be no way to keep Cersei Lannister alive. There was also her brother, the Kingslayer, who murdered her father. As for the other brother, the actual Lord of Casterly Rock, she would see. She would probably have to fight against him if she killed his brother and sister. Varys seemed uncertain when it came to the
usurper, Tommen Baratheon, but didn’t believe he would be allowed to surrender by his advisors.

The boat was close now. Daenerys could distinguish its occupants. The captain, a Dornishman in the thirties, was accompanied by the oarsmen and another man in red armor. If the colors were any indication, Daenerys assumed he was serving the Lannisters. She thought she remembered seeing a few men wearing a similar outfit during the battle.

“Is that him?” she asked.

“Possibly, your Grace. He’s wearing a Lannister armor, after all,” Varys answered.

“Are all Lannisters wearing the same armor?”

“Similar ones, yes. The lords and the knights at least, and their commanders, of course. Most of their infantrymen as well, though not the archers. They are more lightly armored. And of course the sellswords following their armies are dressed differently.”

The boat came close to the hull of the ship and a ladder was thrown to allow the men inside to climb on board. Daenerys had her closest advisors with her for these negotiations, the first she would make with Westerosi. She negotiated with Essosi quite often, but never with men from her country. She tried to maintain a self-assured appearance, but in truth she was nervous. Dragonstone was carved with magic, her brother once told her, and she wasn’t sure that dragon flame could tame it. If the garrison refused to surrender, they might lose precious time besieging the island, time that could allow the usurper to send reinforcements. The troubles in the Stormlands could keep him occupied for a time, but between a threat in the neighborhood of the capital and another one far away, Daenerys had no difficulty to imagine what his choice might be.

As the man in red armor climbed the ladder into her ship, Daenerys looked at her advisors. Lord Varys was in retreat, behind her. Kinvara seemed calm as well. Grey Worm wasn’t present, nor was Prince Trystane or Ser Jorah Mormont. They were leading the operations in the Stormlands. Hopefully, they would take the castle of the Baratheons before she joined them. When they neared Westeros, they divided their forces in two, the biggest part heading for the Stormlands while a smaller force headed for Dragonstone where she would claim back her family’s possession. The island belonged to her family. Her mother named her Princess of Dragonstone at her birth, after her father died, and the castle was shaped by the first Targaryens who came from Valyria.

The Dornish captain came, followed by the red knight, and bowed before her. “Your Grace, this is Ser Atos Myatt, commander of the garrison of Dragonstone.”

It seemed Varys’s information was still actual. Daenerys eyed the knight closely. He didn’t bow to her. He simply lowered his head for a moment, his helmet under his arm. He looked back straight at her, but she could see he was nervous. Over her head, Drogon screamed.

“You stand before Daenerys Stormborn of the House Targaryen, the First of Her Name, the Unburnt, Queen of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, Lady of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm, Queen of Meereen, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Breaker of Chains and Mother of Dragons,” a man she chose as her herald announced. She missed Missandei.

“Your Grace.” The knight acknowledged her title by lowering his head again. “I come here in peace at your demand and I am ready to listen to whatever you have to say. However, if you would allow me, I have some things to say first.”

“As you wish. Say what you want,” Daenerys replied. She would let him speak first, let him reveal his intentions before she revealed hers.
“I have no wish to see any of my men die. More than enough of them have died in the wars that just ended and they’re all tired of fighting. But I have orders to hold Dragonstone for the king. I ask you to turn around and go back to Essos. I will speak for you to the king and to my liege lord and do everything I can to convince them to leave you alone. I can’t promise you I will succeed, but I believe they will be ready to consider your incursion on our shores as a simple raid that could be settled by a treaty. This is my offer, but I’m ready to negotiate if that is your wish.”

Daenerys wasn’t that surprised by the offer. Just like the Wise Masters of Yunkai, this man was trying to send her away so they wouldn’t have to fight her. They should know better. “I’m afraid I must decline your proposition. The Iron Throne belongs to me, as it belonged to my father before, and his father before him. I was born to rule the Seven Kingdoms, and I will rule the Seven Kingdoms. You can either bend the knee immediately and swear fealty to me, or you can die fighting for an usurper who would never fight or die for you.”

She could see the fear in the knight’s eyes, although he tried to dissimulate it. “Your Grace, this is not something I can accept. My house has served House Lannister loyally for centuries. Until Lord Lannister bends the knee to you, I cannot turn against the king he serves.”

“This king is already dead. If the Lannisters keep fighting for him, they will be doomed, and so will be any house who will follow them, including yours.”

“Maybe, but no one knows what the future holds for us, your Grace, and I received orders from the lord I swore to serve. And he ordered me to keep this island for the king.”

“Tommen Baratheon doesn’t have a long reign ahead, good ser,” Lord Varys intervened. “His uncle is far in the North with most of his forces and he is losing what support he has in the south. Our little armada here is but a small portion of our forces. With the dragons at our side, fighting for the usurper is foolish. You stand before your rightful queen. Kneel, and she will let you live.”

Ser Myatt looked at eunuch for a moment. “It seems you are unaware of the recent events. Tommen Baratheon is dead.”

The surprise Daenerys felt was soon replaced with joy. Things were going even better than she thought. “Then it seems you have no usurper to fight for,” Daenerys said.

“I serve another king, your Grace.”

“May we know who this king is?” the Spider asked.

“I serve Jon Snow, the King in the North, and the King of Westeros.”

Daenerys had never heard of him. That name was entirely unknown to her. She looked at Varys who answered indirectly. “I find it strange that Lord Tyrion Lannister decided to follow the bastard son of Eddard Stark, and even more that he proclaimed him king for all Westeros.”

“Jon Snow is not the son of Eddard Stark. He is the rightful heir to the Iron Throne.” He took a piece of paper in his pants. “This is the declaration of my lord for the king.”

After a moment of hesitation, Daenerys made a sign to a servant to bring her the paper. Tyrion Lannister, the Lord of Casterly Rock, announced that he declared Jon Snow, the son of Rhaegar Targaryen and Lyanna Stark, born at the Tower of Joy at the end of the usurper’s war, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms. He also gave the order to the garrison of Dragonstone to hold the island and its attendant territories for their new king against any other person who would fight for someone else.

Daenerys handed the message to Varys, keeping her eyes on the knight. “This is an outright lie,” she
declared.

“It is not my place to say if my lord is lying or telling the truth. I am loyal to House Lannister.”

“Your loyalty goes first to my house as the rightful rulers of the Seven Kingdoms, and the Lannisters betrayed my house. They rebelled against the Crown, broke their oaths. You serve oathbreakers and kingslayers.”

“With all your respect, your Grace, my family served the Lannisters before your family came to Westeros. We served them when they were King of the Rock, we kept serving them under your house’s rule, we continued to serve them after you were gone and we will continue to serve them no matter who proclaims himself, or herself, king or queen.”

Wasn’t he afraid? She could see he was, but he didn’t flinch. He didn’t give any sign that he would bend the knee before her. “I give you a chance to live to you and your men. You said you didn’t want them to die. I give you a choice between life and death. What do you choose?”

“If this means choosing between dishonor and honor, then I choose death, your Grace.”

A silence followed. Daenerys looked at the man. Why did he want so badly to die for a house who murdered children when she offered him the chance to live? Even the slave masters weren’t that determined. When they saw everything was lost, they begged her to let them live and accepted whatever condition she imposed on them. Would that man change his mind when the castle of Dragonstone would burn?

“Your Grace, maybe we could discuss this in private, away from prying ears,” Kinvara suggested.

“I agree. Stay here, ser. We will decide what to do of you.”

She walked away, followed by her two advisors. When the door of the cabin closed, she went to sit, gathering her thoughts.

“This man is stupid,” the High Priestess stated, as if she was giving a sentence. “He thinks that by remaining loyal to a house his family served for years, this makes him worthy or honorable.”

“Some men value themselves through loyalty,” the eunuch said.

“That doesn’t make them less stupid. Being loyal to a man only because your father was loyal to him or his father before him is as foolish as to keep following gods because your forebears followed them.”

“It helps to maintain stability in the country.”

“So far, this stability mainly allowed monsters and tyrants to rule the world.”

“Is it true?” Daenerys cut their argument. Varys and Kinvara didn’t like each other, and right now she didn’t need any of their quarrelling. “What this man says about Jon Snow, being my… nephew?”

The eunuch cleared his throat. “I had no access to any information going in that sense, your Grace, and I can tell you I know most of what is going on in Westeros. I didn’t know Tommen Baratheon was dead because we spent the last months at sea and my little birds in the West take more time to bring me news when I’m in the East.”

“So this is a lie.”
“Most certainly. Eddard Stark proclaimed the boy his before the entire world. I don’t see any reason why he would lie about this. I never saw Jon Snow, but from what my little birds are telling me, he is the very image of his father. I highly doubt he has any link with your family.”

“This is quite a great lie all the same,” Kinvara remarked.

“Indeed, but we must admit the lie was pretty well used. Tyrion Lannister must be behind the idea. I don’t believe he would turn against his nephew. He always seemed fond of Tommen. However, if he’s dead, then Cersei Lannister most likely took control of King’s Landing, and she and Lord Tyrion hate each other. Tyrion Lannister is a good man, but he’s not afraid of lying when necessary. During the war, he had the High Septon tell everyone in King’s Landing that Stannis Baratheon would burn the Great Sept of Baelor if he took the city. Perhaps he wasn’t wrong about it, but we had nothing to lead us to think that Stannis was actually planning this. Still, this is a well concocted lie. It is true that Ned Stark’s bastard son was born at the end of Robert’s Rebellion, and we don’t know who his mother is. What I find strange, however, is that Tyrion Lannister chose the Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch as king. There is no precedent of a brother of the Night’s Watch forsaking his vows without being executed.”

The eunuch said the two last sentences with a different tone. He looked lost in his thoughts. “My brother never had any child with Lyanna Stark. She died during the war. This is only a lie, and I will defeat Jon Snow when the time comes. For now, we must focus on taking King’s Landing, and to take King’s Landing I need Dragonstone,” Daenerys said.

“I agree. Dragonstone must fall, but Ser Atos Myatt will not surrender it, not if it means bending the knee to a queen the Lannisters oppose.”

“Can the dragons take it? I never saw that kind of stone before, and it was made by the Valyrians. Can we take it without heavy losses?”

The Spider pursed his lips. “I wouldn’t place a bet on it. It is possible that the beasts could frighten the men inside, but we can’t be sure. And Dragonstone has scorpions on its battlements. One projectile well placed and one of the dragons could die, which is the last thing we need right now, right when our invasion is beginning.”

It was true. Daenerys couldn’t allow to lose one of her children. The effects would be devastating on the morale of her troops. Anyway, she couldn’t let someone hurt them. They were her children, the only children she would ever have.

“We must force him to surrender,” she declared.

“He said he wouldn’t bend the knee, that he would remain loyal to House Lannister,” Kinvara pointed out. “If we want Dragonstone so much without a fight, we must make him surrender without forcing him to serve you, your Grace.”

Daenerys thought about that. “How many men are there inside the castle?” she asked.

“The garrison must be about two hundred men, three hundred at most,” Varys informed her.

*Three hundred men.* Her dragons would kill them easily in an open field battle. Only, this would not be a battle in an open field. It would be a siege, a siege she couldn’t afford. She needed Dragonstone, and she needed it now.

“Would he accept to surrender the castle if we allowed him to leave with his men?” she asked.

“Maybe. Though they would go to the rest of the Lannister army and reinforce it,” Varys replied.
“The Lannisters already have tens of thousand men in their ranks. A few hundred more won’t make any difference when they will face my dragons. We will allow him to leave with two ships, two that are in good state. I want the word of my return to spread.”

Wherever they would go, these men would tell what they saw. Her dragons, the ships that burned, they would speak about that. When they returned to Ser Myatt with their offer, he accepted. He was given two hours to leave the castle with his men. Daenerys watched their two ships leave the harbor of Dragonstone. Her own fleet let them pass. Once they were gone, she sent one of her own ships into the harbor to dock. She watched from afar as the banner of House Lannister was dropped from the battlements and replaced by the red dragon with three heads on a black field. Her command ship sailed forward to enter the harbor and docked. The crew of her ship was mostly Dornish, like the captain, and well trained at sea, so they had no difficulty to berth.

Daenerys let two Unsullied walk down the ramp when it was lowered before she followed. One moment before she stepped on the dock, she stopped. Then she made the step forward, and for the first time in almost twenty years, she set foot on the ground of her country. She looked ahead of her to see the black castle, shapes of dragons everywhere, threatening, imposing. Her ancestors built it, and this was the place where she was born.

The great doors that led to the castle were open. Unsullied were already taking the walkway up to the fortress, to make sure the Lannisters left no surprise behind them. After a long moment of unbearable waiting, she walked forward with her advisors and began to climb to her castle. The way was long, but the closer she got to the fortress, the more it was impressive. Inside, the walls, floors and ceilings were all made of the black stone of the island. Daenerys put her hand on the walls to feel the heat coming from it. Some places seemed familiar, perhaps fragments of a long lost childhood she couldn’t remember with precision. She was only a baby when they left the island, she and Viserys.

They arrived in the Great Hall. Immediately, her eyes caught sight of something displeasing, very displeasing. A huge banner of a black stag on a field of gold was displayed behind the throne. The sigil of the usurper, the man who took her family’s throne and forced her to live as an exile for all her life. Now he was gone, and his children and his brothers too, and here she stood, still alive. Daenerys noticed a few other banners, all lined up on the two sides of the Hall, alternating between the golden lion and the black stag, the two families who destroyed hers.

She felt anger rising in her chest as she looked at the banners of her enemies displayed in her home, the very place where she came into the world, where her mother gave her life so she could live. **Burn them all.** That’s what she wanted for these huge pieces of fabric.

As if the gods heard her prayers, the nearest banner with a golden lion caught fire. She saw with fascination the flames eating away the beast. A lion might have claws, but against fire, he could do nothing. He was defenseless. She knew the words of House Lannister were *Hear me Roar.* Well, they could roar all they wanted as the fire devoured them. Her family had her own words.

“Fire and Blood.” Kinvara said the words as she thought about it. Daenerys looked at the High Priestess, who smirked and gazed on her left. Daenerys saw a second red banner catch fire. She returned the smirk of the woman and began to walk towards her throne. It wasn’t the Iron Throne, but it would do for the time being, until she took back everything that was hers. As she progressed towards the dais, she felt and heard other banners burning as she passed before them. When she reached the throne and turned to look at the Great Hall, all the stags and all the lions were burning. She sat and contemplated the scene, as her advisors knelt before her, surrounded by the fire. **Fire and Blood.**
This chapter is in some way divided in two sections. The first one is the negotiations with Atos Myatt, where Daenery faces for the first time the politics of Westeros and where it is brought to her knowledge that she has a nephew, a claim she considers to be a lie immediately. The second section is more symbolic, with Daenerys taking her "rightful place" and looking at her enemies burning, which may be a forecast for the future events.

Please review

Next chapter: Kinvara
Here's a chapter that I was very eager to publish. This is in some way the Arrival to Dragonstone part II. The Daenerys chapter was more centered over the symbolic aspect of the arrival in Westeros. This one is about the actual decisions and implications of this arrival, and we continue to dig into Kinvara's character as well.

Some of you might be surprised by the names of a few characters in this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The room was far from empty, and richly furnished as it was expected for a highborn lady of Westeros. They left the furniture behind them. However, the shelves were empty. She brought all her potions and mixtures with her.

Kinvara was exploring the room where Melisandre of Asshai lived while she resided at Dragonstone. She knew everything the priestess from Asshai did from the moment she came to Westeros. She burned the statues of other gods, burned people alive, used spells that involved the torture of people in the hope to make the man she claimed to be the Lord’s Chosen one win an useless war. How many people died because of her?

Melisandre wasn’t under Kinvara’s authority. She came from Asshai, not from Volantis. Even the Red Priests of Volantis knew little of Asshai, except that the people coming from there seemed to have great powers. But these powers had a tendency to devour them from the inside, to turn them into something lifeless. Kinvara doubted that they really followed the Lord of Light. Maybe some believed they did, but they were wrong in their beliefs.

Kinvara was tired of this. Too often she saw members of her order fall into fanaticism, being ready to sacrifice people massively for the sake of pleasing R’hlloir. Many priests destroyed the work of R’hlloir, ruining the chance of their Lord to triumph with their crimes, their blindness and their stupidity. Melisandre was among those people. The Lord of Light taught them forgiveness, selflessness, love, to help those in need and to act for the greater good. Priests like Melisandre ruined this faith with their beliefs of killing everyone who refused to follow the Lord of Light. Moqorro did the same with his determination to kill whoever stood in the way of their order. And others like Thoros of Myr, who were supposed to give an example and to show how to live to their followers, did even worse than them.

The men and women who pretended to serve R’hlloir had destroyed everything good inside the order of the Red Priests and turned the faith in the Lord of Light into sadistic beliefs that killing and burning infidels were the greatest deeds to prove your faith into R’hlloir. Kinvara opposed this behavior within her order before and after she was named High Priestess, and she knew it would be a fight she would lead until the end of her days.

Staying in this room, thinking of that mad woman who burned innocent people alive made her sick. Kinvara turned her back on it and closed the door behind. She looked at her guards.
“I want a man positioned before this door at every hour, day and night. No one is to ever enter this room again.”

She walked away, leaving a curse on the room where Melisandre of Asshai slept, bathed, ate and practiced her dark magic for years. She calmed herself as she walked to the Chamber of the Painted Table, where Daenerys Stormborn would hold her first council in Westeros. On her way, she was joined by another Red Priest who would assist to the council at her side. Kinvara had brought twenty priests and a hundred members of the Fiery Hand with her from Essos to help her and the queen. Of all these priests, Revan was the most mysterious, even more than her. He had been in service to the Red Temple of Volantis before she began her apprenticeship, and no one knew who he was exactly, or where he came from. It wasn’t unusual for the Red Priests to know little on their fellows. When they joined the order, they forsook their name, their past, their family, and everything that came before they pledged their life to R’hllor. However, the High Priest and his closest advisors often knew much about the origins of every of their priests. With Revan, it was different. No one knew where he was born, or how old he was, or even how he looked like. His face was always hidden behind a mask, and no one ever saw him remove it. During the war for freedom in Volantis, he led the early strikes that took the masters by surprise, and he also led the assault on the port. If Moqorro was the political leader of the rebels, Revan was the military mind behind the victory at Volantis. Ruthless when necessary, he disapproved the burning of people most of the time, believing it was only useful in some very specific occasions and only from the perspective of the effect it could have on the morale of troops. He was a leader, someone people were ready to follow to their death, not because he threatened them, but because he convinced them and made them ready to die for a noble cause. He would be useful here in Westeros, for his skills as a warrior, as a military commander and as a missionary.

“What will be our first move?” he asked her.

“It will be to the queen to decide,” she replied.

“What if the queen is wrong?”

“Then we must guide her in the right direction. She is our only hope.”

“Right.”

The sword at his belt dangled a little as they moved forward. They arrived before the Chamber. An Unsullied soldier let them in. No one was here yet, so they waited. Revan closely observed the whole table that displayed a detailed map of the Seven Kingdoms. Kinvara’s gaze was fixed on one particular point in the south, a place consumed by fire. Her eyes were locked on it, thinking about all the people who died there, only because kings and queens decided they should die.

The queen and Varys came in. Daenerys Targaryen took place in the raised seat that was placed at the precise location of Dragonstone for the map. The queen looked at the painted table for some time, then she looked at all of them. “Shall we begin?”

“I questioned Maester Pylos and my little birds who work here,” the eunuch began. “It seems Ser Atos was honest. Jon Snow was proclaimed King in the North, and he is being supported by the North, the Riverlands, the Vale and the Westerlands. He has half the Seven Kingdoms on his side now.”

“What are his forces? How many men does he have in his army?” Daenerys asked.

“The North and the Riverlands were quite spent by the War of the Five Kings, but they can still align about ten thousand men each. The Westerlands can muster more, and the Vale of Arryn is intact. I
would say that Jon Snow could align seventy thousand men on the battlefield, but most of them are in the North right now. We have some time before they arrive in the Crownlands, but we must act quickly.”

“What can you tell me about this Jon Snow?”

“Not much. I never met him. He is the natural born son of Lord Eddard Stark, and from what my little birds in the North say, he looks a lot like his father. He joined the Night’s Watch when his father became Hand of the King and survived the war against the wildlings. He was made Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch while Stannis Baratheon was at the Wall, then assembled an army made of wildlings and a few northern lords when House Bolton was declared traitor to the Crown and marched on Winterfell. He joined his forces to the Lannister forces who invaded the North and they took Winterfell. He seems to be a decent swordsman and a good leader overall, though if he is as honorable as his father was, I don’t give him much time to live. But Jon Snow is not the one we should worry about, I think.”

The queen frowned. “What do you mean?”

“The man we should worry about is the man behind his proclamation as king. Tyrion Lannister. He is the Lord of Casterly Rock and certainly the true power behind Jon Snow.”

“How could a Lannister end up working with a Stark? The two families were at war not long ago.”

“Most of the people who started this war are dead now,” the Spider explained. “Tywin Lannister, Joffrey Baratheon, Eddard Stark and Robb Stark are gone and were the ones to ignite this conflict. Lord Tyrion became Warden of the West at his father’s death, and he is married to Jon Snow’s sister, the Lady Sansa. Tyrion and Cersei Lannister always hated each other. While he served as Hand of the King under Joffrey, they were always fighting for the power. She tried to have him killed a few times. I suppose he thought Jon Snow would make a better king than his sister. I know they met when the little lord visited the North before the war. Tyrion Lannister will never support his sister, that we can be sure of.”

“That is no surprise,” Kinvara commented. “Among the Lannisters, family doesn’t seem to mean much. This will make things easier for us.”

“I agree,” the queen said. “Cersei Lannister cannot rely on the support of Casterly Rock. What is her position?”

“Not very well,” Varys answered. “She destroyed the Great Sept of Baelor, by which she got rid of her opponents in King’s Landing, but she lost all the allies she had. She killed Mace Tyrell’s children in the process, which means the Reach will no longer help her. Her authority doesn’t go beyond the Crownlands, and even then, I doubt the lords there will fight for her when they see a great army marching against them with three dragons.”

“Then we must use this opportunity. King’s Landing is without defense. It is time to take it.”

The Master of Whisperers was silent. Revan spoke. “How many men Cersei Lannister can muster? What are the defenses of King’s Landing?” He pointed the region where the capital of the Seven Kingdoms should be, though it didn’t appear. King’s Landing wasn’t yet built when the Painted Table was carved.

“Strong walls, though they were probably damaged by the wildfire,” Varys replied. “As for the number of men, a few thousands, probably, but their loyalty will be wavering. The moment our queen’s men breach a gate, they will flee. The men we have with us at Dragonstone should be
enough. I could arrange for a few of my little birds to open the gates for us.”

Another silence followed. “How many people live in King’s Landing?”

“Half a million.”

“Can the Crownlands feed them?” Kinvara knew that Revan was looking at Varys as he asked the question.

“No. The city depends on the Reach and the Riverlands for its supplies. During the last war, Joffrey faced riots in the capital because the Tyrells closed the Rose Road.”

“So, if we take King’s Landing right now, we will be taking a starving city?”

“Yes, we will, and we might face riots just like Joffrey did during the war,” Varys recognized.

“That’s not something I can allow,” Daenerys Stormborn said. “The people living in King’s Landing are my people. I am their queen. They didn’t choose Cersei. I cannot let them starve. We will have to conquer the Reach and the Riverlands.”

“The Riverlands will not be of much help, your Grace. The countryside was entirely spoiled by the last war, both by the Lannisters and the northern armies. The Reach is what we need. The country was spared by the war so far.”

The queen nodded. “Then we will wait for Mace Tyrell to reply to our raven. If he refuses to bend the knee, we will have no choice but to conquer Highgarden.”

“Your Grace.” Kinvara intervened. “If I may, winter has come upon Westeros. Harvests are over. We need supplies right now for the capital if we don’t want thousands of innocent people to die. We must make sure the Tyrells accept to prevent that from happening.”

Kinvara knew what hunger was. A long time ago, before she became Kinvara, her parents used to work as much as slaves. The girl she once was hadn’t been lucky enough to have a hot meal every day. She wouldn’t let the people starve because the lords decided their wars were more important.

“I agree with the High Priestess,” Varys said, to her surprise. He seldom approved something she said. “To have the Tyrells by our side is vital. We need them. When Jon Snow comes south, we will need this kingdom with us, not against us. I’m afraid Tyrion Lannister may already have proceeded to include them in the alliance supporting Jon Snow. Cersei Lannister killed Ser Loras and Lady Margaery Tyrell. Lord Mace will do everything to get his revenge for the death of his children, and as long as Lord Tyrion promises him Cersei’s head, I’m afraid he could declare himself for Jon Snow.”

“I can promise him Cersei’s head without problem as well,” Daenerys said.

“Maybe, but Jon Snow has something you don’t, your Grace. A free hand, for marriage.”

Daenerys’s face dropped a little. “My hand is free as well.”

“Officially, yes,” Varys bowed his head. “However, Doran Martell still expects you to marry his son, and making an arrangement of that type with House Tyrell could endanger our alliance with Dorne.”

“Mace Tyrell’s children are all dead,” Kinvara observed. “He has no one to offer in marriage.”

“No children, indeed, but several cousins, nephews and nieces. If Tyrion Lannister offers Mace
Tyrell to marry one of them to Jon Snow, he might be very tempted to fight for him.”

Kinvara wasn’t surprised. When you were a noble man, your children could be killed, but it wouldn’t stop you from declaring yourself for the person who would offer you the most. These people were only interested by power.

“Very well,” Daenerys said. “Does any of you have a way to gain the Tyrell’s support without engaging myself?”

A long silence followed. Kinvara knew they had to offer the Tyrells something. However, she knew the politics of the Free Cities much better than those of Westeros and wasn’t sure what could equal a crown in the eyes of a Tyrell.

“Wasn’t the city of Lannisport attacked by the Ironborn recently?” Revan asked suddenly.

“Yes,” the eunuch replied. “From what we can tell, the city is in ruins.”

“And the harbor? The fleet?”

“Probably the same.”

The priest kept looking at the map. “The Ironborn will attack the Reach sooner or later. Euron Greyjoy will threaten their shores very soon, and we already have Yara Greyjoy sailing for the Iron Islands. If we help the Tyrells to defeat the Ironborn, we will be offering them something the Imp can’t offer. He cannot help them against the Iron Islands. We can defeat Euron Greyjoy with Yara’s ships joined by the fleets of the Arbor and Oldtown on the sea while our troops conquer the Stormlands, then bring our forces towards King’s Landing with the Tyrells. The city will be surrounded on two sides and we will be able to launch an assault from the south with the bulk of our forces and from the north with our forces here at Dragonstone. If we do this quickly, we might take the city before Jon Snow’s forces cross the Riverlands.”

Varys seemed thoughtful for a moment. “It could work. Help against Euron Greyjoy should be enough to gain the Tyrell’s alliance.”

Kinvara knew she had been right to bring Revan with her. As a strategist, few could equal him.

“Very well,” Daenerys declared. “I will fly to Highgarden and negotiate with Mace Tyrell myself.”

“Your Grace, I don’t believe this is a good idea to endanger yourself.”

“When the Tyrells see Drogon, Rhaegal and Viserion, they won’t dare to cause me any harm. This will be one more reason for them to support my claim, and we need to act quickly if we are to get the Tyrells before Jon Snow does.”

“Your Grace, I don’t believe…” Varys tried again.

“Lord Varys, I thank you for your concerns, but if I’m not ready to risk my life for my people, then I’m not worthy of being a queen. Why would the people of the Seven Kingdoms risk their lives for me if I can’t risk mine for them?”

The eunuch had nothing to oppose to this, but it was obvious that he disapproved. Revan kept staring at the painted table all the while.

“Good, the matter is closed,” the queen resumed. “Do we have any news from the Stormlands?”

“No much, your Grace,” Varys answered. “Prince Trystane and Ser Jorah didn’t send any report
since they don’t know yet that we have taken Dragonstone, but from the ravens Pylos received recently, it seems a few castles already fell. The island of Tarth is under our control, as are Haystack Hall and Bronzegate. Our armies might already be at Storm’s End as we speak. We could send a raven to one of the fallen castles and ask a report from your commanders.”

“I agree. I will stop by Storm’s End on my way to Highgarden. My dragons could persuade whoever is holding the castle to surrender. Any other news of interest?”

“No, your Grace.”

“Very well. I would like you to show me to Maester Pylos, Lord Varys, then. I want ravens sent through all the Seven Kingdoms announcing my return and demanding every lord to bend the knee.”

“Of course, your Grace. If you want to follow me.”

“You are dismissed,” Daenerys told to Kinvara and Revan.

“Your Grace,” Kinvara said at the moment. “May I have a moment with you, alone?”

Daenerys looked at her, and Kinvara made her understand with her eyes that it was important. She had better chance to convince the queen if she was all alone with her. The queen trusted her, in general.

“As you wish. Please go out, both.” Varys and Raven left, bowing before the queen before exiting through the door, Revan making one more bow before Kinvara. “You didn’t talk a lot,” the queen observed when they were gone.

“The politics of the Seven Kingdoms and wars are not what I’m best at,” Kinvara recognized.

Daenerys nodded. “What do you want?”

“The eunuch wasn’t the only one to look at the messages Dragonstone received recently. I took a look myself, and there’s a message from the Wall that I found that was… disturbing.” Kinvara took the scroll she hid in her sleeves and gave it to the queen. As Daenerys Stormborn read it, she continued. “It was recently sent by Eddison Tollett, the new Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch. All the messages coming from Castle Black for the last two years asked for men, and the three Lord Commanders who wrote all said the same: the dead are coming.”

Daenerys Stormborn frowned and looked at her. “What does that mean?”

“Among your people, there is a legend about creatures called the White Walkers, ice demons who appeared eight thousand years ago during the Long Night and who almost killed every human. They can turn the dead into wights who obey them and kill more people so they can add them to their army. In my order, we call them the Others. They are the servants of the Great Other. They disappeared for thousands of years, and now they are back.”

The queen looked at her with an incredulous expression. “You want me to believe that there are demons who are coming to turn all of us into some sort of… walking dead?”

“I want you to believe the truth, your Grace. For now, the Others only gathered men north of the Wall, but the day is coming where they will try to breach the Wall, and when they do and they invade the Seven Kingdoms, it will be a matter of months before all the livings are gone. And when it happens, it won’t matter who sits on the Iron Throne.”

She could see that the queen didn’t believe her. “Let’s suppose that what you say is true, so far
these… dead demons stayed north of the Wall. Can they breach the Wall? And when will they try?”

“I don’t know. There is magic in the Wall that could stop them, but they will try to get through it, and very soon. The great war is coming, and when it’s there, you’ll need to be in the North to fight the Others.”

Daenerys Targaryen looked at her, not looking sure of what to believe. She laid the scroll on the painted table. “For now, the Others didn’t show themselves, and the North is occupied by my enemies. Let’s hope that when they come, Jon Snow bent the knee before me. Now, I have ravens to send.”

Kinvara stayed in the Chamber of the Painted Table for some time afterwards after Daenerys Targaryen left. The queen didn’t believe her. Who would? She would need time to convince her, but did they have enough time before them? The messages from Castle Black were alarming. The most recent ravens were begging for men rather than asking for them. Daenerys Stormborn had to reach the North with her dragons before all was lost. She was Azor Ahai reborn. Who else could be? Right now, the only way to get her in the North as quickly as possible was to make sure all the Seven Kingdoms bowed before her.

Kinvara looked at the Painted Table. Their armies were conquering the Stormlands right now. There were fights between the Tyrells and the Martells on their frontiers. The Iron Islands were raiding the coasts of the Westerlands, and soon the Reach. In the North, a pretender was supported by half of Westeros, claiming to be the queen’s nephew. They were all fighting each other when they should all side together to face the real threat. Instead, the highborn people were burning and plundering cities. She looked at Lannisport, then at the place where King’s Landing should be. What would be the next place to burn?

The High Priestess kept staring at the table for a very long time. How many people lived there, with rulers who didn’t care if they were to die tomorrow? She looked at Casterly Rock, the Hightower, the Eyrie. Everywhere, the men and women from the nobility loved to live high above the smallfolk. The only place where lowborn people could stand higher was at the Wall, and there they froze themselves to death, not sitting on cushioned benches with servants pouring their wine and warm blankets covering their feet.

Later, Kinvara was in her rooms. She had taken simples rooms. There was a bed, a featherbed. A girl once hopped into a similar bed when she saw one for the first time. She used to sleep in a bed of straws with four other people. There was a table, with two chairs. A girl once sat with her whole family around a larger table, though roughly made, where they would pray before they ate what little they had. There was a chamber pot in the corner, made of lead. A girl once had no such thing. There was a wooden bucket in the room she sept, which she shared with half a dozen people. Sometimes, the girl had to go outside, in the streets, to relieve herself. There was a tray with food on the table. A girl would have jumped on the food and devoured it, afraid she wouldn’t be able to eat again before a few days. Kinvara had no use for food. The Lord of Light gave her everything she needed. She didn’t even need a bed to sleep.

There was an hearth. It was burning, fed by more than enough logs. The girl knew what it was to have an hearth. She loved to sit by it while her mother told her stories to her and her siblings. Later, someone would always forget to keep it lit, but she wouldn’t care, since she was warm enough. A serving girl came into the room and stopped before the untouched tray.

“You didn’t eat, my lady?” she asked.

“I’m no lady,” Kinvara replied harshly, her back turned on the servant.
“Sorry, my…”

“Bring the food to someone who needs it.”

She heard the girl grab the tray behind, but then she dropped it on the table. She saw the servant approach the fire and taking a log of wood.

“What are you doing?” Kinvara asked her.

“I’m feeding the fire, my lady.”

“I’m not a lady, and I will feed the fire myself.”

“Sorry.” The girl let the log fall on the floor.

It was at this moment that Kinvara realized how dirty the girl was, how her hair was unkempt, how her ragged clothes hung to her scrawny body. As she walked back to the table, Kinvara felt guilt for speaking so harshly to her. Before, she could have been this girl.

“I changed my mind.” She heard the girl freeze behind her. “Eat the food yourself. You need it.”

After a moment, the girl answered. “Thank you, my lady.”

Kinvara didn’t bother to correct her this time. There were far worse things in the world than to call her my lady. She wasn’t a lady, and she would never be a lady. She looked at the fire as the serving girl ate everything on the tray, not looking at her a single time. She could have been that girl once, but that was in the past. She was no longer that girl.

When the servant was gone, Kinvara went to take three logs and threw them into the hearth. She always made her own fires, one way or another, and she wouldn’t let anyone made them for her. She sat comfortably in her chair and watched the flames dancing around her. She closed her eyes and prayed, then she opened them and watched the fire for some time. She closed her eyes again and said another prayer before looking in the fire once more. She repeated the process again and again for a very long time. Each time, the shadows and forms she could see in the flames turned more distinct.

The visions she received were not very clear all the same. Swords. Arrows. Battles. Dragons. Storms. Darkness. Fire. Snow. Fire. Snow. Fire. Ice. Eyes. Blue eyes. They were watching her. In these eyes, she saw ice cracking, and the dead following, and the servants of the Great Other leading them. They were many. Too many.

The vision stopped. Kinvara was panting. They’re coming. They’re coming soon. Very soon. Too soon. They didn’t have much time left. She summoned one of her own servants she brought with her from Meereen and told him to gather all the priests.

They met in the Chamber of the Painted Table. Despite the fact they were in the middle of the night, the Unsullied who guarded the room let them meet there. The Red Priests were serving the queen, so the Unsullied had no reason to stop them from meeting at night. When Kinvara came in, they were all there, the twenty Red Priests, men and women who crossed the Narrow Sea with Daenerys Stormborn to advise her and help her in the Seven Kingdoms, and also to spread the word of R’hllor in Westeros. They all turned silent when she entered. All were sworn to the Red Temple of Volantis.

“May the Lord of Light watch over us,” she said.

“For the night is dark and full of terrors,” they all replied as one. They stood in a circle around the painted table.
“I summoned you tonight because the Lord granted me a vision. The Others are coming. It’s not a matter of years before they come. Now it’s a matter of months, maybe weeks or days.”

“Then it is a blessing that Daenerys Stormborn came to Westeros now. It is yet one more proof that she is the Lord’s Chosen One,” a Red Priestess said.

“Maybe, but Daenerys Stormborn will need help in order to defeat the servants of the Great Other. The great war is not still to come. It already started. For now, the Others are kept behind the structure they call the Wall, but it won’t last. Westeros must be united behind the Mother of Dragons when they come south.”

“We must have faith in our Lord,” a man declared. “He sent us Daenerys Stormborn. He won’t fail us.”

“Our Lord will not fail us, true, but he doesn’t expect us to do nothing and only wait for him to save us. We must work for our own salvation, and our salvation will not only come through prayers or faith. The people of Westeros must all stand with the queen, lowborn and highborn alike. That’s why I’m sending you all on the continent. You are to convince the people and their lords that they must unite behind Daenerys Targaryen or else they are doomed.”

They all nodded in agreement, but she wasn’t done. “Let me be clear. Our work is to convince the people to serve the queen Daenerys. She is Azor Ahai reborn. Our primary objective is to convince the people to follow her, not the Lord of Light.” She let her words sink in the room.

“But how the people will follow Daenerys Stormborn if they don’t believe in the Lord of Light?” the youngest priest asked.

“Many people already serve her and fight for her, and they do not believe in our Lord. Right now, our objective is to defeat the Others, not to convert Westeros. There will be no one left to believe in our Lord if everyone dies at the hands of his enemy’s servants. Our goal right now is not to convince that R’hhlor is the only true god, but to make everyone follow the savior, no matter the reason. The conversion of Westeros will come by itself, after we’ve defeated the great enemy. You are not to provoke the other religions or to start hostilities over theological matters. Do you understand?”

All the priests agreed, though some did so reluctantly. Kinvara would have to keep an eye on them. Although she only brought people who truly believed in the Lord of Light and in Daenerys Stormborn, she couldn’t be totally sure of the means they would use to serve the Lord and the queen.

“All of you are to leave as soon as you can,” she resumed. “Remus, Nymphadora, I’m sending you to Dorne. Albus, Sirius, Minerva, you’re going to the Reach. I want one of you in Oldtown and another one near Highgarden at all times. Riyah, Darren, Alexander, I want you in the Stormlands. Priscilla and Eleanor, you leave for the Westerlands. Yennefer, you will stay in King’s Landing with Vesemir. Triss and Cirilla, you take care of the Riverlands. Geralt, you’re going to follow me. Jolee and Juhani, you get the Vale. Bastilla and Meetra, you must leave for the North as quickly as possible. Try to see if this Jon Snow would be receptive to an alliance with Daenerys Stormborn. As for you, Revan, you will stay by the side of the queen. Your experience in war strategy and politics will be more than valuable to her. Has any of you questions, or anything to share?” No one replied.

“Then may the Lord of Light watch over you.”

“For the night is dark and full of terrors,” they all replied again.

They disbanded, everyone knowing his mission. Soon, Kinvara was alone with the map painted on the table. Well, not entirely alone. Revan stayed behind. She couldn’t see his eyes, but she didn’t think she was mistaking when she thought he was examining the table and every detail it displayed.
Kinvara had her eyes fixed on one point in particular of the table again, the same than before, and she forced herself to look away.

“Do you think Daenerys Stormborn can conquer all Westeros before the Others come?” she asked her fellow priest.

“She might succeed, if everything goes as planned, but in war, things never go as planned. Let’s hope the servants of the Great Other don’t cross the Wall immediately. If they do, everything is lost.”

“But do you think we have a chance?” Kinvara had faith in her Lord, but her faith in humans wasn’t as strong as she wished it was.

“We have. The best way would be to defeat our enemies with minimal losses, or even to turn them into allies without battle. We will have more men to fight our enemies,” Revan stated.

“Cersei Lannister will never bend the knee to Daenerys Targaryen. As for the Ironborn, they will never surrender until we bring them on their knees by force.”

“Then let’s hope the Tyrells accept our alliance and that Jon Snow is reasonable enough to do just like Torrhen Stark did three centuries ago.”

“And let’s hope the people of the Seven Kingdoms will not ignore everything we say only because we bring a foreign faith.”

“Who we are is not important. Our message is.”

With that, Revan left, and Kinvara really found herself alone with the Painted Table. Again, her eyes were drawn to a single point on the map. She stayed there for an hour, only looking at one specific place. Then she left and went to sleep what little she needed. In her sleep, she could hear the cries of a baby, abandoned by her mother.

Chapter End Notes

Many of you probably realized it, but the Red Priests in this chapter all bear names of characters with some sort of magical power from books, movies or video games. Remus, Nymphadora, Albus, Sirius and Minerva are from Harry Potter of J. K. Rowling (most of you probably noticed these ones, especially). Riyah, Darren, Alexander, Priscilla and Eleanor are from the Black Mage series of Rachel Carter, four books that I devored not long ago. Yennefer, Vesemir, Triss, Cirilla and Geralt are from the Witcher games. Jolee, Juhani, Bastila, Meetra and Revan are from the video games Star Wars : Knights of the Old Republic.

I inserted these names for fun and they are only there as cameos at best, except for Revan who is very similar to the character in the video game and who will play a secondary role in the story. He’s my favorite video game character. :)

Please review

Next chapter : Cersei
Cersei VIII

Chapter Notes

We come back for a Cersei chapter, the last one before a good time since a lot of the following chapters will turn around the events in the North and the people around Daenerys.

Good news, my master's thesis is done. Writing this fic will be easier from now on.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CERSEI VIII

To all the noblemen and noblewomen of Westeros,

From this day on, I, Daenerys Stormborn, Of the House Targaryen, the First of Her Name, the Unburnt, Queen of Meereen, Queen of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, the Breaker of Chains, the Mother of Dragons, will be the one true queen of Westeros.

I grant a pardon to everyone who served the Usurper, Robert Baratheon, and his children. Those who swear fealty and bend the knee to me and to my house will keep their lands and titles. However, whoever refuses to swear fealty to me and House Targaryen will be branded traitors and treated as such. I offer the hand of peace and the gift of life to everyone in Westeros. Those who shall reject this gift will be shown no mercy and will know the wrath of the dragon.

Qyburn ended the reading of the raven they received a few days ago from Dragonstone. They were alone in her rooms, Cersei didn’t give much attention to the raven the first time it was brought to her attention, but then a ship from Dragonstone arrived in the harbor and the men on it told stories that they were attacked by a fleet displaying the banner of House Targaryen. Dragonstone had fallen, and most of the houses sworn to it as well, according to Qyburn. If you added to it the words they received from several castles in the Stormlands of a barbarian invasion, it was obvious they were facing a real threat. The Targaryen girl in Essos, the last grandchild of the Mad King, came back.

“How many castles did we lose in the Stormlands?” Cersei asked.

“It is impossible to know with certainty, but we received ravens from about twenty lords asking for help against barbarians riding horses who raided their lands and plundered their fields. The description fits the Dothrakis who live across the Narrow Sea. Is it true that Daenerys Stormborn was wed to a Dothraki warlord before the War of the five Kings?” Qyburn asked.

“Maybe. I’m not sure. It was a long time ago and we had more important matters to attend at the time.” They were at war against four other kings back then. A girl at the other side of the world was the least of their concerns. “So we don’t know how many castles we lost?”

“Not with certainty, your Grace, though some of the lords who wrote also spoke of banners of House Martell and said they were under siege. Lord Rogers of Amberly is the only one who wrote to tell us he was to surrender his castle to protect his people from the ravages of the invaders. Since Amberly is deep into the rainwood, we have to assume that half the Stormlands may have already
“fallen.”

“Any word from Storm’s End?”

“None, but I’m afraid it is only a matter of time before the castle falls.”

“Storm’s End has never fallen. It will not fall now either.”

“Maybe, your Grace, but the commander of the garrison may not be willing to resist long when he sees his lands spoiled by the Dothrakis. And we mustn’t forget the dragons.”

The dragons. The men who came from Dragonstone didn’t stop talking about them. They said they saw three of them, giant flying creatures with scales, spitting fire that burned ships like dried wood in a hearth. When she realized how such rumors could spread panic in the capital, Cersei had four men who talked about it more than the others hung and ordered the others to never speak about it again.

The dragons had been gone for over a century. They couldn’t be back. Varys told them Daenerys Targaryen had dragons with her in Meereen, but Varys betrayed them. He was a traitor. What told them he didn’t lie? However, now, it seemed he didn’t lie about it. This Targaryen girl was back with three grown dragons, a powerful fleet, an army of Dothraki raiders, and she was supported by Sunspear if they could rely on the reports of the banners with a sun that could be seen in the Stormlands. Cersei had sent all the troops of the Crownlands to the Blackwater Rush and ordered to sink all the bridges on the river to stop the Martells and the Tyrells to cross the river. This way, they would be kept out of the Crownlands and far away from King’s Landing. They were not to pass.

“Is there a way to get rid of the dragons? To kill them?” Surely a dragon could be killed. It was not easy, for sure, but it had to be possible.

Qyburn took some time to answer. “There are ways that are known. Queen Rhaenys’s dragon was killed by a scorpion’s bolt during the First Dornish War, when it pierced its eyes. However, the odds of this happening are not very strong.”

“Is there any other way?”

“Some dragons were killed with swords, or even clubs, but most were very young, only children. An adult dragon would be far more difficult to kill this way.”

Cersei settled a little more comfortably in her chair and inhaled deeply. “Very well. I want scorpions built on the battlements of the Red Keep everywhere. Everywhere.” She insisted on the word. With enough scorpions, the odds of hitting one dragon in the right place should increase enough to give them a good chance. One bolt could miss its target, but it would be bad luck if there wasn’t a single one on an hundred or a thousand that didn’t succeed.

“How many men do we have to guard the Blackwater?” she asked Qyburn.

“Five thousand, your Grace, from our accounts.”

“Is that really all?”

“I’m afraid so, your Grace. The lords of he Crownlands don’t seem able to make any more levies after the last war.”

“Nonsense. They can raise more, but they don’t want to.” If she was her father, they wouldn’t hesitate to give her all the men she asked. “We can’t rely on the Crownlands alone. We need more men. And I know precisely where to find some.” She took a sip of wine. This wine came from
Rosby. She refused to drink anything from Dorne or the Reach now. Everything they sent her was always trouble. “Fetch my brother.”

“As you wish, your Grace.”

Qyburn left and Cersei found herself alone, drinking down her cup. She wasn’t stupid. She knew her position was precarious. Everyone had turned against her, and everyone in the city wanted her dead. She didn’t care about what the people thought of her, but she knew that if one of these filthy rags found himself alone with her, he would kill her without second thoughts.

She had taken her precautions so that it would never happen. She reinforced the guard around the Red Keep, and never left it. She didn’t even leave it for the burial of Tommen’s ashes. She stood up and walked to the balcony. She seldom left her rooms nowadays. She let Qyburn make sure everyone did his job, and when she needed to see someone, she had him come to her.

She looked at the ruins of the Great Sept of Baelor, where her children were all buried. *Gold will be their crowns. Gold their shrouds.* They were gone, and so was her father and her mother. *Jaime and I are the last Lannisters, the last ones who count. We have enemies to the east, enemies to the west, enemies to the south, enemies to the north. I will defeat them all.*

She was looking at the west right now. Far away was Casterly Rock. Genna had refused to send them men. Cersei could still hear Qyburn’s quiet words as he read her answer. *Convince your brother to support your claim despite all the enemies you’ve made, and then we will talk about sending you men. Or else, if there’s any sense left in you, abandon your crown, come back home and let Tyrion find a way to save your head. For the sake of your father who was my brother, give up the Iron Throne before it’s too late.*

Cersei gripped the cup in her hand tightly. She was the queen. She would never abandon her crown. It was hers, only hers. *You’ll be queen. For a time. Then comes another, younger, more beautiful, to cast you down and take all you hold dear.* That would not happen. Her children were all dead. There was nothing dear left to her. That part of the prophecy couldn’t happen.

Jaime came inside at this moment. Qyburn said he made a good job overall, bringing back order in the streets of the city. People were trying to rebuild their houses. They could try, for all the good it would do. When winter would come, they would all die. Cersei wouldn’t.

“You asked for me, your Grace?” her brother asked. She noticed the mocking tone he used.

“You’re leaving,” she said, still staring at the horizon, not caring to face him.

“Leaving? Where?”

“The west. You will ride for the Westerlands before the sun sets. There, you will go to every castle, every village, even to Casterly Rock. You are to recruit every man and boy strong enough to hold a sword and to bring them all here to defend their queen. You will tell our aunt Genna that I am the queen now and that she has the choice to serve me or to die. If she still refuses to obey, you will kill her.”

Her brother snorted after a long time. “And you believe anyone will obey you?”

“If they don’t, you’ll only have to cut their heads for disobeying their queen.”

A moment of silence followed. “Are you sure you’re not the one who lost her head?”

“Refusing to obey your queen is treason, and you know better than anyone what’s the sentence for
“Treason.” She took another sip of wine.

“I think you don’t understand, Cersei. You are no queen. You have no kingdom. You barely have a hold on the Crownlands, and these lords will abandon you the moment a bigger army stands before them.”

“Be careful about what you say, brother.”

“Tell me why? Why should I be careful? You will order me to be put to death? It’s not enough for you to kill one brother, you want to kill both of them? Just like you killed your daughter-in-law?”

“The Sparrows murdered Margaery.”

“Not as much as you murdered Tommen.”

This time, she turned to face him, and she looked straight into his eyes. “I gave you an order. Do what I say. That’s the only thing you’re good at, doing what other people tell you to do. Follow the orders. I’m your queen. You are bound to obey me.”

“You’re wrong, sister. I never followed your orders because you’re the queen. I never did anything you asked because you were queen. I followed your orders, I did what you told me to do all these years, for two reasons: you were my sister, and I loved you. The latter is no longer true. The only reason why I stay here is the hope that I could convince you to abandon your foolish impression to be queen before it gets you killed. The Ironborn are raiding the coasts of the Westerlands, the Martells and the Tyrells want us dead, there’s a Targaryen who’s about to burn our asses with her dragons, and another one who controls half of the Seven Kingdoms and is supported by our brother. If you had any common sense, you would abandon your crown before it gets you killed.”

She looked at her twin, at the man she used to love. How could she love such an idiot? “You have your orders. You leave before sunset.”

She turned her back on him and dedicated her attention to her cup once again. If Jaime couldn’t bring any man to the capital, at least she would get rid of him. His presence had become more than annoying. He always mocked her, questioned her, rejected any decision she made as stupid. He was her own brother, her own flesh and blood, they shared a womb before they came into this world, and yet instead of helping her, he incited her to give up, to abandon, after everything she went through, everything she suffered. She had enough of him. He could die for all she cared.

“I tried. Farewell, sister. I love you.”

She heard footsteps, a door that closed, and he was gone. Somewhere, Cersei felt a knot, but she ignored it. She wouldn’t let any feeling for that fool surface. She was Cersei Lannister, the First of Her Name, Queen of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynar, Protector of the Seven Kingdoms, Lady of Casterly Rock and Lady of the Westerlands, the Lioness, daughter and heir to Tywin Lannister. The Iron Throne was hers, and it would be hers until the day she died.

Cersei asked one of her guards to bring someone else to her chambers. She went back to the balcony and looked again at the ruins where her children were buried. It was in the Great Sept of Baelor that she was wed to Robert Baratheon and that her years of torture began. If it hadn’t been for her children, she would have killed herself long ago. She lived thanks to Tommen, thanks to Myrcella, and thanks to Joffrey. Tyrion once asked her if Joffrey really was the reason why she was still alive. It wasn’t long after the Red Wedding, after Sansa’s family died. She advised Tyrion to give Sansa a child. It seemed he followed her advice in the end. Cersei wondered how the child looked like. She had cared for Sansa, in some way, despite her family’s treason. Cersei had loved Robert once, as
much as the girl loved Joffrey once. Cersei may have been able to love her in time, not like her own
daughter, but like her son’s wife, if it hadn’t been for Margaery’s influence. She turned Sansa,
changed her, made her into the Imp’s wife, created another enemy to Cersei. She would have to kill
Sansa. There was no other choice. Wasn’t there? There was no hope for Sansa to be the little dove
she once was again. Once you took this path, there was no way back. Cersei knew what she was
talking about. She took the same path long ago, and she suffered for it. It was sad that it had to end
this way, but the world was made this way. In *our life, we must choose either to be the hunter of the
prey. If we choose to be the hunter, then we must play the game of thrones. And when we play the
game of thrones, we win or we die. There is no middle ground.* Cersei would win, and Sansa would
die. It had to be this way.

The door opened and her Queensguard announced Lord Petyr Baelish. He bowed when he entered,
smirking as always. She hated that smirk. She understood why Sansa Stark wanted him to die.
Maybe she should grant the request she made to Margaery.

“Your Grace, I have the pleasure to tell you that my men found a hidden cache where the High
Septon hid many valuables. Selling them will add large amount of gold to the coffers of the Crown
that could allow us to recruit sellswords…”

“Your time here may be coming to an end, Lord Baelish,” Cersei cut him, then she let a silence
linger.

“To an end?” he asked.

“Yes, to an end. It is possible that your usefulness may be coming to an end, and once you are no
longer useful to me, what’s stopping me from giving you to Qyburn for his experiments?”

“I’m still useful, your Grace. I can get you your brother’s head…”

“You didn’t give it to me yet. How is it going, by the way? Any progress?”

“It takes time to execute such a plan, your Grace. Tyrion Lannister and Sansa Stark are far away in
the North, and I learned recently that most of the troops of the Vale there were scattered all over the
North…”

“I don’t care about your excuses.” She turned to face him, putting as much disdain and threat in her
voice and on her face as she could. “You will bring me my brother’s head before the next moon is
over, or else I will find another Master of Coin.”

“As you wish, your Grace. I shall return to my duties then.”

“Not yet.” She stopped him before he could turn. “You told me you still had contacts and allies in the
Vale.”

“I did, your Grace, and I still do.”

“I have enemies who are coming, and some of them will come from the North. I want the largest
army the Vale ever assembled to come here, to King’s Landing, to defend the capital, their queen,
and by the same way their Master of Coin.”

Littlefinger hesitated. “It will be difficult. The Knights of the Vale are proud people, and they will
find it strange to fight for you while another part is in the North, supposed to fight for Jon Snow.”

“I’m sure you will find a way. You are very resourceful. Of course, if you can manage to kill Sansa
and Tyrion, then the Vale will have no reason to fight for their puppet. I suggest you take care of
them quickly. If the Knights of the Vale fail to serve their true queen, one way or another, then the acting Lord Protector of the Vale and the future Lord Paramount of the Trident will meet the end waiting for the traitors and incompetents.”

“Very well, your Grace. I live to serve. I will make sure that an army of twenty thousand men are at the doors of King’s Landing within the next two months.”

“Good. You are dismissed. And Lord Baelish.” She stopped him again before he could leave. “Don’t ever think about betraying me, or else the Knights of the Vale will have to mourn their lady’s widow.”

“I would mourn him as well,” he quipped. “Don’t worry, your Grace. I had my lesson concerning the betrayal of the queen.”

The rest of the day was quiet, without accident. Cersei remained in her rooms, shut to the rest of the world. She looked at Jaime who rode away with four men through the Lion’s Gate in the end of the afternoon. Her other half was gone, though Cersei didn’t feel like she lost him. His departure was no loss, since the loss occurred a long time ago. Perhaps she should have felt something all the same, but she didn’t. She felt what she had to feel before, and she wouldn’t feel it again. This night, for the first time in centuries, Cersei slept well. No nightmare came to haunt her, and Maggy the Frog didn’t whisper into her ear.

The next day, on the morning, she was listening to Qyburn about their stocks of grain.

“We have enough food in the Red Keep to sustain a siege that could last years, but many granaries burned during the unfortunate destruction of the Great Sept. With the Rose Road closed, we won’t be able to import more grain for the people. We will barely have enough to get through two years of winter. If winter lasts any longer, then the smallfolk will die by the thousands.”

“Let them die, then,” Cersei said dismissively. “A smaller smallfolk should be easier and quite convenient to rule. Let’s drop the matter of food stocks and focus on the defenses of the Red Keep.”

“As you wish your Grace.” Cersei drank some wine as Qyburn began to expose the progress of the construction of the scorpions on the Red Keep. “Several good positions have already been designated to install scorpions, ballistas, trebuchets and catapults. The men are a little reticent at the idea of facing dragons, but for now they remain in line. We managed to maintain the idea that the stories about the dragons are only stories. Though I’m not sure for how long we will be able to keep the belief that all those stories the men of Dragonstone brought with them are only stories and nothing more. Perhaps it would be a good thing to spread another story, different, that would reassure the men, or turn their attention towards something else.”

“And what story do you have in mind, Qyburn?”

Before the failed master could answer, they heard a great shriek. They looked at each other, then another shriek followed. Qyburn looked at the balcony and walked to it. Cersei followed a moment later. The shriek that followed was even more piercing, so much that it looked like it came from above their heads.

Then they saw it. From above their heads, a huge creature, black, with great wings maybe thirty feet long, appeared in the sky, flying away southwest. Two other creatures appeared at his side, smaller. One was green, the other one orange or something similar. Cersei looked at them, unable to say anything. It only lasted a moment. Soon, the three winged creatures shrunk, then disappeared on the horizon.
For a long time afterwards, Cersei remained there, unmoving. Silence surrounded her. It was as if everything, even the city below, had been paralyzed, and that everything that lived had stopped moving, like in a trance. In this very moment, Cersei Lannister realized that her true enemy wasn’t the people, or the Martells, or the Tyrells, or the Imp, or Sansa, or any other lord. Her true enemy was the young woman with blond hair who rode the black dragon she just saw.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter : Trystane
Trystane V

Chapter Notes

It might not look to be the case when you start reading this chapter, but I think many people have been waiting for it a very long time. You'll understand why.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

TRYSTANE V

It was said that Storm’s End was built after King Durran declared war against the gods, and that it was the seventh castle he built and the only one to resist the storms. It was also said that Storm’s End was never taken by force. Stannis Baratheon had resisted to a long siege during his brother’s rebellion, and during the War of the Five Kings, the castle surrendered without enduring a siege after King Renly’s mysterious death. Apparently, Renly Baratheon had assumed that Trystane’s father would side with him when he would wage war to his enemies, but Prince Doran Martell had taken a very different path. Instead of supporting Renly, he accepted a defensive alliance with Joffrey, an alliance that led to the betrothal of Trystane with Myrcella.

Renly was dead now, and so was Stannis… and Myrcella. Trystane cast a look at his side, where Obara Sand stood on a horse just like him. He hated her. She could be his cousin, but she was also one of the women who murdered Myrcella. He wished his uncle had never met that whore in Oldtown. Obara had come with reinforcements from Dorne who joined Trystane’s forces a few days ago. She said they would have taken less time to arrive if it hadn’t been for the army the Tyrells sent and who blocked the Prince’s Pass. The Tyrells finally retreated one day, and later they learned that Randyll Tarly had died in King’s Landing. His son, Dickon, had gone back to Horn Hill, and the Dornish troops were able to progress into the Stormlands, catching the lords by surprise as much as Trystane did with the Dothrakis and the Unsullied. Over half of the Stormlands had fallen to them now, and if Storm’s End fell today, it would be a matter of days before every lord in this kingdom fell on their knees. The Storm King was the first king to be defeated by Aegon Targaryen when he invaded Westeros, and his kingdom would be the first to fall into the hands of his descendant.

Trystane had to admit that he was impressed by the castle. He never left Dorne before sailing to Meereen, and he had to say the castle of the former Storm Kings was impressive. The walls, made of pale grey stone, were about one hundred feet high, impossible to climb. Trystane didn’t see how an assault on it could end without heavy casualties for the attackers. A lone tower was to be seen, emerging from the interior of the castle, well protected by the deep walls. Any enemy movement could be seen miles around by someone who would stand at the top of this tower, and Trystane suspected the tower was in itself a castle inside the castle. Any attempt to take it would kill thousands of people.

Doran Martell taught to his son to only fight when he had to, when he had good odds of winning, and also when the cost of the victory wasn’t so heavy that it would make the victory useless. Trystane could see now what his father meant. The cost of seizing Storm’s End would be far too great if they had to storm the castle. Trystane wasn’t eager to unleash a storm of men upon the castle when its name was Storm’s End. It would be better if they took the castle without a fight.

That was what he hoped for as he watched the delegation approach. He discussed with Ser Adar
Kellington, the commander of Storm’s End garrison, yesterday. The man was calm enough to have a civilized discussion and negotiate with Trystane. The first thing he said when he and Trystane met was I’m glad that this army is not being led by a barbarian. None of the storm lords were pleased to see their lands ravaged by the Dothrakis, and Trystane couldn’t blame them. They were unruly and plundered and raped everything they saw. Trystane’s attempts to forbid rape had been useless, and Ser Jorah quietly discouraged him to make strong attempts to stop the Dothrakis in their behavior. Looking at how the Dothrakis defied anyone in duel as soon as they felt insulted and how they fought, Trystane had no illusion about his chances to defeat a Dothraki in single combat. Still, he was furious that he could do nothing against the atrocities they committed. That was exactly what his father told him that war brought. He would need to talk to Daenerys Targaryen the next time they would meet. She may have enough influence on the Dothrakis to force them to change their ways.

The Dothrakis could pose a real problem in the future. They were very good to cause terror, but the problem was often to force them to stop their raids after a lord surrendered. So far, they could distract them by turning them against lords who had not yet surrendered, but it wouldn’t last. One day, there wouldn’t be enough lords still fighting to satisfy the needs of the Dothrakis for rape and plunder, and when that day would come, no one would want to surrender when they realized that it didn’t mean a halt to the ravages on their lands. To have a dragon with them would be quite useful right now, but the three were with their queen.

Ser Kellington was close now, riding with two other men. During their first discussion, Trystane promised him that no harm would come to his men if he surrendered peacefully, but that if he resisted, he wasn’t to expect any mercy from the queen. He hoped the threat of the dragons was strong enough to motivate the knight. He doubted Storm’s End could resist three dragons when Harrenhal couldn’t resist one.

To be honest, Trystane wouldn’t understand if Ser Kellington was to resist. He had every reason to surrender Storm’s End. Tommen Baratheon was dead. They learned about the death of Myrcella’s brother not long after they landed, when they took their first castle. Trystane didn’t know what to think of this. On one hand, it would make the conquest of the Seven Kingdoms easier, but Tommen was Myrcella’s brother. She always spoke fondly of her little brother. What would she think of him right now, fighting against her family? Her mother proclaimed herself queen, and Margaery and Loras Tyrell died when she seized the power, after her son committed suicide. That was why the Tyrells had abandoned their plans of invading Dorne. They suspected Cersei Lannister to have intentionally killed Mace Tyrell’s children. Remembering what Myrcella told him about her mother and that she murdered her own husband, Trystane had no difficulty to imagine it.

Adar Kellington had no reason to fight for the woman who murdered the previous Lord of Storm’s End. All the Baratheons were dead, so he had no one to fight for. Furthermore, the Targaryens killed no Baratheon during Robert’s Rebellion. He could understand the Starks and their bannermen if they refused to surrender. After all, his uncle Oberyn had wanted to keep the war going on after his aunt and her children were murdered. He couldn’t blame the Starks for refusing to follow Daenerys Targaryen after what her father did to two of them, three if Lyanna Stark’s death was to be included. However, the commander of the garrison of Storm’s End had absolutely no reason to resist, no grudge to hold against House Targaryen. Any fight would be vain. Trystane hoped the knight understood that well. He seemed reasonable, or so he hoped.

Ser Kellington arrived before them. Along with Trystane and Obara were Ser Jorah Mormont, Grey Worm, two Dothraki commanders whose names he had difficulty to pronounce, Lord Anders Yronwood and Malcolm Branfield. Trystane would lead the parley and receive the surrender, if there was one.

“My prince,” Ser Adar said as an introduction.
“Ser Adar. Have you taken a decision? If you surrender, I can make sure nothing happens to your men. If you don’t, however, I won’t be able to protect you or them when we storm the castle.”

The knight took some time before he replied. “I took my decision. I am ready to accept your terms.” Trystane sighed inwardly in relief. “At one condition. I don’t want these barbarians inside my castle.”

He cast a look at the Dothrakis in Trystane’s delegation. The two riders eyed the knight suspiciously. They didn’t speak the common tongue, so they couldn’t understand what Ser Adar just said, but at the same time they couldn’t miss the repulsion that his face showed.

“No Dothraki will be settled inside Storm’s End, on that you have my word. However, you must expect a few of them to attend official events, especially when the queen comes.”

Trystane waited for the knight to answer. “I accept.”

“Very well.” He looked at Branfield who rocked their banner, giving the signal to the Unsullied. “I trust your men will cause no problem and surrender their weapons without question.”

“Your have my word, Prince Trystane. I ask to return with your men to the castle, to make sure nothing goes wrong.”

“Granted.”

The column of five hundred Unsullied marched towards them as they spoke. When they reached their position, Malcolm Branfield took their lead and Trystane allowed Ser Adar to follow with his two men. Grey Worm and the Dothraki commanders went back to their camp to take care of their own men, and Trystane remained where he was with Obara Sand and Lord Yronwood.

“You must be glad,” his cousin declared.

“You said?” Trystane asked.

“You must be very proud of yourself. You just took a big castle without a fight.”

“Strangely, yes, I’m very proud of it.”

“There is no pride in taking a castle without fighting,” Lord Yronwood said.

“Well, if we stormed the castle, we would lose countless people. You may be right, Lord Yronwood, I shouldn’t be proud, but I rather prefer to see thousands of men live than to feel pride for taking a castle at the cost of their lives.”

“Would you have the same thoughts if you handed Dorne to the Lannisters in order to save lives?” Obara wondered with hostility.

“That’s different. If the Lannisters tried to take Dorne, we would have to fight to defend it. We wouldn’t have a choice. We weren’t forced to fight to take Storm’s End. There’s no point in sacrificing men when we can achieve our goal without having them killed.”

“True, you’re right cousin. The Lannisters don’t need to send an army to take Dorne. They only need to send a blond-haired girl who opens her legs for you.”

Trystane wanted nothing less than to take his sword and slit Obara’s throat right away. Why wasn’t she in King’s Landing with Tyene when the Sept of Baelor collapsed over her head? He would be
rid of two Sand Snakes instead of one. Trystane felt it was only justice that Tyene died after she murdered Myrcella, and it would only be justice that Obara died as well for helping her. She had been insufferable ever since she arrived, mocking him at every turn, provoking him. Trystane knew he shouldn’t take the bait she gave him, not when so many lords of Dorne were close. She provoked him on purpose in the presence of Lord Yronwood right now, and he wouldn’t shame his house when one of their most powerful bannermen was present. He took the calmest voice he could find given the circumstances.

“I’m sure you know a lot about open legs, cousin.”

Lord Yronwood sniggered, though it was obvious he tried to hide it. Obara’s eyes were throwing daggers. “Be careful, cousin.”

“Be careful, yourself. In Dorne, insulting a princess is a serious crime, grave enough to be executed.”

“Not insulting a bastard.”

Trystane didn’t look at her. “Lord Yronwood, come with me. I think it’s safe enough for us to go in.” The yellow banner with a black stag on the battlements had been dropped, replaced by the red sun pierced by a spear on an orange field and the red three-headed dragon on a black field. “Obara Sand, you stay outside. Since you have such a poor opinion of bastards, I wouldn’t want to bring one into an important castle like this one.”

“Do you really think you can give me orders?”

Rage was boiling inside Trystane. “Lord Yronwood, ride forward. I’ll join you.” The Lord of Yronwood did as he was told and left Trystane alone with Obara. “I warn you, shut your mouth,” he told her as soon as they were alone.

“Why? Or else you’re going to kill me?” She mocked him again. Trystane had no envy to play this game.

“Whether you shut your mouth, or I give free leave to the Dothrakis to rape you and your sisters as much as they like. I wonder how many you will manage to kill before they get to you. Maybe you’ll kill a few, but they will get you in the end.”

She kept smiling smugly. “You wouldn’t do that. Your father would never approve.”

“I don’t need his approval, and I don’t need the bastard daughter of a slut. Everyone finds you unbearable and insufferable. You humiliate House Martell with your behavior. The lords of Dorne will be relieved to see you die.”

He shook the reins of his horse and moved forward, leaving the bastard behind. Obara was a real bastard, a murderer. She could say what she wanted, between the Sand Snakes and Myrcella, his uncle’s daughters would always be the bastards and Myrcella the princess. Lord Yronwood was waiting for him and adjusted his pace to Trystane’s mount.

“You should send her away, my prince. An army is no place for a woman, especially not one like this,” he advised him.

“Thank you for your advice, Lord Anders. I’ll take it into consideration.”

“She should really leave,” the lord insisted. “Her way to address you is inappropriate. She makes fools of Dorne in the presence of everyone.”
“I agree, but I’m afraid we will have to suffer her presence a little while longer. But for now, I’ll banish her from the councils.”

“Good decision, my prince.”

Lord Yronwood was a good friend of Doran Martell. Despite the rumors of Oberyn poisoning his grandfather during a duel, Lord Anders had maintained good relations with his father, even more after Quentyn was fostered to Yronwood. Trystane’s brother had even been knighted by Lord Yronwood himself. His father maintained peace in Dorne this way. Trystane wondered if he would be able to do the same.

They went through the gates of Storm’s End and found themselves into the main yard. The Unsullied were escorting unarmed men with the arms of House Baratheon. Everything was in order. Trystane asked an Unsullied officer where Malcolm Branfield was. He found him in the main hall, where the throne of the former Storm Kings and Lords Paramount of the Stormlands was. To Trystane, the appearance of this hall was entirely foreign, nothing to see with Sunspear or Meereen. Dorne seemed to have more in common with Essos than with the rest of the Seven Kingdoms when it came to architecture. He supposed this wasn’t strange since his ancestors came from Essos, and they came to Dorne much later than the First Men or the Andals.

“Storm’s End is ours,” the man from the Crownlands declared when he saw Trystane walk in. “No resistance. I have to say, the conquest of the Stormlands proves to be easy, so far. I find it almost too easy.”

“We’ll have to expect resistance, sooner or later,” Trystane recognized. “With Tommen dead, the storm lords are in disarray. They have no one to lead them. It will be different by the time we get to the Reach and the Crownlands. And I didn’t talk about the king in the North who claims to be Rhaegar’s last living son.”

“I agree. We will meet resistance at some point. People will fight against us even if they see everything is lost and that they gain nothing from it. My own family kept fighting for Daenerys’s father until the end, and we paid it dearly. I lost my father and my brothers in this.”

“Hopefully, the lords in the Crownlands won’t be as loyal to Cersei Lannister as your father was to our queen’s father. At least, once the war is over, you’ll get your family’s lands back. I’m sure the queen will give them to you.”

“Maybe.” Strangely, he didn’t seem very eager about this. “I was wondering. I have a niece at Oldtown. I could send her a raven, just to let her know that I am well.”

“It could be dangerous, Malcolm. You could give the impression to the Hightowers that your niece is working for the Targaryens.”

Malcolm Branfield grumbled, obviously unhappy. “You’re right. I just wish she knew I was alive. Everyone else in our family is dead, Ironrath is destroyed. She probably believes everyone she knows is dead. I’d like her to know that she still has an uncle somewhere.”

“I’ll let you communicate with her as soon as the Hightowers bend the knee.”

The man nodded. “We will have to split our forces to invade both the Reach and the Crownlands. Do you think I could participate to the invasion of the Reach?”

“I’m afraid not. You know the Crownlands better. You were born there. Daenerys Targaryen will want you with the invasion force that will march on the capital. Furthermore, we hope the Tyrells
Malcolm sighed. “I’ll have to wait before I can see Mira, it seems. Well, I’ll go back to look at our men.”

They were at the beginning of the day when Storm’s End surrendered. Trystane used the rest of the day to make sure everything was in order in the castle. He sent a raven to Dragonstone to inform Daenerys that they had taken the main castle of the Stormlands, and he also sent ravens to every castle in the Stormlands to tell them of the events that took place at Storm’s End. Trystane was quite sure that many lords would surrender immediately when they learned that the seat of the Baratheons had fallen. They would be able to invade the Reach and the Crownlands very soon. Trystane hoped that invading the other kingdoms would be as easy as it was with the Stormlands, but he knew better than to expect his hopes would come true. There would be a battle soon, a real battle. Hopefully, they would have Daenerys Targaryen’s dragons when it came.

He then had a war council with the other commanders of the army. Obara wasn’t there, so it made the reunion much easier for him. He decided to stay at Storm’s End for some time, to organize the kingdom before the queen arrived. Ser Jorah and Grey Worm would complete the surrendering of the lords who still resisted. He thought for a moment to give a day of rest to the men, but Ser Jorah strongly advised against it, saying they wouldn’t be able to keep the Dothrakis under control if they were to stay too long in one place. So Trystane remained at Storm’s End with three hundred men, all Dornish soldiers.

They left at dawn on the next morning. Obara went with the army, so Trystane got rid of her at the same occasion. He hoped she would die during the campaign. In the middle of the day, some lords had already replied to their ravens. Lord Robert Cafferan of Fawnton was the first lord to swear fealty to Daenerys Targaryen after the fall of Storm’s End.

Trystane had never thought that he would help a queen to conquer the Seven Kingdoms. His father had taught him to prioritize peace over war, diplomacy over swords, crops and wells over armies, ruling over sword fighting. If his father had told him that one day he would end up helping a woman with three dragons to take the Iron Throne… There were many things his father should have told him. He kept everything secret and only told him the truth very late, when he needed Trystane to hear it. He didn’t tell him of his plans to overthrow the Lannisters and the Baratheons. Trystane could have understood, after what they did to his aunt and her children, but his father hid him the truth and made him believe that he would marry Myrcella. He felt like his father used him. He even hid him that Myrcella was… It didn’t matter. His father had these information from the Spider, and Trystane knew better than to trust this man. He knew better than anyone who were the real bastards.

His squire came inside at this moment. “My prince, Tyene Sand is asking for you.”

Trystane froze. He was writing a raven for his father, to tell him about their progress. He looked at his squire, who had to be only two years younger than him. “What are you saying?”

“Tyene Sand is here. She asks for an audience with you.”

Trystane slowly laid the pen on the table. “Tyene is dead. She was in King’s Landing when everything was destroyed.”

“Well, she’s here, my prince. I swear, this is her, or else this woman looks very much like your cousin.” How could Tyene have survived? “Where do you want to meet her?”

“Uh, well, in the main hall. Bring her there.”
Trystane lingered for a long time behind after his squire had left. Tyene was still alive. He had thought she was dead, that somehow Myrcella had been avenged. Now, he just learnt that Tyene was still alive. She had been the one to hurt Myrcella, to make the cut that poisoned her and killed her. And now she was here. What was he going to do? He had a few ideas about how to bring justice to his cousins for their crimes. His uncle Oberyn would probably not disapprove if he was still alive. Oberyn Martell always said the murdering of children was criminal. He wouldn’t approve that his daughters assassinated an innocent young woman. Trystane was seeking the same thing than his uncle, revenge and justice.

Trystane walked decisively into the main hall and waited on the dais. After a moment, the doors opened and his cousin came inside. She wore usual robes for a septa, but they were ruined. She was also all dirty, as if she travelled for a very long time.

“Hi, cousin. Glad to see you,” she said.

Her behaviour had not changed. She smiled mischievously at him, the same way she did before she murdered Myrcella. Trystane took a look around. There were twenty men with him in this room, and Tyene was alone. He only had to give the order and the guards could kill her. However, he realized the moment he thought about it how it could turn problematic. The guards were all from Dorne, and they all knew that Tyene was one of the many daughters of Oberyn Martell. They wouldn’t execute such an order without hesitation. And Trystane had to think about his house. What would everyone believe if he was to order the murder, without any reason, of one of his cousins? Officially, Myrcella wasn’t murdered by Tyene, and even if the people knew about it, many in Dorne hated the Lannisters and the Baratheons so much that they would thank the Sand Snakes for what they did. No, he couldn’t order Tyene’s death. He would have to find another way to avenge Myrcella.

Trystane looked at his cousin, who kept smiling. She knew he hated her, and she kept taunting him, just like Obara did. He didn’t smile to her, he didn’t welcome her, but he tried his best to remain civil when he spoke.

“What do you want?”

“Nothing. I just wanted to see my uncle’s son. I heard you took Storm’s End.” It was the voice she used when she tried to seduce a man. Was she trying to do the same with him? She should know it wouldn’t work.

“I thought you would follow Obara and the army. You probably crossed their path on your way here.”

She shrugged. “Maybe, but I thought you could use some company. I heard you were all alone in a huge castle.” Trystane’s right fist formed a ball. For the second time in two days, he wanted nothing more than to kill a Sand Snake.

“Why are you really here?”

She kept smiling smugly. “I brought you a gift. A very useful gift, and I thought Storm’s End was a good place to keep it safe.”

Tyene turned to her right. It was at this moment that Trystane realized that she didn’t come alone. He had been so focused on Tyene that he didn’t notice the person standing a few feet behind her. There was a Silent Sister with her, her robes in quite a sorry state as well, her face obviously covered by dirt despite the fact most of it was hidden.

“Come on, remove your hood. My brother is very kind with girls from enemy houses,” Tyene said
on a patronizing tone to the Sister.

Slowly, hesitantly, her hand shaking, the woman removed her hood and her veil. The part of her face that was previously covered didn’t prove to be much better than the rest of it, all blackened by dust and mud. Despite this, there was something oddly familiar about her.

“Who are you?” he asked her.

She looked at him, and seemed to hesitate before she spoke. “Prince Trystane, I beg for your help.” Her eyes were begging as much as her voice. “My name is Margaery Tyrell.”

Chapter End Notes

Now, we all know who escaped the Great Sept of Baelor. Not that it was a great secret, but I preferred to keep some doubts. I was very criticized for initially killing Margaery in the explosion, and I admit that killing her after I developed her character so much, and in the same way than in the show, was mean. Now we can continue to watch her play the game of thrones. This also means the rose will meet the dragon very soon.

Please review

Next chapter : Mira
The portcullis was torn as if a giant had opened it with his hands. The wooden archway over the entrance gate had been destroyed, as were the other wooden fortifications over the bailey. The stone walls were all blackened. Over it flew the banner of her house. Mira Forrester was back home.

As they progressed through the entrance, Mira saw more of the buildings inside. Half of the huge double doors that led to the Great Hall was missing. The Great Hall itself had been burned, and whole sections were missing. When they entered the courtyard, Mira could take in a scene of desolation. All the smaller buildings had been burned, and there was almost nothing left of them. People were working to erect new habitations. Mira judged they had to be twenty, at most, plus the guards, which had to make about forty people in Ironrath. That was before she and Talia arrived. If they added the twenty other men they brought with them, there were now sixty living souls in Ironrath.

A man with a hammer very close to the gate looked up from his work and saw them. He let his tool fall on the ground.

“Lady Talia.” He stopped before Mira, looking at her for a moment, then his eyes widened. “Lady Mira. It’s good to see you again.”

“Ralten. It’s good to see you too,” Mira replied. Ralten was the blacksmith of Ironrath when Mira left years ago. Back then, he didn’t have strays of grey in his hair and he didn’t look weary like he did now.

“It’s a relief to see you both, my ladies.”

He looked tired, very tired. Despite the cold weather, sweat covered his forehead and his wet hair was stuck to his red face. Mira looked around. Some people stopped what they were doing as they realized she and Talia had arrived, but they were all working on building back the structures that the Whitehills destroyed. Judging from the state of the whole place, they would need to work very hard and very fast if they wanted to be ready for winter.

“My ladies,” one of the guards who welcomed them before the gates said. “If you would, I will escort you to the Great Hall.”

“We’ll help with your horses,” Ralten said.

Mira dismounted and so did her sister and all their company. Mira looked around and saw no stables.

“Where will you put the horses?” Mira asked Ralten.

“We’ll attach them to a pole. We didn’t have time to finish the stables yet. We only began the foundations.”

That wasn’t good. Without stables, the horses would die, out in the cold. “We’ll need to talk about it later.”
She followed the guards to the Great Hall. Ironwood didn’t burn easily. There was a special method to make it burn, a method known to the Forresters and only to the Forresters. However, every material burned if it was exposed to fire long enough, no matter how resistant it was to fire. Harrenhal burned even if it was made of stone, and although most of the ships of Stannis Baratheon’s fleet were made of ironwood, wildfire consumed them all the same. Mira didn’t witness the ships burn since she wasn’t in King’s Landing for the battle, but she saw the wreckage of the fleet in Blackwater Bay later, when she came to the capital, just like she could see the damage fire made to her home.

Wood and stone were blackened all alike, on the walls, on the ceilings, on the roofs. Torches were missing on the walls, and as they progressed through the corridors, she noticed cold ashes in the corners the servants hadn’t cleaned yet. When they arrived to the room where the Lord of Ironrath received guests and gave feasts, a flood of memories came back to Mira’s mind. When the ruined doors gave way, she saw her father and her mother, Lord Gregor Forrester, the Good, and Lady Elissa Branfield, sitting side by side as they all ate together at the high table. On her father’s right was Rodrik, already looking like a man. Talia and Ethan sat side by side, and Asher was exchanging jokes with his older brother. Ser Royland and Ser Duncan were with them too. At last, sitting beside the maester, Mira saw a younger girl, no more than thirteen. She was speaking with Maester Ortengryn, like she always did, listening attentively to all his answers. She looked back at Mira, who just stared at her for a long time. They had the same eyes, the same color of hair, but the resemblance stopped there. The girl who was known to everybody as Mira Forrester, who sat next to the maester bound to Ironrath, who wore robes made of wool to remain warm in the cold weather, who arranged her hair in the common northern style, who played to hide-and-seek with her siblings in the grove behind their home, looked upon her older self, the Lady Mira Hightower, a married woman, with a costly ring of gold and diamond at her hand, her hair arranged in the southern fashion, wearing furs that only ladies from the south would wear, the handmaiden of a dead queen.

The thought of Margaery brought a pang to her heart and it brought back the memory of Sera as well, which only tightened the knot in her chest further. The people at the table disappeared one by one, until only the girl with black hair remained, all alone. She kept looking at Mira, a tear running on her cheek, then she faded as well.

“The Whitehills had a small garrison here,” one of the men who welcomed her explained. “When they learned what happened at Winterfell and that Torrhen Whitehill was killed, they left. They burned the whole place again, as if the first one hadn’t been enough. They had started to rebuild Ironrath, but all their work went into smoke. They murdered everyone inside the castle. When Lord Asher arrived, there were only ashes and burned bodies everywhere. Some were hanging from the battlements. He went back on the road immediately for Highpoint with most of his men.”

“Gwyn and Ryon didn’t stay behind?” Talia asked.

“No, they went with the army. Lady Forrester wanted to accompany Lord Forrester, and so did your young brother. They only left us behind, thirty-five men, to guard Ironrath and rebuild it.”

“And the other people here?”

“Some are farmers or hunters from the surroundings, others are former members of the household who miraculously survived the Whitehills. They helped us to somehow rebuild this place, though there’s still a lot to do.”

Indeed, there was still a lot of work to do. Mira noticed with sadness but without surprise that the tapestry was gone. It couldn’t survive to fire.

“We cleared your old rooms, my ladies, and we keep working on clearing the other rooms, but it will
take months before the Great Hall can be a proper living place again,” the guard continued.

“What about the granaries and the larders? What about our provisions for winter?” Mira asked.

“None left. The Whitehills took or burned everything there was. The larders are being rebuilt, but we still need to wait for the granaries.”

“Wait a minute.” Mira interrupted him. “You didn’t start to rebuild the granaries?”

The soldier looked at her. “We don’t have much workforce, my lady. There have been several other matters to retain our attention.”

“What other matters? You’ve been here for a month, almost, and yet none of the essential buildings have been repaired. The granaries, the stables, the larders. I didn’t even see a smithy when I arrived. What did you work on all this time?”

The guard crossed his arms. “We worked mostly on the Great Hall, at the demand of your husband, my lady.”

Mira was taken aback by this. “I beg your pardon?”

“Ser Gerold Hightower gave us the order to make sure that the Great Hall would be a suitable place to live in when you would arrive. He was the one to give us that order. Since Lord Forrester didn’t give us a single instruction about rebuilding Ironrath, we obeyed to Ser Gerold.”

Mira couldn’t believe it. What did her husband think about? “How many men are working on the Great Hall right now?”

“On the forty who are working, half of them.”

“Well, from now on, I only want five people working on the Great Hall. All the others are to rebuild the essential buildings, including the stables and the granaries, and also their homes. The Great Hall is in a good enough shape, and we’ll be able to work on it from the inside when the storm comes. And I want the servants to work as well on the reconstruction.”

The man looked shocked. “My lady, if you do that, there won’t be anyone left to wait after you and your sister.”

“I was a lady-in-waiting for a queen, and Talia and I both spent the last months in army camps. I think we can take care of ourselves. We don’t need servants to make our fire or our bed.”

He looked at Talia, who only shrugged. He bowed and left, saying he would do as Mira told him. Mira also told the other people to leave her and her sister alone.

“Well, you’re good at giving orders,” Talia said once they were all gone.

“What was Gerold thinking about? Making the rebuilding of the Great Hall a priority? Without place to stock our reserves, we won’t last a single year through winter.”

“I agree, though we have nothing to stock right now. You heard Byron. The Whitehills burned everything.”

Byron. Now, Mira remembered his name. “I’ll send a raven to Sansa. She’ll send us something. She won’t abandon us.”

Talia looked embarrassed. “There’s a problem, Mira. We have no raven left. We killed them all after
we made Gryff Whitehill prisoner. We didn’t want the traitor to send information to his father.”

Mira pursed her lips together. “Well, we have no choice but to send a rider. It’s too important. Without food in reserve for winter, we are doomed. In the meantime, we should try to increase the activity of the hunters. It would probably be good to open the woods to everyone for hunting. With all the ravages of the war, this is no time to reserve the woods for highborn people. The smallfolk will need food as much as us.”

Talia nodded. “We must find a new master-at-arms, a new steward, a new maester too. We… we must start all over again.”

“I’ll tell the man we’ll send to Winterfell to ask for a new master to the Citadel as well. I am a Hightower, so maybe the archmaesters will hurry.”

Talia grinned. “It seems to be a blessing that my sister was wed in the south.”

Mira returned the smile. She wondered what Gerold was doing right now. She hoped Asher wouldn’t taunt him too much as they besieged Highpoint.

Talia walked to the chair of the Lord of Ironrath. It had survived, almost without a scratch. Mira’s sister stopped several steps before it, and then she didn’t move. Mira joined her after a moment, placing a hand on her shoulder. In a year or two, Talia would be as tall as she was.

“That’s where he killed Ethan.” Her sister’s voice was hoarse. “Ramsay. He plunged a dagger in his throat, and Ethan died. He died right there, in front of me, and there was nothing I could do.”

Mira put her arm around her sister’s shoulders. “Sometimes, there’s nothing we can do.” There was nothing she could do while she was in King’s Landing to help her family. Nothing that she did could have saved them. She had been powerless, as much as Talia was this day.

“It shouldn’t be like this. Ramsay wanted to take me away, and now… I know what he did to the girls he took. We all know it now, after… Ethan saved me from this. He shouldn’t be dead.”

“I know, Talia. He shouldn’t be dead. Many people shouldn’t have died. Many that live deserve death, and some that die deserve life.”

They remained silent for a long time before Talia spoke again. “You were right at Winterfell. The war brought us nothing. We lost so many people, and for what? Joffrey ended up dead at his wedding. We lost Father, Mother, Rodrik, Ethan, Ser Royland, Maester Ortengryn, and who else could we lose in the future? We are at war again. Asher could have died at Winterfell. I thought I would feel better after Ramsay died, after Ethan was avenged, but I don’t. And killing Ludd Whitehill… Asher and Ryon only think about that. They could get themselves killed at Highpoint. Rodrik and Father should never have left. They wouldn’t be dead, and we would all be alive, all together, just like before.”

Things were not as simple as that, but Mira couldn’t tell her sister that she was wrong. Their brother died right in front of her. Mira just held her as Talia wept, tears coming out of her eyes. Mira had cried for all her dead siblings a long time ago, back in King’s Landing, but her sister didn’t have the opportunity to mourn her brother. They had all been in danger here at Ironrath, and the Whitehills were a persistent threat. They never had time like Mira did. Mira met her own challenges in the capital. She was forced to act as if everything was all right, that nothing affected her, but she could still cry in private for the people she cared for who were gone. She had her own time and her own place where to mourn those she loved and that she lost. She also had friends to help her. There was the uncertainty of her family’s fate that was an ordeal as well, but that was nothing when compared
to the dangers her siblings met in the North.

In the end, Mira just remained there with Talia for a very long time. They supped together later, in silence. None of them really wanted to talk. Talia retired to her chamber early. Mira could have gone to bed as well, but she didn’t feel like she could sleep. Instead, she wandered through the Great Hall of Ironrath. Mira had never felt lonely here, but today was different. So many people were gone, and so many could leave them any moment as well. Her husband and her brothers were risking their lives at Highpoint. If Ludd Whitehill was anything like the man he was when Mira last saw him, he would never surrender. She remembered his rage when he discovered the secret relationship between Asher and his daughter. She was afraid for Asher. He had a rage to fight. He would be in the thick of the battle when they would assault the fortress of the Whitehills. Would Gerold be able to stop him from doing anything foolish? She made him promise to stop her brother from killing Gwyn’s father, but would he be able to hold his promise?

Without realizing it, Mira ended at the top of the tower, looking over the courtyard. It was almost night, though they were quite early in the afternoon. In the North, in the middle of winter, days were short. She could still see people working on their houses, trying to be ready for the time when winter would strike them hard. If Margaery was there, she would give them money and food to help them. But Margaery wasn’t there, and Mira had no food and no money to give them, her own people. Some of them, like Ralten, had known her ever since she came into the world. She recognized him, still working near the gates. The moon was full and there were no clouds in the sky, so it was easy to see. Were Elys and Garlan looking at the moon as well in Oldtown?

The top of the ironwood trees brushed the moon in the sky. Mira took a closer look at them. Their branches were devoid of leaves, but the light of the moon didn’t show any sign of fire on the trunks. She left the tower and decided to go in the grove.

When she watched them closer, she realized the first trees had been touched by fire, but as she sank deeper into the grove, the leaves reappeared and the few marks of burning that were visible on the trees at the edge left. Ironwood didn’t burn easily, indeed. Mira was surprised the Whitehills didn’t cut down the whole grove. Perhaps they thought it was too good a natural defense for the castle and preferred to destroy the forests.

As she progressed through the grove alone, her path lightened by the torch she held in her right arm, Mira revived moments of her childhood.

“Mira, come with me. Your father and I, we have to talk with you,” her mother called after her.

She was playing with Rodrik, Talia and Ethan. She wanted to stay and looked with envy at them, then at her mother. She was giving her that look meaning that she had to come, that it was her duty.

“I’ll come back later,” she told her brothers and Talia.

She followed her mother to her father’s solar. “Did I do something wrong, mother?” she asked.

“No, Mira. Don’t worry. You did nothing wrong. Your father and I must only talk to you about something very important in private.”

Mira was relieved, though she wondered why her parents needed to speak to her alone. There were only a few reasons why they would do so, but she ignored which one it was. When they entered her father’s solar, he was tapping his desk with his fingers. He smiled when he saw her. People said she looked very much like him and that they shared the same smile, among many other things.

“Mira, please sit.” She took a seat in front of him, just like she was taught, and her mother sat by her
side. “You’re probably curious as to why we asked you here.”

“Yes, Father,” she admitted.

“Well, I won’t keep the suspense any longer. It may come as a shock for you, but I think you knew it could happen someday. We arranged for you to have a place in Highgarden as a handmaiden.”

Highgarden? Highgarden was the seat of House Tyrell, the Wardens of the South and the Lords Paramount of the Reach. Her father kept talking.

“Your mother has contacts there, friends from her time in the south, and she was able to get you a place in Lord Tyrell’s household.”

So that was it. Her lady mother had told her years ago that Mira would probably have to leave for the south eventually. She introduced Mira to the southern ways, taught her the courtesies and ways to behave in the south. Mira hadn’t been sure whether she wanted to leave or not. She knew she would have to leave one day, but she loved Ironrath and she was in no eagerness to leave her home and her family.

“When do I leave?” she asked her father.

“Next week. I’ll accompany you to Winterfell, and then you’ll make the rest of the journey with a few of my guards.”

“Yes, Father.”

Her father smiled fondly at her, then he looked at her mother. “Could you leave me with our daughter for a moment, please?”

“Of course.”

Lady Elissa Forrester walked out obediently. Mira found herself alone with her father. Although it was her mother who mostly raised and educated her, her father had always had time for her. He kept smiling fondly at her, but she thought she saw a hint of sadness behind his smile. He stood up, walked around his desk and came to sit in front of her. He remained silent for a moment.

“Are you happy to leave? I mean, to go to Highgarden?”

Mira didn’t really know how she felt about it. She knew she would leave one day, but she always saw it as something inevitable, not as something she should either desire or dread. “I will do my duty, Father.”

Her father’s smile stretched for a moment, but not for long. He lowered his head as it happened. Gared said she didn’t only smile just like her father. She also did exactly the same movements than him when she smiled.

“I don’t want you to leave, Mira. You’re a Northerner, a Forrester, and I’ll never feel entirely safe knowing you are so far away from us. But there comes a time when we must let our children go away. You do know why your mother wants you to go south?”

“She wants me to learn the southern ways,” Mira answered.

“Aye, but you know why she wants you to learn these ways. You know why she prepared you all these years for this time in the south.” Mira nodded. “Your mother hopes you will marry someone from the south. You don’t feel uncomfortable about this?”
“No, Father.” It was her duty.

“Good. I wouldn’t want to send you there if it wasn’t the case.” Her father then took her hand into his. “Just remember this, Mira. You are a Forrester. You’ll always be a Forrester. Never forget that.”

Mira arrived in the clearing. Once, she had spotted Asher talking with Gwyn there. There, before the trunk of a tree that was bigger than the others, Talia and Ethan had played music more often than she could remember. Behind another tree, she recognized the place where Rodrik always hid when Elaena Glenmore visited them. She always found him, and Mira suspected now that Rodrik had wanted her to find him, and that it was why he always hid at the same place. Farther, out of the path, Asher used to teach Ethan how to fight with a wooden sword. And that stump… She used to come here to read from time to time.

She remembered a time when it began to rain as she read a book she borrowed from Maester Ortengryn. It was a very precious work of his collection, about the history of ironwood crafting. A few droplets had begun to stain the page she was reading, and within a few seconds it was as if people were emptying buckets of water over her head. She had come back home, clutching the book under her shoulder. Ortengryn had been furious to see his precious book ruined by water, and Mira had been in for a very strong cold along with a very strong scolding.

The day before she left Ironrath, she had been reading there too, late in the evening. Maester Ortengryn said she shouldn’t do that, that it would strain her eyes to read in the dark like this, but Mira wanted to spend as much time as possible in the grove before she had to leave it. She wasn’t stupid. She knew she may not see it again before long, maybe never. She wanted to use every second she had left in the places she loved the most.

She was reading her favourite tale when she heard brushwood creak before her. She looked up from her book and saw her father’s squire standing before her.

“Hi, Gared.”

“Hi, Mira.”

Gared’s uncle, Ser Duncan Tuttle, was her father’s steward. He was a very good man, always kind with everyone, and Gared was just like him. Gared was almost a brother to Mira and her siblings.

“What are you reading?” he asked her.

“Nothing very original. I’m reading it one last time before I leave.”

“Oh, aye. It’s true.” He remained silent for a moment. “Do you know when you’ll come back?”

“I don’t know, Gared. Probably not before a few years. I’ll be a woman by the time.”

Gared nodded. “You… you must be eager to go there. I suppose it will be exciting in Highgarden.”

“Well, that will be something new for me, but I don’t know what I’m going to do. I’m going to be a handmaiden, but I don’t know for who. I might end in the service of some distant relative of Lord Tyrell. It’s not even sure that I will remain in Highgarden for long. They could send me somewhere else”

“But you won’t come back here before years.”

“No. I have no choice, Gared. It’s my duty to go in the south.”
He nodded again, and looked at her, a sad expression on his face. “You’ll write to us?”

“Of course, I will.”

“Well, I wish you a pleasant time in the Reach.” He stood there for some time, and Mira thought he wanted to say something else. “Farewell, Mira.”

Mira could see it as if it happened yesterday. Asher used to tease her about the way Gared looked at her. Did he hope for something more than friendship? Mira didn’t consider this like a possibility at the time. She was too young, and anyway she knew she would marry someone in the south, so why consider there could be something more? Anyway, Gared was dead, lost in an expedition north of the Wall. She thought of her husband. If only Gerold could be here, with her.

She didn’t know for how long she remained sitting on the stump, her torch installed in an opening carved on the side of the stump, making the torch hold straight. Ralten had made it for her years ago, so she could read in the darkness. She seized the torch and came back to the Hall. She replaced the torch on the wall in the corridor and climbed to her chamber.

To her surprise, it was in perfect order. She shook her head. They definitely should have let the men take care of more vital works. Her chamber was in a perfect state, as if it never burned, while most of the people outside still lived in rudimentary habitations. She took the candle waiting on a table nearby the door and brought it with her close to her bed. The clothes she brought with her from Oldtown were placed in a corner. She put on a nightshift and climbed into her bed.

As she was about to blow off the candle, she noticed a book on the small table right next to her bed. The light allowed her to read the title. *Frozen*. It was the very same exemplary she had before she left for Highgarden and that she was reading the evening before her departure. The fire hadn’t destroyed it. A smile crossed her face. She blew off the candle and laid in her bed.

Mira always had a god sleep, but no matter the position she took, she couldn’t manage to fall asleep tonight. Her mind was filled with memories of her life in Ironrath and worries for the people she loved. Again, she wished Gerold was there. His presence next to her in the bed was soothing. She only truly realized it when he was gone. She didn’t want him to die.

After a few hours, she decided she couldn’t stay in this state any longer. She arose and lit up the candle on her bedside that she brought with her. She climbed the stairs to the apartment where Maester Ortengryn previously lived. When she arrived, she realized at the light of the candle that the room was a complete mess. There had been no cleaning here. Fire had damaged everything and, when she opened the door, a gust of wind welcomed her. There was a hole in the wall. She tightened her nightgown around her and walked in.

There was a desk, half eaten by fire, and she could see pieces of chairs spread all over the floor. The place was in complete ruins, just like in her dreams. She used to spend hours every day with Maester Ortengryn as he taught them sums, figures, writing, reading and history. The maester suggested her a lot of books to read. She wished he was still alive, that she could talk to him again. She could still see him sitting right there, and the girl she saw in the room for feasts was right in front of him, leaning over a piece of parchment. Mira rounded them, and when she was behind Maester Ortengryn’s back, she could see the girl focused as she wrote. She handed her paper to the maester, and when she looked up, her eyes met Mira’s again like they did early in the day. Mira looked for a moment at Ortengryn’s back, then again at the girl, and the girl was crying like before.

Then they both vanished, and Mira was alone in the maester’s room again. She heard ravens caw in the rookery above. Had anyone taken care of the ravens? She was told they were all killed. She climbed the stairs leading to the rookery and found a few ravens waiting. One of them was white.
She knew where he came from. She visited the rookery of the Citadel once, and white ravens only came from there.

Maester Ortengryn had showed her how to take a scroll from a raven and send it back to its home. Gerold had been very surprised of this when she told him as they visited the rookery of the Citadel. She took care of the white raven. Without surprise, it was the same message the Citadel sent to Winterfell that announced that winter was here. She released the raven so he could fly back to the Citadel after feeding him. Since she had taken care of one raven, she didn’t see why she couldn’t deal with the others. She went to another raven and took the message he was carrying. To her great astonishment, the scroll bore a sigil she never thought she would see in her life, at least not used on a raven scroll: the three-headed dragon.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is mostly an exploration of Mira's mind as she meets her past. She spent the last years in the south, and now she is back home, but her home is much more different than when she left it, and she is different herself from the time when she left it as well. In some way, this chapter is Mira meeting the ghosts of her past. War left marks, and no one was spared.

Please review

Next chapter : Margaery
Margaery IX

Chapter Notes

Margaery is back. This chapter is another introspection into her mind. The recent events in King's Landing will have affected her deeply, and she has a lot of time to think about it. She also meets several people, and faces a difficult choice.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

MARGAERY IX

The water was lukewarm. She should get out of it, but she didn’t want to leave it. As long as she remained there, laying in the tub, she could escape the outside world, do as if it didn’t exist, but once she would climb out, it would be over and the thoughts and memories that plagued her day and night would return. She plunged her head inside the water and remained under it for some time. She kept her breath, as long as she could. Right when she was about to rise up to the surface, hands gripped her under her arms and took her off the bath. The surprise it caused made her breathe before she was in the air and she started coughing and spitting water.

“My lady, are you all right?” she heard someone say. “Breathe slowly, my lady. Don’t panic.”

Margaery spat the last water she had in her lungs. “What in the Seven Hells were you thinking about?! You made me choke!” She coughed a little more.

“But… my lady, I thought you were… that you were… You were under the water and I thought…”

“What?!” Margaery yelled. “That I was trying to drown myself? If I wanted to suicide, I would open my veins with a knife, or strangle myself with my bed’s sheets.”

“What’s going on here?” Trystane Martell appeared at the door, followed by two men. “We heard shouting.”

“That’s nothing.” Margaery sighed and stood up to face the prince. “Just the handmaiden you assigned to me who believed I was trying to kill myself because my head was under the water.”

Trystane Martell looked at Margaery, then at the servant, Erella, who had grabbed her out of the tub.

“Prince Trystane, I swear, I was really fearing...” the girl began to explain. Margaery cut her before she could finish.

“I have no intention to kill myself, at least not now. So would you leave me so I can have some time for myself?”

The prince of Dorne looked stunned by her words. “Of course. Erella, leave Lady Margaery alone. I’ll come back later, my lady.”

The prince bowed and left. He had to call after his two men so they would leave. Margaery almost didn’t realize as she was shouting that she was standing naked on the floor. Well, they weren’t the first men to see her like this, and with some luck, they would probably not be the last. She went back to the tub and almost jumped in it. She winced in pain when she landed on the hard surface under the
water. She should be more careful. Her hand found its way to her growing belly.

After a few minutes, the water combined with silence allowed her to find some calm again. She needed this. A bath was one of the few things that could soothe her these times, since she arrived at Storm’s End one week ago.

She remained in the tub as long as she could. She could have stayed in all day, since she didn’t have much else to do and nowhere to go, but she knew she had to leave it. With a sign of resignation, she left the tub and proceeded to dry herself with a towel. Her handmaiden left clothes for her nearby. This included a green gown, thicker than those she was used to. Margaery didn’t know to who these clothes belonged before, but they were obviously made for a lady who lived in the Stormlands, not in the Reach. Well, she was in no place to complain about such details. She may be a prisoner, but her living was much better than when the Sparrows held her in the Great Sept of Baelor. She put on the clothes without a word, then proceeded to brush her hair.

It felt awkward to do it alone, in silence. Margaery was used to being dressed and prepared for the day or any event of importance by her handmaidens. That wasn’t the fact of being attended by other people that she missed the most, but the small talk, the giggles, the laughs and the gossips they would exchange while they prepared her. She had no idea what happened to her friends, but seeing what Cersei did… She couldn’t think about it. She kept brushing her hair, trying to think about nothing, focusing on the sound of her hair being stretched and thinking about what she should do next.

Her family was still powerful. Her father could raise more men than anyone else in Westeros, and the Reach wasn’t much affected by the war when compared to the other kingdoms. If only she could find a way to send a message to Highgarden, to tell them she was still alive. Unless Trystane Martell already told them. After all, if they wanted to keep her as a hostage, they had to make it known that they were holding her prisoner at Storm’s End. It wouldn’t serve their interests to keep her existence secret. And yet, so far, they did everything to keep her away from everyone else in this castle.

Margaery had to remain inside her chambers, the door locked from the outside. She was provided with a comfortable bed, three meals satisfying for a lady, rich furniture, could take a bath whenever she wanted, and she even had a handmaiden assigned to her personal service. They provided her with tissue to sew or books to read if she asked for, and Prince Trystane Martell had come to sup with her every day since she arrived. It was a comfortable golden cage.

Margaery didn’t trust the Martells. She had given some of her trust to Tyene Sand back in King’s Landing, because they had the same enemy in the person of Cersei Lannister, but now she wouldn’t trust a Martell even for a crown. They abandoned Loras.

She shouldn’t think about it. She had to think about a way to contact her father or her grandmother. They certainly thought she was dead. Why wouldn’t they? Perhaps she could contact Sansa as well, but she was probably in the North, too far away, in no position to give her assistance. No, her family was the only help she could hope for. She had to find a way to communicate with them.

She finished to brush her hair and looked at her reflection in the mirror. She had cleaned herself from all the dirt she accumulated in King’s Landing and on the road, and a maester made sure that her infection wouldn’t get worse. Tyene Sand had been able to contain it while on the road, but she didn’t have what was needed to cure the infection properly, or she claimed she didn’t. The maester of Storm’s End, Jurne, solved the problem as soon as she arrived. She looked at the small bandage around her finger.

The door opened at this moment, and Erella came in. “Prince Trystane Martell,” she announced.

The young prince of Dorne walked in. He was handsome, though not the most handsome man Margaery had ever seen. Although he treated her very decently, she didn’t trust him, not after Tyene,
and not considering all the history between House Tyrell and House Martell.

“Lady Margaery.”

“Prince Trystane,” she replied politely.

“Could we sit?”

“Of course.”

Erella began to bring the supper. It began with a mushroom soup, one similar to those they had in Highgarden. She noticed the food she received was much alike the one they had in the Reach. When Erella was gone, the son of Doran Martell spoke up.

“I’m sorry for Erella’s behavior. If you wish, I can find you another handmaiden.”

“Thank you, but no.” Erella was beginning to warm up to her, and Margaery wouldn’t send her away when she could become a way for her to communicate with the outside world. “Erella still knows my tastes better than anyone else, and better to have a handmaiden who’s too careful than one who isn’t enough.”

“If you say so. Did you make good use of the linen I sent?”

“Yes. I think it’s beginning to take a shape. It should make a good cloth soon. I plan to put my family’s sigil and its words on it.”

The prince nodded. They kept doing small talk for a moment. When the main plate arrived, which consisted essentially of a boar, Trystane Martell asked her something he never talked about so far.

“You knew Tommen Baratheon, didn’t you?” the prince asked.

“I was married to him. Wouldn’t it be strange if I didn’t know him?”

“True. Sorry. How was he?”


“Did you love him?”

She had to be more careful about what she would answer to this. His face told her that he was curious about it. “I didn’t have time to know him enough for that. I was supposed to marry his brother, and then he died. We were married hurriedly. We were not together long enough for me to know if I loved him or not.”

“Still, you’re carrying his child.”

Margaery’s eyes followed those of the prince to her belly, then focused again on his face. “Women don’t get a say in the husband they marry, and they don’t decide whether they have children or not.”

The prince nodded. “I would have liked to know him.” This surprised Margaery a little. “I was betrothed to his sister not long ago. If she had lived, and in another world, you child may be my nephew, or my niece.”

“Yes, in another world.” That was a conservative answer, engaging her to nothing.
“Myrcella used to tell me that he loved cats. Was it true?”

“Yes. There… was one that he loved very much. Sometimes he even slept with him. Ser Pounce.”

Trystane nodded, a sad smile coming to his lips. “She talked to me about him.”

An uncomfortable silence settled between them. They finished the main service and arrived at the
dessert, which consisted of lemon cakes. It was Sansa’s favourite dessert. Where was she now? Still
in the North, at Winterfell? On the road back to Casterly Rock?

“I wish I could tell you everything will be all right,” Trystane Martell began. “However, I can’t. It
will depend of the queen’s decision.”

She laid back the cake she just took. “Prince Trystane, I know our families had their differences in
the past, but they also fought together. We both fought for Daenerys’s father back in the days of the
rebellion, and we only surrendered after it was obvious that we had no chance to win and that King
Aerys was dead. Nothing is stopping us from doing the same. My brother…” She stopped to gulp.
“My brother was murdered, along with many of my friends, my cousins, by Cersei. I can convince
my father to side with you, and if he knows that you picked me up and treated me well, he will have
all the more reasons to fight for Daenerys Targaryen. My father is not an idiot. He will never support
Cersei now. Let me write to him. I can convince him to fight for you.”

The prince sighed. “I wish it was that simple. In another world, I would agree with you and let you
write to your father, but here, I can’t. You know why.”

Of course, she did. She was a threat to whoever claimed to be king or queen of the Seven Kingdoms.
More precisely, the life growing inside of her was a threat.

“Lady Margaery, I can ensure your safety, as long as you stay here, but once the queen arrives, your
fate will be in her hands.”

“When will she arrive?” Margaery asked.

“Any day, now. I’ll speak for you to her, I don’t wish to see you die, but the decision belongs to her
in the end.”

He stood up, bowed, and proceeded to leave. “Prince Trystane.” He stopped and turned to look at
her. “May I know, at least, if my parents are alive and well. My brother is dead.” She gulped again.
“I think I have a right to know if the rest of my family is well.”

“As far as I know, your lord father and your lady mother are all right, and so is your grandmother,”
he answered kindly.

“I had friends and cousins, in King’s Landing. They were part of my retinue. Do you have any news
concerning them?”

“I’m afraid not. I’m sorry.”

She thought about asking for Sansa or Mira, but their links with families previously at war with the
Targaryens wouldn’t make Trystane look at her with a favorable eye. She kept her mouth shut.

“Do you need anything?” He always asked after their daily supper.

“No. Thank you.”
“My lady.”

He bowed and left, this time for good. Margaery forced herself to eat the lemon cake before her, but she didn’t taste it. She always had friends with her during supper. Now they were all gone. All the people she knew in King’s Landing, they were gone. Cersei probably killed them. Only Mira had escaped because she was in the North with her husband, and Sansa for the same reason. But were they really still alive? She had no way to know. How could she be sure of anything? One moment she was queen, and the next a prisoner.

Erella came to take away the empty tray, and then she helped Margaery to dress for the night. Margaery did small talk with her, like always. Her handmaiden talked about her life in Storm’s End while Margaery talked about her own in Highgarden.

“Is it true that you were a friend of Lady Lannister?” Erella asked at some point.

“I knew her, yes.”

“She probably hated you. I mean, she was supposed to marry King Joffrey, and instead it was you who married him, and she got to marry the Imp.”

If only she knew how relieved Sansa was when her betrothal with Joffrey was cancelled. “She didn’t show much animosity towards me.”

“Well, I’m surprised. And the Queen Mother? Cersei Lannister? How was she?”

“Horrible.” On that, Margaery had nothing to hide, since talking against Cersei couldn’t do her any harm here. “You know she murdered her husband?”

“I heard. How could she do this? King Robert was a good man, I heard.”

A good man, maybe, but not a very good husband, and a drunkard. “I didn’t know Robert Baratheon very well.”

“But you knew his brother, Lord Renly? You were married with him.”

“Yes, if we can call it a marriage. You know about Lord Renly, surely?”

“Well…” Erella hesitated. “He was Lord of Storm’s End for a long time. I mean, we knew him for a long time, so… People learned after some time that he was… I mean…”

“We don’t need to talk about this.”

“No, of course, my lady. Still, I find this Cersei Lannister horrible, me too. Hopefully, she won’t stay in power for long. With two Targaryens against her, I don’t give her much time.”

Margaery frowned. “Two Targaryens?”

Erella stopped to prepare her. Margaery could see by her reflection in the glass that the handmaiden realized she said something she shouldn’t have. She served the Martells, not Margaery, and was certainly told to tell her nothing of the events happening in the outside world. “I’m sorry, I… I think you’re ready, my lady. I wish you a good night.”

Margaery followed her in the glass as she walked out of the room. The door locked behind her. Two Targaryens. What did she mean? Well, it didn’t matter much. She didn’t succeed to get to send a message to her family. She was still all alone. If only she had someone to talk to. Her mother, her
grandmother, her father, Sansa, Mira, Sera, Loras…

She left her chair, came face to the wall and leaned her forehead against it. Her life had turned to hell ever since she was arrested by the Sparrows. She had a surge of hope when Cersei was arrested and forced to make her walk of shame, but all of it disappeared when Tyene Sand came to extract her from her cell.

According to her, the daughter of Oberyn Martell was warned that Cersei intended to destroy the Great Sept of Baelor. By who, Margaery had no idea. Still, she had come to her cell and pushed her out without explanations, saying they had to leave now. When Margaery said they had to bring her brother with them, the Sand Snake refused flatly, saying he would only slow them down, that he was in a condition much worse than Margaery, and that if she hoped to live, they had to escape immediately. The young woman even promised to Margaery that she would come back later to save her brother, but she didn’t. She lied.

As the two progressed through the underground tunnels of King’s Landing, they had heard a great sound, stronger than the thunder from that day. Then a part of the tunnel collapsed behind them, and Margaery saw a flash of green light behind the debris as they fell. Then she had known, she had wanted to go back, go back to save her brother, but Tyene had stopped her, and she even knocked her out. Margaery had woken up later, in a cave, the storm still raging. The Sand Snake now had a dagger in her hand and threatened to kill her if she attempted to flee, or to signal their position to anybody.

For the weeks that followed, as they travelled to Storm’s End under the disguise of a septa and a Silent Sister, Margaery was a prisoner. Tyene always kept an eye on her. She treated her wounds from her captivity, but warned her that she wouldn’t let her flee. She told Margaery about what happened in King’s Landing, that her brother was killed inside the Great Sept, that Randyll Tarly and his men were dead as well, and that for the rest of the world, she was dead too. Everyone believed she was in the sept when it exploded. She had no choice but to follow Tyene to wherever she would bring them.

They headed for the Stormlands. She was disguised as a Silent Sister, forced to not speak. Sometimes, Tyene poisoned her. She put something in her food, and Margaery would cough, vomit, and feel weak until the Sand Snake gave her the antidote. That was why Margaery could never escape. She could never know when Tyene poisoned her, and if she escaped, she could die without her antidotes. They finally reached the Stormlands and avoided the Dothrakis until they reached Storm’s End, where she was handed to Trystane Martell.

Overall, Margaery had been lucky. She was still alive, and her baby hadn’t died. Considering her constant poisoning, that was a miracle. She had managed to hide her pregnancy to Tyene on their way, her morning sickness being limited by the small amounts of food she got, and confused with the symptoms of her captor’s poison. Trystane Martell proved to be much more human than his cousin. Still, she couldn’t trust him. She couldn’t trust the Martells, and she couldn’t trust the queen they served, Daenerys Targaryen. When she learned that Margaery was carrying Tommen’s child, the Targaryen queen might decide to eliminate her. Margaery and her child were a threat to her rule, after all. That was why she was kept inside a single room. The Martells didn’t want the news that Margaery Tyrell was alive and pregnant to spread. For now, most of the world still believed that she was dead, and if the Targaryen queen wanted, she could decide that Margaery had to be dead for real.

The wall against which she leaned her head was cold. How could they arrive to this? Margaery and her family had wanted her to be queen one day, and they did everything to reach this goal without endangering themselves too much, but now… Loras was dead. Her brother was dead.
A sob escaped her throat. *My little brother.* A second followed. *Sera. Megga. Alla. Elinor.* She burst into cries, turned her back to the wall and let herself slip along it to the floor. And there she sobbed. She cried for all those she loved that she lost. *Tommen.* Tommen, her husband, was dead too. She kept crying. She had a child from him, a child she prayed for, and he was dead. Now her child could die as well. Was did she do to deserve this, to lose so many people she loved?

She remembered the first tourney to which Loras took part, how handsome he had looked in his armor and with his curly hair. She remembered the day Sera entered her service. She remembered Alla and Megga chuckling together in a corner as they were sewing. They were all gone. All gone. She remembered Tommen, speaking to her in the middle of the night, Ser Pounce climbing into their bed and rubbing against them, making Margaery laugh because his fur tickled her.

She cried, and cried, and cried. In her dreams, her brother was in a cell, covered with mud, calling for her, begging to help. Margaery tried to reach him, but as she tried to walk and then to run to him, his cell receded until it was so far that she couldn’t see him. She moved backwards, still trying to go in the opposite direction, the tunnels leading her outside the city. Then she saw the Great Sept explode in a smoke of green flames, and she tried to run to help her little brother again, like when they were children and that he almost drowned in the Mander, but she kept getting farther from him, until she fell behind into complete darkness.

Her handmaiden woke her up on the floor in the morning, worried as always. Margaery tossed her concerns away, reassuring her that she was fine, and after she was dressed for the day, she sent Erella away. She remained at the only window of her room, looking outside. It gave on the sea, and apart from the waves crashing against the shores, there was nothing much to look at. There were never waves like these in the Mander or at Oldtown. What was her family doing right now? Did her mother spend her days at the window like her, looking outside, thinking her only daughter was dead along with her son? If only she could send a raven, only to tell her parents that she was truly alive, that they still had a child in this world.

The door opened. A man in the thirties with a moustache and short brown hair walked in and the door closed behind him. He wore clothes made of leather, without ornament. As soon as he was inside, he bowed to her.

“Lady Margaery. Please forgive me if I disturb you. My name is Malcolm Branfield. Could I have a few words with you?”

“Of course.”

She saw no reason to refuse. She had nothing to do of her day anyway, so why not speak with this man. His name sounded familiar, but Margaery couldn’t recall where or when she heard it. She had met so many people in her life. Even though she tried hard, she couldn’t remember all of them. She remembered most of them, since it was very useful to make friends, but she couldn’t prevent her from forgetting a few. They sat face to face.

“My lady, maybe it will come as a surprise, but I had a member of my family that you knew very well.”

“Is that so? Who was he?” Almost everyone told her they knew someone she knew when they introduced themselves for the first time.

“She. She was my niece. She was your handmaiden for some time. Her name is Mira.”

Margaery remembered immediately where she heard the name *Branfield.* “You are her uncle, aren’t you? Her mother’s brother?”
“Aye, it’s me. I see she talked to you about me.”

“Yes, she did.” She never expected to see this man here. From what she remembered, he was supposed to be in the North, at Ironrath. If he was coming from there, maybe he knew something.

“How is Mira? I had no news from her for some time.”

She had to hear good news, to hear that at least one of the people she cared about was well. And she needed news about the events that took place outside these walls.

“And I was hoping you could tell me how was my niece. I had no news from her in quite a long time. The last I heard, she was wed to a knight of House Hightower.”

He was late in the news, indeed. “You didn’t see her on your way from the North?” If he had come from Ironrath, he should have crossed Mira’s path.

“I didn’t come from the North, my lady. I spent more than a year in Essos, at the service of Daenerys Targaryen. I heard very few about my family while I was there.”

“You serve Daenerys Targaryen?”

“Aye, I do.”

She had to be careful then. “How did you end up serving her? Mira never told me anything about this.”

“She probably didn’t know. Her mother sent me on the other continent to bring back her brother Asher.”

“The one who was exiled?”

“Aye. I found him and we got help from Daenerys to come back home, but she asked me to remain at her service. So I stayed in Meereen and came back to Westeros with her army. And here I am. I was hoping you could tell me a little about my niece’s whereabouts. She is the last kin I have, after all.”

“I’m sorry,” Margaery said. She meant it, but she didn’t only say this because she meant it. “I know what happened at the Battle of Ironrath. Mira was broken after that.”

“I imagine.” His face showed a pained expression. “Poor girl. She was only a child when she left. I didn’t see her for years. How does she look like now?”

He didn’t seem to have asked the question to her. He was looking away, at the floor, but she answered all the same. “She has grown up into a beautiful young woman. When I saw her with her husband, he only had eyes for her. It was me who arranged her marriage.”

“How is he? Who did she marry?”

“Ser Gerold Hightower. He is a grandson of Lord Leyton Hightower. My mother is a Hightower, so she helped me to arrange everything.”

He smiled. “I’m glad to hear it. Elissa always wanted Mira to marry in the south. At least, this wish of hers was granted. I thank you.”

“You have no need to thank me. I never really saw Mira as my handmaiden. She was a friend to me. A real friend.” And I abandoned her when she tried to help her family, when having her close to me
became dangerous. And still, she remained loyal to me. “The last time I saw her was a few months ago. She and her husband led a small army in the North to take back Ironrath from the Whitehills and they stopped in King’s Landing on their way. Then they made their way up north and I never saw her again. The last news I got from her was that they managed to take Moat Cailin and that they were heading for Winterfell.”

He looked at her with a queer expression. “So, Mira is in the North?”

“As far as I know, yes. I don’t know what happened after that. Ever since I was made a prisoner by the Sparrows, I heard almost nothing of what happened anywhere in Westeros.”

“Did Mira and her husband join the Lannisters when they went in the North?”

“Yes, they joined a combined force of men from the Westerlands, the Riverlands and the North to take back the North to the Boltons.” She didn’t even know if they succeeded.

“Well, I suppose this is good news, then. The Boltons were defeated. There was a battle at Winterfell and Ramsay Bolton died. Good riddance. He killed my nephew Ethan. I suppose Mira must be safe and that they managed to free Ironrath. Though I wish I could talk to her.”

These were the first news she got from the outside world in months. So Sansa succeeded. Winterfell was hers. “This means the Lannisters hold Winterfell now.”

He looked at her again with a queer expression. “The Lannisters? No, they don’t have Winterfell. Winterfell is being held by Jon Snow as we speak.”

“Jon Snow? Lord Eddard Stark’s bastard son?”

“Yes, my lady. I see you’re not aware of what’s going on out there. He was declared King in the North after your husband, King Tommen, died. The Westerlands, the Riverlands and the Vale support him.”

Sansa’s brother was king of four of the Seven Kingdoms? That wasn’t something Margaery expected. If her memories were right, Sansa’s half-brother was Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch. How could he be named King in the North? That made no sense. Margaery had considered many possibilities of what Sansa and her husband could do after Tommen’s death, but naming her bastard brother king wasn’t among them. In fact, she almost expected Tyrion Lannister to proclaim himself king. With Tommen dead, there were no living Baratheon left. The family was extinct. Tyrion Lannister was Lord of Casterly Rock, his wife was Lady of Winterfell, and they just brought back peace into the Riverlands. With these three kingdoms, they could carve their own kingdom, even seize the Iron Throne. Margaery had thought that if she could contact her family, she could gain Tyrion and Sansa’s support eventually for her child, perhaps naming Lord Tyrion Regent of the Realm. With Ser Kevan and Lord Randyll gone, he was the most plausible choice. He had been Hand for Joffrey, then Master of Coin, and Margaery and his wife were friends. To maintain the Tyrell-Lannister alliance, it was the most logical choice, not to mention that Lord Tyrion would make sure that Cersei was neutralized for good. Margaery even thought that she could promise a marriage between her children and Sansa’s children when they would be of age.

However, all these were only plans she made in her mind. She couldn’t execute them without talking to her family. Now, however, if Sansa and her husband chose to support another king, this complicated things a lot.

“Why was Jon Snow named King in the North?” she asked. Why choose a bastard as their king? It made no sense.
Malcolm Branfield was about to answer when they heard something Margaery never heard before. She didn’t remember hearing anything like this. It was living, but nothing to live that she knew. She had her answer a second later when she looked through the window and saw a gigantic creature flying over the sea right in her sight. *She came. She’s here.*

The door burst open and Erella came in. “My lady, we must hurry. The queen is there. I must prepare you for your meeting with her.”

Margaery didn’t have much choice than to comply. Mira’s uncle excused himself and left Margaery alone with her handmaiden. She had her hair brushed again and her gown smoothed, and then she waited. She wasn’t to be in the main hall when the Dragon Queen would arrive. Again, the fewer people who saw her, the better for the Targaryens. All she could do was to wait. The waiting was without end to her. If they had to end this, better to end it now. But Margaery didn’t want this to end. As much as she wished for her brother to be still alive, she didn’t want to die. There were still people who loved her. She still had her family, and now that Loras was dead, she was the only future of her house. And she had a child who was coming. What would happen to him?

She finally heard footsteps from the other side of the door. It was unlocked, and then it opened. Two men wearing black helmets and black breastplates first came in, holding a spear and a shield of the same color than their armor. Then another person, wearing black as well, but without armor and without weapons, walked in. The door closed behind her.

The woman who stood before Margaery had to be about her age. She wore a black dress that covered everything from her ankles to her neck and her wrists. Her hair was a silvery blond like none Margaery had ever seen. She looked at Margaery with a cold and unflinching gaze that left no place to emotion. Her hands hung at her sides. She said nothing. She only looked at Margaery.

“Your Grace,” Margaery finally said, supposing she had to be the first to talk.

“It is customary to kneel before a queen,” the other young woman replied.

Margaery saw that there was no way around. She knew little about Daenerys Targaryen, but the tales from across the Narrow Sea talked about a few atrocities, including the burning of children or the crucifixion of men. She couldn’t take any risk to infuriate the Mother of Dragons. She curtsied before Daenerys Targaryen, knowing very well what it meant. Better to be a living lady than a dead queen.

“You may rise,” the Targaryen told her. Margaery did so. “Prince Trystane told me that you arrived last week.”

“I did.”

“My informants told me you were dead. How did you survive the events of King’s Landing? I want to know everything.”

This queen wasn’t Cersei. Joffrey’s mother took pleasure in humiliating people and making them feel smaller than she was, and you could see how she felt through her eyes and the expressions of her face. That wasn’t the case with this one. Her eyes were cold, deprived of emotions, and her voice displayed no feelings at all. It didn’t make her in any way less threatening. In fact, Margaery thought she may be even more dangerous than Cersei. She had no reason to hide the events of her escape however, so she told her everything.

“You went through a lot. I’m sorry for your brother.” For a brief moment, Margaery saw a softness within the eyes of this queen, but the cold expression returned almost immediately. “Cersei Lannister will pay for her crimes. On that, you have my word.” Margaery wasn’t surprised. Cersei occupied
the Iron Throne. Whoever wanted the throne would have to kill Cersei before she could sit on it. Cersei would never give it away. “However, I don’t really know what to do with you. Should I consider you as an enemy, or a friend, or something different?”

Margaery chose her words very carefully. “I have no wish to be your enemy. The enemy of my enemy is my friend. Cersei killed my brother, and she killed many other people that I loved, people I knew for years, who were my friends since I was a child. I can help you to defeat her, if that’s what you want.”

“Let’s suppose it is true. Should I be concerned about you after we’ve defeated Cersei Lannister?”

“You have no reason to be concerned about me.” She saw the dragon. Margaery wasn’t foolish enough to try to take down a queen who could order a dragon to burn her by moving her finger. Anyway, it didn’t matter much for her to be queen now. Being queen cost her more than she ever thought it would, and she didn’t want to lose more people she loved for a crown she had little chance to get.

“Shouldn’t I? House Tyrell fought for my father during the war of the Usurper. Then you made an alliance with his brother, and when he died you switched your cloak for the son. You were wed to three kings, three usurpers, all Baratheons, and you’re bearing a child from one of them. Tell me why I should trust you? Why shouldn’t I expect you to stab me in the back the first chance you get?”

Margaery sighed and said something she never thought she would say not long ago. “I’m no longer interested in being queen. I lost too many people, and unlike Cersei, I don’t value a crown over my life, or over my family’s life. The Targaryens were gone, so we had to live in the Seven Kingdoms as they were after your father was defeated. My father will want revenge against Cersei for my brother’s death. He will be more than happy to help you to take the Iron Throne if this means Cersei’s death. He won’t care that I am no longer queen. Knowing that I’m alive will be more than enough for him.”

In fact, Margaery was afraid that her father could be greedy enough to try to seize an opportunity later to make her queen, if he believed there was one. He might also complain, though not openly, about the fact that she was no longer queen, but with the help of her grandmother, Margaery believed she could convince her father to listen to reason. Now was no longer the time to look for a way to make her queen. The time had come to think about their family’s survival, and this survival involved the death of Cersei Lannister.

“If that’s what you want, I will kneel before you and give up any claim I might have on the Iron Throne, in front of as many witnesses as you want. I was only a queen consort, anyway. I was the queen because my husband was the king,” Margaery explained. “This is no longer the case. My husband is dead. I am no longer a queen, because I am no longer married to a king.”

Daenerys Targaryen walked to her right and looked away for a time, always maintaining a severe expression and her chin up, then stared back at Margaery. “I need your father’s armies. I’m ready to overlook all your past actions and your former alliances with my enemies, to forgive you and to do as if nothing happened ever since my father died. However, know this. If you ever betray me, or try to rebel against me, I will be without mercy.”

She meant it. It wasn’t hard to see. “I understand.”

“I will allow you to write to your father.” Margaery’s heart bumped into her chest. She succeeded. “You are to tell him that you are alive and well, and to persuade him to swear fealty to me and to follow me into battle. You will remain at Storm’s End for the time being, as a guest. I will give you more freedom inside the castle, but you are not to leave it under any circumstance.”
“Very well.”

“There’s another matter we must discuss. Your child. He could be a threat to my rule.”

“I swear that I will never try to use him against you.”

“Even if you say the truth, words are wind. People made promises to me in the past, and many didn’t honour them. Anyone could try to use your child to challenge my claim.”

There was no way out. Margaery knew it. Tywin Lannister murdered the children of Rhaegar Targaryen twenty years ago, the nephew and the niece of the woman standing before her. She wouldn’t spare the great-grandchild of this man.

“I will be honest with you. I have no wish to kill your child,” Daenerys Targaryen told her, causing relief to flood through Margaery for a brief moment. “I do not consider children responsible for their parents’ crimes. However, I cannot allow him to be an eventual threat to my rule. So here’s what I propose.” Margaery listened. “I will let your child live. You will stay here until he is born, then you will be moved somewhere else. As for your child, I will take him somewhere people will take care of him. No harm will come to him. But you will never see him again.”

“I beg your pardon!”

“You heard me. You will never see him. You won’t be allowed to know where he is, who he is, his name, or what he does. And you will not be allowed to talk about him to anybody. No one must learn of his existence. If you do inform someone, Varys will tell me, and you will face the consequences.”

“But he’s my child!”

“So you better think about what’s best for him. Life or death. Because that’s the choice you have.”

“I am his mother,” Margaery pleaded.

“I know. I had a son, a long time ago, and he died right when he came into the world. I lost him.” Again, her voice had turned softer. “Your child’s fate will be much better than the one my son had. You are his mother, so think about what’s best for him.”

She couldn’t take her child away from her. No, she couldn’t do this.

“What if I refuse your offer? What if I choose death for him?” she asked. That was a dangerous game she played, but she had to try.

For a moment, she thought she saw doubts in Daenerys Targaryen’s eyes. But then the resolve was back. “Who’s telling you that I gave you a choice?” She approached Margaery. She was far more fearful than Cersei. “Did I forget to mention that when you give up all claim on the Iron Throne, you will also have to recognize before all of Westeros that Tommen Baratheon was the son of Jaime and Cersei Lannister? Even if you managed to keep your child, everyone would know about his origins, and he would be seen as a product of incest. It may be acceptable for my family, but not for yours. Is that really the life you want for your child?”

There was no way out. Margaery could see it. Her child would be taken away from her the moment he was born, and there would be nothing she could do. The people here didn’t serve her family. They served this woman. If she tried to find him back, it would only create problems for her family. She felt her baby pushing very faintly inside of her. She had to think about him. She had to think about her family. After a long time while she considered every option available, she took one of the
most difficult decisions of her life, if not the hardest.

“I accept,” the former queen finally said.

“Good. I’ll have someone to bring you what you need to write to your father. Don’t try to warn him about your child. Only write what I told you.”

“How do I know you will keep your word? You could just kill him, and I wouldn’t know it.”

“You’ll have to trust me, Margaery Tyrell. If you want your family to survive, you have to. Believe me, I will not cause any harm to your child. I fought in Slaver’s Bay for years so that no child who was born there would know what it was to be sold or bought. When the Great Masters of Meereen crucified one hundred and sixty-three children on the road from Yunkai to their city in order to taunt me, I crucified one hundred and sixty-three of them. I didn’t come back to Westeros to murder children after I fought for them in Essos.”

She seemed sincere. She was better than Cersei to simulate emotions if that was what she did.

“We’ll talk again later.”

Daenerys Targaryen left on those words and Margaery found herself alone once again. If Daenerys Targaryen kept her promises, she may have saved her family from Cersei’s wrath and from dragons, but she lost her child in the process. She laid a hand on her belly. She didn’t have much time left with him.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter : Asher
Asher III

They slowly progressed through the tunnel, their legs buried into water up to the thigh. They were thirty men, all of them Northerners, silently advancing in the dark, holding their weapons over their heads to keep them away from the water and to prevent them from getting rusted. They had to be in position before dawn, when the attack would begin. He wished Beskha was with him, but she was watching over Ryon in their camp. Asher had allowed his little brother to accompany them to the siege on his insistence, but he wouldn’t let Ryon join the battle. He wouldn’t risk his life.

The bulk of their forces were positioned in sight of the Whitehill forces, in front of the battlements of Highpoint and its main gate. They would launch a massive assault that would bring most of the Whitehill men to the battlements, allowing Asher and his men to fulfill their mission.

The siege had lasted for a month now. Asher didn’t expect it to last so long, truth be told, but here they were, a few weeks after they arrived, about to end this war. Gwyn gave them the position of a secret tunnel that was no longer used, leading from a ruined section of Highpoint to a near river. She assured them her father wasn’t aware of its existence. The castle was half in ruins and many people living in there never visited the abandoned sections. The tunnel Gwyn told them about was used a long time ago as a mean to escape for the family if the castle was to fall, but there had been a collapse a few decades ago, making it useless. However, Gwyn thought that it might be possible to clear the path. Asher’s men had worked an entire month to make the tunnel usable again. Now it was, and they could put their plan to execution.

Asher’s brother-in-law was waiting outside, leading the army. He would attack at dawn. Asher had come to like him. He was shy whenever it came to Mira, but he loved her, it was obvious for everyone to see. Asher never thought his sister would make a man so besotted. They seemed to fit pretty well together, still. Asher remembered with a smile the moans his sister was making when he found them together before the Battle of Winterfell. Both were reserved people, not trying to attract attention. Gerold was a good lad, but he lacked the behavior to be of good company around a campfire. In a private discussion however, he could prove to be more enjoyable. Asher had more than one drink with him. His sister’s husband seemed eager to know more about Mira from her brother, so Asher told him a few stories about Mira while she was at Ironrath. He remained silent on the most humiliating ones, though there weren’t many, and tried to depict Mira back when she lived at Ironrath the best he could. He had the Hightower knight laugh more than once when he told him about the many times Mira could force anyone to shut up whenever there was someone insufferable or arrogant nearby.

Gerold Hightower genuinely wanted to make his sister happy. That was enough for Asher to like him. As a joke, he always threatened to gut him if he found out that he hurt his sister in any way. None of them took it seriously now, both knowing that would never happen. Another topic they often discussed was Gwyn. Asher was worried about her. When they arrived at Highpoint, they had
a parley with her father where she was present. She tried to talk some sense into him, like she had tried for her brother, and again she failed. In fact, that was even worse than with Torrhen Whitehill.

“You’re not my daughter. I don’t know who you are, but you’re not her. All I see is a hole for Forrester cum.”

Such were the words her father used to her face. Asher had wanted to kill him on the spot. His brother-in-law had placed a hand on his arm, preventing him from killing the man who just insulted his wife. The parley had given no result and Ludd Whitehill flatly refused the offer to join the Night’s Watch in order to save his life.

Despite all this, Gwyn had begged Asher to let her father live, to give him another chance to go to the Wall. Asher didn’t understand Gwyn, not after what this man told her, but before her insistence, he promised he would try. He didn’t think Ludd would accept to go to the Wall, even with a dagger on his throat and a sword on his chest, but he would give him one more chance. For Gwyn.

Gerold strongly advised him to not kill Ludd, because he could lose Gwyn if he did it, but Asher didn’t see any other possible outcome. If Ludd Whitehill refused to join the Night’s Watch, Asher would have to execute him for high treason, and he would have to carry out the sentence himself, as the Old Way demanded it. There was no way around it. He would have to kill Ludd. He had to say that the prospect of killing the man delighted him. Gwyn would have to accept that. Her father was a cunt and he didn’t want to live if there were Forresters left in this world.

The secret passage had a slow climbing curve that led to the heart of Highpoint. After long minutes, they reached a point where there was no more water on the ground. They kept going forward, not stopping a single moment. They had to be in place for when the assault would start.

The torches they carried lit the walls, highlighting their irregular surface. Without the torches, they wouldn’t be able to progress in the dark. They followed the only path before them, until they reached the point where they gained access to Highpoint. A massive stone three meters high blocked the entrance to the castle. Asher and six other men moved it very slowly. Then they stepped into an empty corridor. Through a window nearby, Asher could see they were about an hour before dawn. He sent his men in groups of five to take their positions. They were to use the paths Gwyn indicated on a map, to avoid any patrol. Half the castle was abandoned, but there were empty sections everywhere through Highpoint, which meant there were largely unused corridors even a few feet away from Ludd Whitehill’s bedroom.

Asher’s team was soon positioned. They waited in an empty room that looked to have been used as some sort of larder a very long time ago and waited. Then the trumpets sounded and the assault began. They waited one minute before they entered into action. They left their hideout and ran to the post of the trebuchet nearby. There were six men there to man it, and only one of them had a weapon. They did not expect to be attacked here. Asher killed the guard who didn’t have the time to draw his sword, and his men took care of the others. They began to prepare the trebuchet, reorienting it to take another target, one who wouldn’t expect to be a target, at least not by this machine. Asher looked over the post and saw the Hightower men struggling under a rain of projectiles, placing ladders and bringing a battering ram to breach the gate. The defenses of Highpoint were very well organized to sustain an assault from the outside, but they were unprepared to face one from the inside. Asher looked at the other posts the teams were tasked to take. They all had succeeded. Asher prepared the crossbows they had with them. Then, when he received the confirmation from every post that they were ready, he gave the signal.

All of a sudden, the defenders were the ones to receive a rain of projectiles. Two trebuchets, three catapults and one scorpion fired on them simultaneously. Before they could recover from the shock,
thirty bolts fired by as many crossbows hit them. The soldiers over the gate were those to pay the higher price. They kept reloading the crossbows and shooting at the defenders, making them unable to fight the attackers from two sides. Before long, a loud crack was heard as the gate was breached and the ram pierced through it.

Asher stopped to look at the flood of men with the grey tower on their tabard coming from the gates and killing everyone in their way. He spotted his brother-in-law among them. For a moment, he saw the same events that happened at Ironrath over a year ago. Now the Whitehills knew what it was, to lose what you held dear the most.

“Follow me,” he ordered his men. “We have nothing left to do here.”

His men were behind him. They followed him for months, waging war against the Whitehills using guerilla tactics, and they were entirely loyal to Asher, ready to die with him. They went into the most used corridors of Highpoint. Asher cut through every man with the Whitehill sigil he came across. All the while he brought every assailant he came upon with him, and soon he had about twenty or thirty men with him. They ran to the very heart of Highpoint, where the apartments of Ludd were, killing everyone in their way. Asher almost cut a man in two with one swift stroke of his father’s sword. They arrived before a room. Asher knew that in this room, a small dining room, there were two sets of stairs along the walls that led to Ludd’s apartments. With some chance, they could get him there. He looked at his men. Some of them had crossbows, other had swords. A few had ironwood shields. He made a nod to Bloodsong, who returned it, and they burst through the door open.

They were welcomed by a volley of bolts. Instinctively, Asher plunged forward under the table. He heard a few muffled cries behind and looked at his people. Some had withdrawn in the corridor, but a few were lying on the floor, one or several bolts in their body. Bloodsong was among them. He looked at Asher while he died, blood spurting out of his mouth. He was dead. He followed Asher to the other side of the world, and he died.

“So, what do you think of it, Forresters?” Asher knew this voice. The voice of the man who ruined his life. Ludd Whitehill. “Not that easy, isn’t it, To take Highpoint? You thought I would let you take my home so easily?” Bloodsong’s face was lifeless. Asher felt anger rising in him. There was a charged crossbow nearby. He grabbed it on the floor and crawled to the other side of the table, still hidden under it. “Come on. Show me how Forresters die. Get out of your hideout and show me how you men die like the scum you are.”

Asher rolled over, his back against the floor, his head and chest emerging from under the table, and took a shot at Ludd Whitehill. The bolt missed its target and he cursed. He rolled back under the safety of the table, and a new volley of bolts lounged themselves into the thick wood. Thankfully, this wood was deep and strong enough to stop the bolts. Asher suspected the table was made of ironwood.

“Show yourself, you coward, under that table!” Ludd shouted.

“Why don’t you come to take a look?” Asher asked loudly.

“Ah. So it’s you. Leave your hiding, Asher. I want to see you when you die.”

“I’m not planning to die today. I have a family who’s counting on me. I have sisters. I have a brother. I have a wife.”

“You’re only a fucking bastard, no better than your father.”
“You’re right, I’m like him.” Malcolm told him before he left Meereen. *You are your father’s son, Asher. For all your differences, he would be proud of you.* All the while, Asher recharged his crossbow. “And that’s why I’m going to kill you, for all the Forrester lives you took.”

“I took what was owned to me. You Forresters always spit on House Whitehill. Well, it’s over. OVER! The time when we bent the knee before the Forresters is over.”

He was mad. “You’re surrounded, Ludd. You have no chance to escape, no ally who will come to your help. Surrender, now.”

“I will die before I surrender to a Forrester!”

“Just like the son,” Asher muttered. He looked at the door. His men were in position. “NOW!”

They emerged from the corridor and sent their own volley of bolts towards the crossbowmen at the top of the stairs. Asher waited three good seconds before he rolled again from under the table. He targeted one of the Whitehill crossbowmen and shot. The bolt lounged itself into his neck.

For a time that looked like an eternity, everything was only an exchange of bolts between the two sides. The Whitehills were fewer, but they had the advantage of the position. Asher’s men were trying to take cover anywhere, under the table like him, under the stairs, behind columns. They even used chairs and candlesticks as protection. Then a large group of men emerged from the corridor. The Hightowers joined them. They had shields that they used to protect themselves from the coming bolts. They began to climb the stairs. Asher had never been so happy to see them.

“Asher! Asher!” His brother-in-law was calling after him in the commotion. Asher stood up and made his presence known. Gerold saw him. “Asher, are you all right?”

“Ludd is above those stairs.” He said nothing more, and went to follow the Hightower men.

“Asher, wait!”

He picked an ironwood shield on the way and began to climb the stairs just like the men from the Reach. They fought well and were very well organized, he had to give it to them. When he arrived on the next floor, a Whitehill crossbowman targeted him. Asher charged while using the shield as a protection. The bolt was stopped by the shield and Asher rushed the man, crushing his head against the ground, killing him instantly. He stood up and drew his father’s sword. Ludd Whitehill was there, not far away, fighting with the few guards he had left. Asher walked angrily to the man. He killed one of the guards in his way, and the next moment Ludd Whitehill was alone. He was surrounded by about twenty men, some with crossbows.

Asher stood forward. Ludd supported his gaze. “After killing the sons, you want to kill the father. Come here, Forrester. I’m going to kill you.”

Asher stepped forward, but not too much. He stared at Ludd. He wanted him to suffer. “You weren’t there when your sons died, weren’t you? You should have. I was. Did you know they screamed like women as they died? Gryff, as he burned in the fire. And Torrhen, after I cut his hand. It was fitting that your eldest son lost his hand. He had no honor, just like the Kingslayer.”

Ludd Whitehill roared and charged forward. Asher stepped aside and made him stumble with his leg. He then plunged his sword in Ludd’s leg. The Lord of Highpoint screamed, just like his sons screamed. Asher walked slowly around the man lying on the floor and tossed his sword away from his hand. Then he swung his sword and cut his right hand. Ludd’s scream were deafening.

“You got fat, Lord Whitehill.” He stood up in front of the wailing man. “You have a choice, Ludd.
This is your last chance to join the Night’s Watch if you want to live. I’m only doing this because Gwyn asked me to. Because despite everything you’ve done, and everything you’ve told her, she still loves you, and she still sees you as her father. You’re still her father. So you have one last chance to live, for the sake of your daughter!”

“Go… fuck… yourself!!!”

“I suppose it means no.” Asher wasn’t surprised, and to be honest, a great part of him wanted Ludd Whitehill to refuse. A small part wished he would choose to live, if only for Gwyn, but it was only a small part of him. “Ludd Whitehill, I declare you guilty of treason and of crimes against the North. I, Asher Forrester, Lord of Ironrath, in the name of Jon Snow, the Lord of Winterfell and the King in the North, hereby sentence you to death.”

“Wait, Asher!” Gerold was behind him. “We can still send him to the Wall.”

“He refused,” Asher retorted.

“We can force him to go there,” his brother-in-law argued.

“He will try to escape the first chance he gets.”

“Asher, you can’t do this.”

“Who’s this fucking boy?” Ludd asked on the floor.

“I am Ser Gerold Hightower. I am the husband of Lady Mira Forrester.”

Ludd Whitehill looked at Gerold with interest for a moment, then laughed between screams of pain. “So it’s you! It was my son Torrhen who was supposed to marry her. Too bad for her. Torrhen would have been more interesting for her than you. But not for long. He would have killed the slut as soon as she would have given him a son or two for Ironrath and Highpoint. I wonder how we would have killed her. Maybe just like her brother, with a knife in her throat. A fitting end for a whore, I suppose.”

Asher boiled in anger. It was time for him to end this, to kill the man who was responsible for the deaths of his father, of his mother, of Rodrik, Ethan, Bloodsong. He raised his sword and prepared himself to deliver the final blow that would end House Whitehill forever.

Before he could kill Ludd, someone pushed him. Asher turned to see who did this just as Gerold Hightower was screaming and bringing down his own sword, point first, through Ludd Whitehill’s face.

Everything was frozen for a very long time. Asher was shocked by what he just saw. His brother-in-law pushed him aside to kill Gwyn’s father himself. Slowly, his sister’s husband removed his sword from Ludd’s face. The sword fell on the floor. He was breathing heavily. He turned to look at Asher, a horrified expression on his face. When he spoke, his voice was trembling.

“I kept my promise.”

Chapter End Notes

Please review
Next chapter: Jon
Jon X

Chapter Notes

Jon arrives at Castle Black. And, as I promise a few people, a character from Telltale Game of Thrones is making his first appearance.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Welcome home. These were the words his uncle Benjen told him when he first saw the Wall. It was only a few years ago, but it looked like a lifetime had gone in the meantime. Back then, Jon had been accompanied by his uncle, Tyrion, two men at his service, a recruiter of the Night’s Watch and two other new recruits. Now he was back with an entire army.

The Umbers resisted at the Last Hearth when they arrived. Mors and Hother Umber, the joint castellans of the castle, fought against Jon’s men when they besieged the Last Hearth. They held for some time, but after a short siege, Ned Umber, the second son of Greatjon Umber and Lord of the Last Hearth now that the Smalljon was dead, rode out of his castle alone with two men and knelt before Jon, asking him to take back House Umber as bannerman of House Stark. Ned Umber was a boy, barely older than Bran the last time Jon saw him, and his uncles didn’t agree with his decision. Hother Umber refused to kneel before Jon and decided to join the Night’s Watch. Mors decided to remain at the service of his nephew, though Jon could tell that it didn’t please him. Jon ordered the forces of the Umbers to march with them to Castle Black, in order to garrison the Wall, bringing Mors with him while sending his son and his daughter to Winterfell as wards.

Overall, Jon had brought twenty thousand men with him, and they all stood behind him as his gaze wandered over the Wall. Tyrion Lannister advised him to not bring so many men and was of an opinion to send more men south to fight Cersei Lannister, but Jon thought it was better to position strong garrisons immediately. Tyrion Lannister knew the threat beyond the Wall, but he didn’t see the Night King. Cersei Lannister was far away, unable to send an army in the North. For now, the dead were the real enemy to defeat.

He left the Wall months ago as… He didn’t really know who he was when he left. He was a Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch who was stabbed in the heart by his fellow brothers. Then he was a man brought back from the dead. After that, he became a rebel who fought against the Boltons, and finally he was King in the North, and King of Westeros.

Jon still couldn’t believe that he was the son of Lyanna Stark and Rhaegar Targaryen. All his life, he wanted to be a Stark. Arya could tell him that he was her brother, no matter what happened, he didn’t feel like a Stark anymore. He shouldn’t be king, whether it was for the North or for the Seven Kingdoms. He was supposed to be a brother of the Night’s Watch, and he dreamed he could be a Stark one day. Who was he now?

Jon had no idea of who he was supposed to be. Arya wanted him to be her brother. Tyrion Lannister wanted him to be Lord of the Seven Kingdoms. The lords of the North wanted him to be the King in the North. What did he want? He looked at Ghost who stood next to him. Sometimes, he tried to persuade himself that he was still a Stark by looking at the direwolf. A Targaryen wouldn’t have a wolf. However, this wolf had been found away from the others, all alone. If only he could ask his
opinion to his best friend.

Jon didn’t know what he would do once all of this would be over. Right now, he had to fight the Night King, and that was all that mattered. The person who sat on the Iron Throne would be of no consequence if the dead got through the Wall. Jon only wanted to focus on that for the moment. Keeping his mind on fighting the dead would allow him to not think about his origins, or the Iron Throne, or his position of king.

Jon rode forward, and the column behind him followed. He knew what was waiting for him on the other side of the gates of Castle Black, and that was the one thing that made him eager to come back. He wondered how he looked like now. It was so long since they last saw each other. Jon knew Howland Reed was eager as well.

Along with Jon were several powerful lords from the North and the Vale, including Howland Reed, Robett Glover, Yohn Royce and Harrold Arryn. Jon brought the Knights of the Vale to the Wall on his brother-in-law’s suggestion, saying that would be where they could cause fewer problems. The Knights of the Vale didn’t appreciate, of course. The wildlings followed them as well. Tormund was farther in the column, with his men.

“Let’s hope we’re not too late,” Ser Davos said, riding next to him.

“The Wall is still standing. I suppose everything’s not lost yet,” Jon replied.

“No, indeed. But we must hurry. I can’t pretend I know the dead very well. I didn’t see the Night King, and I didn’t kill a White Walker, but I would rather assume that the dead don’t rest. So we better not rest either. We must man all the castles as quickly as possible.”

“We have enough men for that. More than one thousand per castle, but it will take time to make them usable again.” *If these castles can be put back to use at all.*

At the Fist of the First Men, Jon heard Mormont say that the Night’s Watch once manned seventeen of the nineteen castles along the Wall, but they were abandoned as the number of men in the Watch began to dwindle. As far as Jon knew, never in history had all the castles along the Wall been manned. This winter might see the first time they were all occupied, if they had enough time. Jon didn’t know how long it would take to make all the castles fit to live and to defend. How much time did they have before them? He had no idea. Truth be told, he was surprised that the dead didn’t launch an attack yet. The Night’s Watch was weak, only the shadow of what it once was. At best, they had fifty men alone in Castle Black, barely a tenth of what they were when Jon joined their ranks.

They arrived before the gates, and they didn’t open. Ser Davos announced that the King in the North demanded entry, but no one answered.

“What’s going on? Why is no one opening to us?” Harrold Arryn asked, impatient.

Jon found it strange as well. For a moment, he feared the worst, that Castle Black had fallen to the dead and that Edd and everyone else were dead, but he realized very soon that it was impossible. They sent a few men ahead of them the day before, to warn Castle Black about their arrival. One of them had come back, saying everything was all right and that the Night’s Watch would be ready to receive them. If they found an empty castle, they would have told Jon.

“Let’s wait a little,” Jon finally said.

If they had no answer before one minute, Jon would send men to scale the palisade. Tormund and
the Thenns had done it without problem. Jon could feel the Lord of the Eyrie getting impatient behind. He had questioned Jon’s decisions at every turn on their way to the Wall. Jon understood very well why Tyrion had his man Bronn break the lord’s noise. As Harrold Arryn was about to say something, they heard a mechanism on the other side of the gates and they began to slowly open. Jon sighed in relief when he saw his friend Edd appear behind the opening gate.

Jon dismounted once inside the courtyard. “Still alive, I can see, Lord Commander” he said to his friend.

“I could say the same for you, your Grace,” Edd replied. They exchanged a laugh and hugged tightly. “Welcome back.”

“You did your job well. It still stands.” Jon looked at the Wall to emphasize his meaning.

“We did our best.”

Jon turned to the people behind him. “My lords, my ladies, this is Eddison Tollett, 999th Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch. Edd, this is Lord Harrold Arryn. Lord Yohn Royce, Lord Robett Glover, Lord Howland Red, Lady Lyanna Mormont and Lord Cley Cerwyn.”

“My lords, my lady.” Edd bowed. “Welcome to Castle Black. The Night’s Watch thank you for your help.”

“Why did it take so long to open the gates for us?” Lord Arryn asked.

“We only have thirty-nine men here, my lord, and we try to patrol the Wall the best we can. It’s difficult for us to spare men for the southern gate. It’s the gates giving on the north that we need to watch the most.”

“We have a lot to talk about, Edd,” Jon interrupted before it went further. “But first, we must settle our men. Are there enough available rooms?”

“Don’t worry, you have all the space you want. I can’t guarantee the state of it, though. The lords and the ladies can stay in the King’s Tower. Your men can take the barracks, but they won’t all fit in there.”

“We’ll manage. I want all the lords and ladies to attend a meeting in the common hall in one hour,” Jon said to the people behind him. He then turned to Edd and added in a lower voice. “Where is he?”

“He’s waiting for you. This way.”

“Lord Reed, you should come,” Jon told the Lord of Greywater Watch. He followed him and Edd as four black brothers attended the other lords. They went to the King’s Tower, without surprise. “How are they?”

“As well as they can be after months beyond the Wall. I still wonder how they managed to survive all this time, but they won’t tell me. He said he would only talk to you. He doesn’t talk very much to anyone, truth be told, except the girl. They’re almost always together. They even spend their nights in the same room.”

This detail troubled Jon. He looked at Lord Reed, fearing his reaction to the revelation. The man seemed puzzled. They climbed the stairs to the tower in silence, not daring to ask any other question. Jon had followed this way more often than he could count back when Stannis resided at Castle Black. It was at the door of the room where he lived back then that Edd knocked.
“Who goes there?” a woman’s voice asked from the other side. Jon felt Howland Reed tense next to him.

“Eddison Tollett, with the King in the North and Lord Howland Reed,” Edd replied.

A silence followed that looked like it would last forever. Then the door burst open to reveal a young woman with curly brown hair, wearing clothes made of skins and furs like the wildlings.

“Father!”

“Meera!” The next second, she was throwing herself in Lord Reed’s arms. Jon stepped aside, not wanting to interfere, then he walked inside the room. Lying in the bed was his brother Bran.

“Jon.” A smile appeared on Bran’s face. He was taller than the last time, now approaching Jon’s age when he left Winterfell. Jon smiled in return and came to hug his little brother. Sam had told him that he had gone north of the Wall, and Jon was afraid he could never see Bran again. Still, here he was, alive and safe.

“How are you?” he asked his little brother, sitting on the bed next to him.

“I’m fine. When compared to how I lived lately, Castle Black looks like a paradise.”

“Do you like Hobb’s stew?”

“Aye. I didn’t eat stew since I left Winterfell.”

“Your Grace.” The girl who opened the door had come back with her father. She knelt before Jon.

“Lady Meera, I thank you. For taking care of my brother.”

“What happened to Jojen? Where is he?” Lord Reed asked. His daughter was back on her feet. She lowered her eyes to the floor. Lord Reed’s face took a pained expression.

“Lord Reed,” Bran said, “Jojen died fighting for me. Without him, I would probably be dead right now.”

“Then it wasn’t in vain.”

The Lord of Greywater Watch sat on a chair nearby. His daughter went to his side. “I heard about Rickon,” Bran said. “Edd told me. What about the others?”

“Sansa and Arya are at Winterfell,” Jon answered. “They’re well.”

“Good.” Relief was plain on Bran’s face. “I saw you at Craster’s Keep, you know.”

Jon was struck by this. “You saw me? You were there? When?”

“When you attacked it. When you killed the deserters of the Night’s Watch who rebelled. I saw you. I… I wanted to go to you, to tell you that I was here… but I couldn’t.”

“Why? Why did you go north of the Wall in the first place? You could have come to Castle Black. We would have kept you safe there.”

“I couldn’t. I didn’t decide to go north of the Wall, Jon. I had to go there.”

“But why?”
His brother said nothing for a second. “It’s a long story.”

So Bran began to tell him about dreams of a three-eyed raven that he did in Winterfell, of the visions he started to have, of his aptitude to warg first into his direwolf then into Hodor. He told him of his encounter with Meera and Jojen Reed, of everything they went through as they travelled to the Nightfort and beyond. He told him about the three-eyed raven living in a cave under a weirwood with the last Children of the Forest, of the visions he had, of the attack led by the White Walkers and how they escaped. It was very difficult for Bran when it came to explain how they lost Summer and Hodor. His brother even explained that he was the reason why Hodor, whose real name was Wyllis, ended up only capable of saying *Hodor*, because he warged into Hodor as he was in a vision of the past. The story took an even weirder turn when Bran told him he and Meera were saved by their uncle Benjen, who survived the White Walkers with the help of the Children of the Forest.

Jon needed time to gather his thoughts after Bran told him the whole story. He thought he saw everything. He saw giants, and his brother told him the Children of the Forest were still alive and that he met them. He saw wargs, and Bran said he was one himself, and that he could even take possession of a human body. He saw the Night King, but Bran told him the Night King actually touched him in a vision. He learned recently that he was the son of Rhaegar Targaryen, and Bran told him he was the three-eyed raven. All this was overwhelming.

“Jon, the Night King isn’t far behind us,” his brother said. “We barely escaped the dead. They killed all the Children of the Forest, or at least I think they killed all of them. It’s only a matter of time before they attack the Wall.”

“I know. I was at Hardhome. I saw him there. He raised his hands and tens of thousand men, women and children’s bodies stood, right before my eyes. I know what we face, Bran.”

“No, Jon, you don’t. You have no idea who the Night King really is.”

“Who is he, then? Tell me.”

“He is a man. Or was a man, once. Eight thousand years ago, when the First Men came from Essos, they fought against the giants and the Children of the Forest, and they killed them. They cut the sacred trees of their gods, the ones we call the Old Gods. They tried to repel the First Men by every mean necessary, but they failed. In the end, when they were pushed to their limits, they placed a shard of dragonglass in a man’s heart. They created the Night King this way, the first White Walker.”

“The Children of the Forest created the White Walkers?” Lord Reed asked, all bewildered.

“Aye, they did. They thought they could stop the First Men. From what I could gather so far, at first, it worked. The First Men lost several battles against the dead. But after a time, the Walkers turned against their creators. They took control of the whole North and threatened the Riverlands. The Children had no choice but to ask for help to the First Men. It took time, but together they defeated the White Walkers. They made the Pact of the Isle of Faces to live together in peace and they built the Wall to protect them against future invasions.”

“So they managed to defeat them,” Jon said lowly. “How?”

“I think you already know, Jon.”

“Dragonglass.”

“Aye. The Children’s weapons were made of it. The First Men used them to defeat the Walkers and
repel them far in the North, until they were so few that they couldn’t hope to defeat the men.”

“But now they’re back. Why come back now?”

Bran shrugged. “I don’t know. Maybe they think they are strong enough now. Maybe they believe Westeros is too weak.”

“They did choose their time well. We’ve been weakened by all these wars in the past years. We’re not enough to fight them.”

“No, but we still have a chance.”

“What chance? Do you have any idea how many men the Night King has in his army?”

“Aye, I do. But I know there’s a way to defeat them.”

“What way?”

“I don’t know. I get visions, I see things, I know they can be defeated, but so far I don’t know how. I think one day I might know.”

Jon sighed. “Bran, we need to know how to defeat the dead now. We need weapons to destroy them, we need men to stop them from crossing the Wall. We cannot wait for a magic sword to appear from nowhere to solve all our problems. We need to man the Wall. For now, it is our best chance. This is the place where we are the most likely to defeat the dead. As long as we keep them north of the Wall, no one in the Seven Kingdoms will die. If they get through it, then we are lost.”

Bran nodded. “I understand, Jon. You must protect the Wall, but I can help you. I have visions of past events. I can see what happened the last time.”

“Well, if you see anything useful, then tell us, but for now, we must focus on defending the Wall. I’m sending you back to Winterfell.”

“What?”

“The Wall is not a good place for you. You’ll be safer in Winterfell.”

“Jon, you need me,” Bran pleaded.

“Bran, you’ll be useless here. We need men who can fight. You can’t.”

“But Jon…”

“Bran, he’s right,” Meera Reed intervened. “The Wall is not a safe place for you. If the White Walkers ever manage to get through it, you will be the first they kill. We must bring you somewhere safe, Winterfell is at a good distance and it is a strong place. You’ll be safer there. And if you ever discover something, you’ll only have to send a raven to your brother. It won’t be difficult.”

Bran seemed to think about what she said. “Meera is right,” Lord Reed added. “We must bring you somewhere you will be safe, Lord Bran. Castle Black is not this place.”

After a moment, Bran nodded. “All right. I’ll go back to Winterfell.”

“Sansa and Arya will be glad to see you.” A smile came back to Bran’s face when Jon told him that.

“Is it true that Sansa is married? To the Imp?”
“Aye.” Jon chuckled a little. “I know, it’s strange, but considering how Joffrey was, I’m glad she’s married to him today. She had a daughter not long ago.”

“Really?” Bran asked, eyes wide open. “Sansa has a child?”

“Aye. You’ll be able to see her when you go back home.” Bran seemed quite eager to go back to Winterfell now, unlike a few moments ago. However, there was one thing Jon had to discuss with him before he left. It couldn’t be delayed. “Lord Howland, Lady Meera, could you leave me alone with my brother, please? We have something important to talk about, in private.”

“Of course, my lord,” the Lord of Greywater Watch said.

Lord Reed left with his daughter. Jon stood up and took a chair that he brought close to Bran’s bed. “Bran, there’s a matter we must discuss right away. You know that I am King in the North, now, don’t you?”

“Aye, I do. Congratulations. Father would be proud of you.”

He didn’t know. “Bran, I’m not your brother.”

A heavy silence fell on the room. “How do you know? Was it Lord Reed? He told you about the Tower of Joy?”

“Aye, he did.”

Bran had a sorry expression on his face. “I’m sorry, Jon. But… you are my brother, no matter what happens.”

Jon smiled sadly. “Arya told me the same thing at Winterfell when we learned.”

“I… I don’t know what to say. I was hoping I could hide it to you. I didn’t want you to believe that you were not one of us. Father promised to our aunt to keep you safe. She was afraid that Robert Baratheon would kill you if he learned who you were. She died begging my father to protect you.”

Jon looked at the floor for a long moment. He was a bastard, but worse he wasn’t the son of Eddard Stark, the man who taught him everything he knew, the man who brought him up as his son. To respect a promise he made to his mother, like Bran said. *Wait, he didn’t say it to Bran yet.*

“How do you know that?” Edd could have told Bran that he was the son of Rhaegar Targaryen. They sent ravens everywhere about this, but the ravens said nothing about a promise Eddard Stark made to his sister.


“Aye.” Jon sighed heavily. “Bran, the Lords of the North chose me as king, but they didn’t know you were still alive. Robb made me his heir in his will, but he thought you were dead. You should be king, and the Lord of Winterfell. It’s rightfully yours.”

Bran looked at him for a moment without speaking. “Jon… I can’t be king. To be honest, I don’t think I want. And if the lords chose you… then it should be you.”

“They would have chosen you if they knew you were alive.”

“I’m not sure. I’m a cripple, Jon. And… I think we both have a role to play in the war to come. I
don’t know which role exactly, but I think I know what role is not mine to play. And I don’t think it is my duty to be king. I have something else to do. And anyway, I think your friend Edd told me you were Lord of the Seven Kingdoms.”

“Aye. It’s not only the North who sided with me. The Lannisters, the Tullys and the Arryns decided I would be their king as well. They want to overthrow Cersei Lannister and place me on the Iron Throne in King’s Landing. There’s already a Lannister army marching on the capital.”

“Then, anyway, I can’t be king, even if I wanted to.”

“Bran…”

“No, Jon, listen. I know what you’ve been through. You fought the dead. I saw you fighting them at Hardhome. You know how to fight them, and that’s what we need right now. I can’t fight them. I can’t even walk. You’re the king we need. I don’t want to start a quarrel in our family over who should be king or not. The lords chose you, and I think they were right. If someone can lead us against the White Walkers, it’s you, not me.”

Bran paused for a moment before he said one sentence that meant everything. “You are our king, Jon.” And with that, the fate of the North was decided.

Later, Jon was sitting in the common hall in the company of all his advisors and the lords who followed him. Tormund was there as well, representing the Free Folk, along with a few other wildling chiefs. After his discussion with Bran, he had gone to Edd to have a global idea of the state of the Wall and the Night’s Watch before meeting his men, but Edd had also showed him several ravens that arrived for him while he was besieging the Last Hearth. These ravens carried information about everything that had happened in the Seven Kingdoms recently. Jon had received some of this information while he was at the Last Hearth by messengers sent by Sansa and Tyrion, but some of these were new to him as well. He would have to inform the lords as well of these new developments. His brother Bran, Edd and Ser Davos were sitting with him at the high table.

“My lords, my ladies,” Jon said to open the meeting. “Thank you all for coming. First, I have some news. Castle Black received a raven yesterday with very good news. The Dreadfort has fallen.” This revelation was followed by cheers. “The Blackfish took it without heavy losses. The garrison surrendered after a short siege. The North is pacified.” New cheers and sighs of relief followed. “That doesn’t mean the war is over. I won’t lie to you, this is only the beginning. We came here, at Castle Black, for a reason. We don’t know where the army of the dead is, we don’t know precisely how many men they have, and we don’t know what are their plans. All we know is that they will attack us, sooner or later. There are nineteen castles all along the Wall, from Westwatch-by-the-Bridge to Eastwatch-by-the-Sea, and sixteen of them are abandoned. The three that are still used don’t have enough men.” Jon turned to Edd. “The Lord Commander Tollett confirmed that there are only thirty-nine men left at Castle Black, and barely a hundred at the two others. So we will have to man these three castles as well, along with all the others. Every mile on the Wall must be patrolled, and everyone will have to contribute. Castle Black will serve as our headquarters. I know the Night’s Watch swore to take no part in the politics of the Realm and that all the castles belong to the Watch, but the Night’s Watch won’t be able to repel the dead by itself.” Jon looked at Edd as he said the last words.

“You’re welcome, believe me,” his friend replied. “Without you, we are doomed. We don’t have enough men, we don’t have enough food, we don’t have enough weapons. We lack in everything. Use the castles as you wish.”

“A garrison will be established in every castle with a commander,” Jon continued. “Castle Black will have a bigger garrison, as will the Shadow Tower and Eastwatch-by-the-Sea. If another castle finds
itself in difficulty, he will have to ask the closest of these three to send help. These castles are already in service, they don’t need to be restored, and they can house more men. The others will need to be restored, their tunnels to be unsealed, their defenses to be rebuilt. I’ve already chosen a commander for every castle. Ser Davos Seaworth will be in charge to oversee the general reconstruction of the castles along the Wall.”

The lords nodded their approval. Ser Davos was respected enough despite his modest origins, and there would be fewer problems if he was the one in charge. A Northerner or a man of the Vale could cause problems with the Free Folk. At least Tormund and the other chiefs respected Davos.

“The Wall also needs supplied. There isn’t enough left in the larders of Castle Black and the other castles for our army. We may last a year with what there is here, but nothing more.”

“I believed the Night’s Watch would be able to prepare for winter better. White Harbor sent them a lot of supplies through the last years,” Ser Waterfell, a knight representing House Manderly, said.

“The Watch had to house Stannis’s army for a time, not to mention she had to feed the Free Folk. And our army is much bigger than the Watch has been for decades if not centuries.” Jon looked all over the assembly, particularly to the northern lords. “I know you all made great sacrifices already, but I must ask you to send whatever you can spare to the Wall.”

The lords of the North looked at each other, and it was Lord Glover who spoke first. “That won’t be easy, your Grace, but we will do it. Since this is what is required.”

“Bear Island doesn’t have much to give, but we will send what we can,” Lady Mormont added.

Soon, all the lords of the North seemed to agree. Jon turned to the Knights of the Vale. “The Vale wasn’t touched by the war. I must demand that you contribute as well,” he told them.

“Wait a minute,” Harrold Arryn interrupted before any of his bannermen could say anything. “Will these supplies be distributed to the wildlings as well?”

“Aye, they will,” Jon answered plainly.

“This is out of question. You’re asking us to feed raiders, rapers and murderers.”

“Be careful, boy,” Tormund warned him.

“I demand you to help your allies. Is that a problem?” Jon intervened.

“Our allies, yes. You are our king, we acknowledged you as much, but these savages didn’t recognize you as their king. They live on our lands…”

“They live on the Gift.” Jon stopped the Lord of the Eyrie before he went further. “The Gift belongs to the Watch, not to us. You said I was your king, and your king gave you an order. Are you going to disobey?”

Harrold Arryn was motionless for a time, and the tension grew in the room. “No. We’ll do as you ask, your Grace.” The last two words were said icily. Jon saw that the other lords of the Vale weren’t happy either. He decided to move to another matter.

“Now, I’ve received some news from the south. It appears that Daenerys Targaryen took the island of Dragonstone. She has come with her own army, and if these news are to be believed, she has three dragons.” There were a lot of reactions, going from uncertainty to fear. “Her armies are invading the Stormlands as we speak, and it seems she is supported by Dorne. She intends to take
back the Iron Throne from Cersei Lannister. She also demands that every lord in Westeros bends the knee before her.’”

He let the lords discuss between them about this for a moment. This was quite unexpected. Jon had heard about Maester Aemon’s last relative, but he didn’t think she would come back to Westeros at this moment. Finally, it was Yohn Royce who reacted first.

“Your Grace, we cannot remain idle before this. It was something to let Cersei Lannister alone in the south, but we cannot ignore this new threat.”

“I agree, Lord Royce,” Jon said.

“What are you going to do, your Grace?” Lord Glover asked. “The last time a Targaryen came, the King in the North bent the knee before him.”

Everyone was looking at him. A heavy silence filled the hall. They were all waiting for their king to state his intentions. Jon had never wanted to be king. He never asked for it. He accepted it because others wanted him to be king, and even then, he didn’t feel like one most of the time. He just learned that his aunt was back to Westeros and intended to conquer the Seven Kingdoms. And she had the means for it. The first Targaryens had come only with a handful of men and three dragons. This one had a whole army along with three dragons. Could Jon stand against her? Torrhen Stark knelt three hundred years ago before Aegon. However, he didn’t know who Daenerys Targaryen was. He knew too little about her. How might she react when she learned that he was her nephew? Did she already know? Jon shouldn’t be king. He was never meant to be king or lord. These were supposed to be the destiny of his siblings, but not his. Carefully, Jon made his intentions known.

“I will not bend the knee. I will not bend the knee to Daenerys Targaryen,” he repeated. This was followed by several signs of approval. “You named me your king, and I will remain your king.”

“Then in this case, we must march on King’s Landing right now,” Yohn Royce declared. “Cersei Lannister is holding the city, but she won’t stand against Daenerys Targaryen. We must reach the capital before the Mad King’s daughter does and takes it.”

“Lord Royce, we need every man at the Wall.”

“Please forgive me, your Grace, but we have the Wall standing between us and these dead you’re talking about. We don’t need so many men to garrison it.”

“We do. We don’t know how many men the Night King has, but at Hardhome they were tens of thousand. Mance Rayder had a hundred thousand men in his own army when he attacked the Wall, and the Night King will certainly have more. We need men at the Wall to stop the dead when they attack and to push them back. The moment they get on the other side, we are lost.”

“Your Grace, we can’t ignore the threat that Daenerys Targaryen represents.”

“We are not ignoring it,” Jon reassured the Lord of Runestone. “We have an army marching on King’s Landing as we speak. Their mission is to take the capital, and Tyrion Lannister is negotiating an alliance with House Tyrell as we speak.”

“You really trust the Lannisters? They murdered your brother and your father!” Lord Arryn shouted.

“I won’t hear any more doubts about the loyalty of the Lannisters. They fought with us against the Boltons, they freed the North from Ramsay and his allies, and their lord is married to my sister.”

“She’s not your sister. You’re not a Stark.”
“Show some respect to your king, my boy,” Lord Glover intervened.

“I am the Lord of the Eyrie!”

“Aye, you are, and you proclaimed Jon Snow you king just as we did. So stop bragging like a child and show your king the respect you owe him.” Lady Lyanna was as sharp as ever.

Lord Royce put a strong arm on Harrold Arryn’s shoulder and forced him to sit down. Then he spoke, more quietly than his liege lord. “Your Grace, I think I speak for all the lords of the Vale when I say that we should send more men south to take the capital and face your aunt. We know she will come soon and we can’t rely only on the Lannisters and the Tullys to defeat her, or on an alliance with the Reach. The Knights of the Vale are more used to fights in the south than the Northerners and the Northerners are better to fight in the North. Many of our men aren’t used to this cold weather. I suggest you send us back south to fight the threats you have there, while the lords of the North remain here to stop the dead if they come.”

Jon couldn’t allow that. They needed as many men as they could find to guard the Wall. For now, they had twenty thousand men, more than a thousand for each castle along the Wall. If the lords of the Vale left with their men, this number would be reduced to five hundred. They needed these men at the Wall. It wouldn’t matter if it was him or his aunt or Cersei who sat on the Iron Throne if the dead got through the Wall. Fighting the dead was their priority.

Jon looked straight at Lord Royce. “My lord, your son Waymar was killed by a White Walker on his first ranging north of the Wall. I understand Daenerys is a threat, but the fights in the south won’t matter if the dead get through the Wall. We need your men here, or else there are other sons who will die, and who will be turned into wights. Your son died fighting against the dead, and we can’t let his death be vain.”

His words seemed to have some effect on the Lord of Runestone who looked deep in his thoughts. And then the Lord of the Eyrie used the moment to roar again. “So we just wait here for dead men to walk at our doors while a Targaryen seizes the Iron Throne and attacks us from the back door?”

“We don’t have to.” Ser Davos spoke before Jon could. “The Knights of the Vale brought ten thousand men with them, but the Vale didn’t take part to the War of the Five Kings. Surely it can muster more troops.”

“Yes, we can,” Lord Royce confirmed.

“Then, the Lannisters and the Tullys will be little more than ten thousand when they reach King’s Landing. If the Vale could raise an army of its own and join them, we would have enough forces not only to take back the capital, but also to fight Daenerys. If Lord Tyrion manages with that to secure an alliance with the Tyrells, we may have a chance to defeat Daenerys.”

Jon looked at Harrold Arryn. “How many men can the Vale of Arryn raise?”

The Lord of the Eyrie didn’t seem to know what to answer. It was Lord Royce who gave the answer. “We can raise quickly an army of twenty thousand good men.”

“In this case, I want the Eyrie to raise an army and make a junction with the army Ser Daven Lannister is leading to the capital. Lord Arryn, I charge you to go back to the Vale and join your men in the fights in the south.”

“Me?” Harrold Arryn asked.

“I think your talents will be more useful in the south than in the North.” And we’ll get rid of you once
“Very well.” The young lord looked unsure about how to react. “I will leave at once.”

“Just one thing. Don’t engage Daenerys’s forces immediately. You are allowed to wage war against Cersei and to arrest her for now, but not Daenerys.”

“What?” Everyone was surprised.

“Daenerys holds Dragonstone. Castle Black received a raven from Samwell Tarly not long ago. He is at the Citadel, learning to become a maester, and he is a brother of the Night’s Watch. He discovered that Dragonstone sits on a mountain of dragonglass. We know dragonglass can destroy White Walkers and the wights. Daenerys also has a powerful army, she has dragonfire, and we share the same enemy, Cersei Lannister. I intend to write to her and propose an alliance.”

There was a general uproar in the hall. “Your Grace, with all your respect, a Targaryen cannot be trusted,” Lord Royce opposed.

“Are you saying I can’t be trusted, Lord Royce? Unless you’ve forgotten, I am a Targaryen.”

“Perhaps, but I remember the Mad King all too well. His daughter cannot be trusted.”

“I am his grandson, Lord Royce. I do not consider myself like the Mad King all the same. We know very little about Daenerys Targaryen, but from what I heard, she spent the last years fighting slavery in Slaver’s Bay. And she is my aunt. If family means something for her, we might have a chance to prevent another war. We need the dragonglass, and we need allies. Fire kills wights, and dragons breathe fire.”

“You said you wouldn’t kneel before her, your Grace,” Lady Mormont said.

“And I won’t.” Not yet, at least. Jon didn’t know what he would do once the war was over, but for now, he had to remain King in the North if they were to hope to defeat the White Walkers. And he had to know more about his aunt before he knelt before her. “I will only suggest her an alliance. Nothing more. We don’t have time to squabble like children over the Iron Throne while the dead are coming for all of us. I will write to Daenerys at Dragonstone and propose an alliance. We will fight her, if need be, but only if we have to.”

Jon could see that many were not happy with this decision. They were ready to accept him as their king, a Targaryen bastard possibly born out of rape, but they were opposed to any idea of an alliance with a trueborn daughter of the last Targaryen king.

Lord Harrold Arryn stood up. “Very well. I’m leaving immediately for the Eyrie.” He walked away and left the Hall. Although Jon gave him the order to go to the Vale, it felt as if he turned his back on him. No one spoke for a moment. Jon turned to Yohn Royce.

“Lord Royce, I make you commander of the forces of the Vale here at the Wall.” The Lord of Runestone nodded, a grim expression on his face.

Jon went on distributing the troops along the Wall. He decided that each castle would belong to a different faction, to reduce the tensions, at the exception of Castle Black, the Shadow Tower and Eastwatch-by-the-Sea. The troops garrisoned at these castles would include men from the North, the Vale and the Free Folk, and they would be under the command of the actual commanders there, Denys Mallister at the Shadow Tower and Cotter Pyke at Eastwatch-by-the-Sea. Jon would take the command of the garrison at Castle Black. Garrisons were sent to the other castles and each were given to a different lord to command. Westwatch-by-the-Bridge was given to Lady Mormont,
Greyguard to Lord Glover, Icemark to Mors Umber, the Nightfort to Lord Reed, Queensgate to Lord Vance, Oakenshield to Tormund, Long Barrow to Lord Royce.

When they were done giving and arguing over command positions and garrisons, Jon discussed the last topic of the day. “My lords, before we go our separate ways, I must announce you a decision my bro… my cousin and I took. You chose me as your king, and I accept that, but Winterfell is not mine. From this day on, Brandon Stark will be Lord of Winterfell.”

Bran spoke then for the first time in the meeting. “I will do everything to be a good lord, but Jon is your king. We need him to face the dead. I recognize him as King in the North, my king, and as Lord of the Seven Kingdoms.”

“But wait, your Grace, what will be your seat if you don’t have Winterfell anymore?” Lord Royce asked.

“Jon will always be welcomed to Winterfell. No matter if he’s my cousin, to me, he will always be my brother.”

“We don’t doubt it, my lord, but the King in the North needs a seat, a castle he can call his own,” Lord Glover said. “What will it be?”

Jon hadn’t thought about this. “Well, I suppose it will be King’s Landing when we take it. In the meantime, I will lead the operations on the Wall from Castle Black, so that won’t be a great problem for now.” The lords seemed content with this and didn’t push the matter further.

The assembly was dissolved not long after. Jon went to write his message to Daenerys Targaryen, proposing an alliance against Cersei and asking her permission to mine dragonglass on Dragonstone. Jon didn’t have high hopes concerning this message. Who would believe the dead had arisen, and would this woman believe that he was her nephew? Still, he had to try. The survival of the Seven Kingdoms depended on it.

Next morning, Bran left for Winterfell, and most of the lords left as well to take command of the castles they received. They kept a strong garrison of three thousand men at Castle Black. Jon spent the day with Edd and Ser Davos, trying to arrange everything to house their many men and distributing duties to every one of them. They had to rebuild many buildings in Castle Black, but also the defenses on the Wall, while some of their men were to assume guard duties along the Wall or to patrol the wilderness. They were never to wander too far from the Wall. Jon wouldn’t sacrifice them to the White Walkers, but there were things men on the top of the Wall couldn’t see and that men on the ground could see.

Around midday, he was taking a meal with Ser Davos, Edd and the new First Builder and First Steward. Edd said they were not traitors like Bowen Marsh or Othell Yarwyck, but didn’t speak very highly of them either. He didn’t name a new First Ranger.

“How much time should it take, to bring back the abandoned castles into shape?” Ser Davos asked the First Builder. Before he was able to answer, a horn blew.

“Do you have any rangers out there?” Jon asked to Edd.

“Nope.”

There was a second blow. They waited, but a third didn’t come. One blow meant rangers returning. Two blows meant wildlings. Three meant White Walkers. Wildlings were approaching. Edd left the table to see what was going on and Jon followed him. It could be possible that a few wildlings
survived north of the Wall and that now they were coming to ask for help. They had to be among the last few survivors.

“How many?” Edd asked to one of the men guarding the gates.

“Our men up there counted about twenty of them,” he answered.

“Where are they from?” Edd was asking the question to Jon as much as to anyone who might give him an answer.

“It doesn’t matter, Edd. We must let them through, or else they’ll become meat for the army of the dead,” Jon said.

His friend nodded. He had no love for the Free Folk, but he agreed with Jon about allowing them south of the Wall. He also warmed up a little to them after they helped to overthrow Ser Alliser.

“Open the gates! Take positions, men!”

It was normal to take precautions. They had no idea of what those people would do once they arrived. Edd sent a few men in the tunnels to escort them. When they came back, it was obvious from the furs and skins that these people were of the Free Folk. Most were full grown men and women, but there was a little girl as well, maybe ten or eleven, with silver hair.

“Jon Snow.” One of the wildlings walked to him. He had a huge brown beard and his steps were heavy. “They’re not far away. They chased us along the road and we could barely escape them. The dead are coming.”

Jon didn’t recognize this man. Perhaps they met while he was living among the Free Folk. No, it couldn’t be. He didn’t talk like someone who was born north of the Wall. He talked like a Northerner, a Northerner from the people who lived south of the mountain clans. He looked at him closely, and then he recognized him. The last time Jon saw him, he was a brother of the Night’s Watch, a man sentenced to death for killing another sworn brother. He was one of the rare people to survive the Red Wedding and one of the men who volunteered to attack Craster’s Keep. He escaped Castle Black the night before his execution, and now he was back.

“Gared Tuttle.”

Chapter End Notes

Bran isn’t as detached as he is in Season 7. When I planned these chapters, Season 7 hadn’t begun, and I didn’t imagine Bran like he is in the actual season, hence the difference.

Please review

Next chapter : Daenerys
Daenerys V

Chapter Notes

Daenerys meets the Tyrells.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

DAENERYS V

She waited on a hill. From there, she could see everything around her. Indeed, the lands of the Reach were beautiful. As far as the eye could see, the ground was covered with farms, orchards and rivers. Viserys had spoken to her about the marvels of the Reach, though she doubted he ever saw them. Still, from where she stood, it seemed he hadn’t been wrong about it. The castle of Highgarden, that stood not far away, was another proof of the beauty of this country. She hadn’t been impressed that much by the Stormlands, but the Reach really looked like a paradise from where she stood. Seeing the crops spreading everywhere, she tried to imagine how many people she could feed with that. If Meereen had been surrounded by such bountiful lands, she wouldn’t have had any difficulty to feed her people back there. She hoped these lands would be enough to feed the people of King’s Landing through winter.

Daenerys looked as the small delegation riding slowly in her direction. She posed as a condition that she would discuss with Lord Tyrell on this hill, and not inside his castle. She wouldn’t go inside a castle whose lord so far didn’t acknowledge her as queen, even if Drogon was there. He was standing behind her on the hill, the Red Priest Revan at her side. He was the only one to accompany her for these negotiations. She had come on Dragon with him to speak with Mace Tyrell in person. They didn’t have time to call a meeting somewhere else or to exchange ravens. She had to speak to him in person. Now he was approaching. The green banners of House Tyrell were growing and Daenerys could notice a golden sign on it. It had to be the rose of their sigil.

Daenerys met Lord Tyrell’s daughter in Storm’s End. She was informed of her presence when she arrived at Storm’s End. They sent a raven to Dragonstone to inform her of this matter, but the raven seemed to arrive after she left the island. She stopped at Storm’s End to make sure it was in their control now, and to use her dragons to take it if it wasn’t already done. She was surprised to discover that Margaery Tyrell was still alive. According to the information they received, she died, but it seemed one of Prince Trystane’s cousin managed to smuggle her out of the city before it was too late. As a result, they had the last surviving child of the Lord of Highgarden in their possession.

This was almost too good to be true, but the bad news was that Margaery Tyrell was pregnant with Tommen Baratheon’s child. Daenerys didn’t want to kill a baby, but she couldn’t let him represent a threat for her. She wouldn’t hurt him, but she couldn’t let his existence be known. Very few would know that Margaery Tyrell had a child with Tommen, and no one would know where he was once he was born.

Daenerys had dined with Lady Margaery before she left Storm’s End. She was two years older than Daenerys. She had been married to three men from the same family, and Daenerys was only married once. She only had one brother and he was dead. Daenerys’ brothers were dead as well, but Ser Loras Tyrell had been kind with his sister, to the opposite of Viserys. Margaery Tyrell had a happy childhood, something Daenerys never had. She envied this woman, though not so much considering
what happened to her recently.

“My father has no reason to oppose you,” Margaery told her as they ate together. “He will follow
you, I promise. I just hope you keep your promises as well.”

“On that, you have nothing to fear. When I give my word, I don’t do it lightly,” Daenerys had
replied.

“So, I really have nothing to fear for my child.”

“Nothing.” The discussion was cold, and Daenerys could see that the other woman resented her for
taking her child away. “I’m sorry, but I can’t take the risk of having an insurrection led by the son of
Tommen Baratheon one day.”

“Everyone will know that Tommen was born of incest and that he had no right on the Iron Throne
very soon. What threat will my son or my daughter be to you when it is known?”

“He might still be a threat. The Blackfyres were bastards, and yet they threatened the rule of my
ancestors for decades.”

“But the Blackfyres were legitimized by King Aegon the Fourth.”

“Just like Tommen Baratheon was considered the trueborn son of Robert Baratheon for years.”
Daenerys had laid her cup of wine on the table at this moment. “I will not change my mind.”

Daenerys regretted that she had to take a child away from his mother. She had fought against that
sort of things back on the other continent, and here she was, doing exactly what she fought so hard
against. “I might give you some news about him after a time, if the situation is good enough.”

That was all she could offer to the woman sitting in front of her. It was still better than nothing.
Daenerys’s son had been taken away from her before she could even lay eyes upon him. She tried to
imagine herself in the place of Margaery Tyrell, and she could only sympathize with her. On the
other hand, this woman was queen for a time, and she had to be careful with her.

“How was your brother?” she asked then to the Tyrell.

Daenerys saw a flash of pain go through Margaery Tyrell’s eyes when she asked the question.
“Kind. Brave. Courageous. Foolish, at times. Loyal to our family. He was one of the best
swordsmen in the Seven Kingdoms. He was also very handsome. Almost all the girls who met him
were swooning before his smile. My grandmother used to say he was the most desirable bachelor in
Westeros.” Margaery Tyrell seemed lost in her thoughts, looking away. “When we had balls and
receptions in Highgarden, every young woman wanted to dance with him. Many thought he would
remember them because he gave them a rose during a tourney. Most of the time he didn’t remember
them.” She made a faint laugh, nervously. “He was always charming. Arrogant, too. He thought
very highly of himself. He thought nothing could defeat him. That nothing could kill him.”

Daenerys had watched as Margaery Tyrell closed her eyes and a single tear roll on her left cheek. “I
had a brother me too. Viserys. He was the only family I ever knew. Most of the time, I was afraid of
him. He got angry very easily, and I was the target any time he got angry. He always told me then
that I woke up the dragon. I didn’t cry when he died. I was pregnant and he threatened to cut out my
baby while he was still in my belly. When he died, I didn’t think that my brother had died. I thought
that the man who used to be my brother had died. But still, I can remember times when I was afraid
at night. I would crawl into his bed, he would reassure me, and he would tell me stories about our
About our father, our mother. About Dragonstone. That’s what I remember. For despite all his flaws, he was still my brother once.”

Daenerys’s mind had drifted away, and when she looked back at Margaery Tyrell, who had tears on each cheek, the other woman nodded. Daenerys looked down. “Please excuse me, Lady Margaery, but I leave on the morrow for Highgarden. I need rest.”

“Of course.” Lord Tyrell’s daughter had wiped the tears from her face and stood up, but she asked one last question to Daenerys before she left her private apartments. “You intend to kill Cersei, don’t you?”

“I do.”

“Then let me give you an advice, your Grace. Don’t underestimate her. Kill her the first chance you have. Don’t execute her. Kill her when you have the first opportunity to do it. She’s capable of everything. She would burn all Westeros if that meant she could be queen of the ashes. She would kill millions to save her own life. Don’t make the same mistakes that I did. Don’t give her a moment. Kill her as soon as you can, by any mean necessary.”

This discussion had taken place a few days ago, and now Daenerys was here, waiting to discuss with the father of this woman. She noticed a carriage with the delegation heading in their direction as they arrived at the bottom of the beginning of the hill. Revan was ready for everything, although Daenerys gave him the order to initiate nothing and only react if the Tyrells tried something on her or her dragon. If things went wrong, they could climb on Drogon and escape. However, Revan said he could stay behind and provide her with a diversion as she flew away. According to Kinvara, Revan was a very good fighter as well as a cunning and skilled politician. He always carried a sword with him. Daenerys wondered why he kept a mask on him at all time. Ever since they left Dragonstone, she never saw him remove it for a single moment.

The head of the delegation approached them. They were about twelve men, all armed. Daenerys could feel Drogon ready behind her. The men were all positioned around the carriage. She thought about how Drogo would have laughed at Lord Tyrell, coming to see her in this way. To the eyes of the Dothrakis, a horse was the only place a king should sit. People who got carried were useless, unworthy.

The door of the carriage was opened and instead of Lord Tyrell, an old woman came out of it. She wore a black gown that covered her head and framed her face. As she walked towards Daenerys, she made a gesture to the two men following her, and they stayed behind. She kept walking toward Daenerys at a normal pace, and she stopped a few steps away from her.

“So, you are the Dragon Queen. Daenerys Targaryen. I won’t say all your other titles, or else we’ll still be here tomorrow,” the woman said.

Daenerys didn’t appreciate the remark, but she decided to do as if she heard nothing. “Where is Lord Tyrell?” she asked.

“My son is in this great castle you can see behind me. I’m here to represent him.”

So she was Olenna Tyrell, the mother of the Lord of Highgarden. “I demanded to speak with the Lord of Highgarden, not with his lady mother.”

“Oh, believe me, these talks will go much better with me than with my oaf of a son. And they will much more pleasant. Would you allow me to bring a seat? A woman of my age needs to rest her legs.”
Daenerys wasn’t pleased with that. She asked to speak to Mace Tyrell, and he was sending his mother. Was this a way to mock her? Well, she would have to do with what she had. She mad a short sign with her head to indicate that Olenna Tyrell could bring what she needed. The two guards she previously left behind brought the chair she talked about, then went back to their previous place, leaving Olenna Tyrell with Daenerys, Revan and Drogon. The men behind were fixing Drogon, obviously weary of him. The Tyrell matriarch looked at Daenerys’s dragon, but with something that looked more like interest than fear.

“This is quite a beast you have here. And you’ve got three, I think,” the old woman said.

“They’re not far away. If your men have any thought about harming me, they won’t survive long enough to regret it.”

“Oh, don’t worry, child. No one here thinks seriously about harming you. This is a parley, and we respect the sacred laws in Highgarden. We’re not the Lannisters.”

“I’m not a child. I’m a queen,” Daenerys replied with an icy voice.

Olenna Tyrell shrugged. “Have it your way. Would it please you if I called you your Grace. Or do you want me to tell all your titles, from Queen of the Andals to Mother of Dragons?”

“Your Grace will be enough.” This woman was starting to get on her nerves. “I assume you know why I came.”

“You want the pledge of House Tyrell.”

“I do. House Tyrell served my house loyally for generations. I ask you to renew the oath you made to my ancestor Aegon three hundred years ago. Our two families will be allies, just like they were for centuries. The Seven Kingdoms prospered in that era, and once the war is over, we will bring back peace and prosperity to this country, just like we did together decades ago.”

“What a nice speech.” She noticed the sarcasm in Olenna Tyrell’s voice. “We were at peace as well under Robert Baratheon, you know, and the Reach prospered under his rule as well.”

A silence followed. “Robert Baratheon sent assassins after me when I was still a baby, and he murdered my nephew and my niece when they were only children. He was drunkard, a fool, and he sent assassins after me when he learned that I was pregnant, to kill my child.”

“Yes, Robert hated the Targaryens.” The mother of Mace Tyrell didn’t seem concerned by this. “And your father burned people alive and ripped tongues from the men who dared to disagree with him.”

Daenerys steeled herself to keep her calm. “My father was an evil man. I know what he did, and I know he earned his name. And I thank you for following him despite this during the war against the Usurper. I don’t blame your family for bending the knee before Robert after my father died. I understand you had to do that to survive, but this is no longer the case. Robert is dead, I am back, and I intend to take what is mine. Will you help me, or do I have to consider you as my enemies?”

Olenna Tyrell remained silent for a moment, fixing Daenerys. Then she nodded. “You are a Targaryen, for sure. But since you’re capable of recognizing that your father was an evil man, I suppose you are better than most of your family.”

“Lady Olenna.” Revan stepped into the conversation. “Let us get to the heart of the matter at hand. Tommen Baratheon is dead. House Baratheon is gone, forever, and they won’t come back. Cersei Lannister sits on the Iron Throne and she killed your grandson, the heir to your house, along with
many members of your household. Queen Daenerys has come back to Westeros to take back the Iron Throne, which is hers by right, but also to bring an end to injustice, to punish those who deserve it. Cersei Lannister committed crimes over counting, and she will continue to do so as long as she lives. She considers your house as her enemies. You say Robert brought prosperity to the Seven Kingdoms, but from what I gather, this prosperity was due to the longest summer that happened in centuries and at the cost of indebting the Crown over its capacity. And since Robert died, the years that followed saw more wars and more battles than the whole last century. The Baratheon dynasty failed miserably. You made an alliance with them and with House Lannister, and all this brought to your house was the death of your grandson, and now you’re isolated from the rest of the Seven Kingdoms, without friends and without allies. I know the Reach is rich and powerful, but not enough to stand alone against her foes. We know that you are at war with the Ironborn. We know the Shield Islands have fallen and that your coasts are being raided as we speak. Tell me, how much was sent to you by the Baratheons and the Lannisters in the past? Did they ever help you? From what I saw, they asked for your help more than they gave you help. And what did this bring to you? The death of Ser Loras Tyrell, the heir to Highgarden, and the deaths of several of your men, far from their home, fighting for something that wasn’t yours.”

He took a pause, then resumed. “Unlike the Lannisters and the Baratheons, Daenerys Targaryen is not only asking for your help. She is also offering you her help. She has three dragons, the armies of Dorne, a part of the Iron Fleet, hordes of Dothrakis and legions of Unsullied, and unlike the Baratheons and the Lannisters, she doesn’t only demand help to her allies, she also grants help to them. She helped the people of Meereen, Yunkai and Astapor to get their freedom, because she felt it was her duty as their queen. She wants obedience from her subjects and her bannermen, but she also grants them assistance in their hour of need. By taking side with her, not only you will get revenge against Cersei Lannister who murdered your grandson, but you will also get the help of a powerful army in your war against Euron Greyjoy. The Lannisters gave you the choice of being their servants or their enemies. Daenerys Targaryen is offering you the choice to be her allies or her enemies. If I were you, I wouldn’t call that a choice.”

Olenna Tyrell looked at the Red Priest for a long time after he was done talking. “Who are you?”

“What I am is not important, my message is.”

Olenna Tyrell smirked. “I suppose you are a Red Priest. I came upon one some time ago, clothed in a similar way as yours. Thoros of Myr. He didn’t strike as a great believer of his god, however.”

“Thoros of Myr lost his faith even before he came to King’s Landing. He was a drunkard and a womanizer. I am an advisor for Daenerys Targaryen.”

The old woman leaned forward. “Stannis Baratheon was advised by someone like you. It didn’t end well for him. My son’s armies were among those who defeated him.”

Daenerys decided to put an end to this argument. “Lady Olenna, this is quite simple. My armies are approaching your borders at this very moment. The Stormlands are now firmly into my possession. No one could resist me there, and I didn’t even need my dragons to take them. Do you want my Dothrakis to travel your lands as allies against Cersei Lannister and Euron Greyjoy, or as enemies? You’ll have to fight on two different fronts. Believe me, you don’t want the Reach to experience what the Dothrakis did in the Stormlands. I will help you to defeat Euron Greyjoy and Cersei Lannister if your son bends the knee and swear me the same oath your ancestors made to Aegon three centuries ago. My family gave you Highgarden and the Reach. I would be in the right to take them away from you if you refused to honor the oath you made.”

Olenna Tyrell kept looking at her as she spoke, as if she was unmoved by what she just said, or as if
it didn’t matter. Daenerys added one last thing, something she informed the Tyrells about in the second raven she sent them before she came.

“And if you ever want to see your granddaughter again, I would say it is in your interest to bend the knee.”

This seemed to provoke a reaction in the old woman, since she straightened herself in her seat. “Is she really alive?”

“She is at Storm’s End, and she is being well taken care of. For the time being,” she added in the end.

“From what we heard, she died in King’s Landing with Loras when the Great Sept of Baelor exploded.”

“She was taken out of the sept by Tyene Sand, a niece of Prince Doran Martell, who posed as a septa there. One of Lord Varys’s little birds warned her in time that Cersei was going to destroy the sept and she could escape with Lady Margaery. She was brought to Storm’s End, and this is where she is right now.”

“Or so you claim.”

“This is no claim. This is the truth.”

“How do I know you’re telling me the truth?”

Daenerys looked at Revan, who nodded and walked toward Olenna Tyrell, producing a long scroll of parchment from his red robes. He handed it to the matriarch who took it, unsealed it and began to read. Revan walked back to stand next to Daenerys. For a moment, she thought the woman sitting before her would cry. She seemed about to do so. Instead, she only looked up.

“It’s difficult to argue with this.” She sighed. “Is she all right?”

“She is. No harm has come to her. She has everything she needs. I spoke with her before I left. She was very sad about her brother’s death.”

“We all are. My daughter-in-law spends her days looking through the window of her chamber, unable to do anything else. She doesn’t know her daughter might still be alive.”

“She is still alive. For now.”

“What should we expect for her?”

“I have no intention of killing your granddaughter.”

“This is what everyone says before they kill someone. Because they feel they have no other choice.”

“If your daughter had crowned herself queen like Cersei did, I would probably have executed her already. However, like she said herself, she was only married to an usurper, or three usurpers, to be more precise. She said her father would accept to lend me his armies. Was she wrong?”

Olenna Tyrell joined her hands. “What will happen to her?”

“If you accept me as your queen, as you should, no harm will come to her. She will remain a guest to House Targaryen until the end of the war, with all the privileges and rights that are associated with her rank. Since she was married to Tommen Baratheon, she will have to wait two years before she
marries again. And since she was wed thrice so far and that now the odds are that not many men would want to marry her, I will make sure she gets married to someone I choose.”

“You want to decide who will marry my granddaughter?”

“I don’t want. I will. I assure you I will not marry her to a monster. I was wed myself to a man who raped me and I know what it is. I don’t want to inflict the same fate upon her, upon anyone else. Your armies will follow me into battle and fight side by side with my men against the Ironborn and the Lannisters. And I will make sure that Cersei Lannister dies for what she did to your grandson, and what she tried to do to his sister.”

The Tyrell woman nodded, as if thinking about it. “Are you aware that there is someone in the North who says he has a stronger claim on the Iron Throne than you?”

Daenerys’s voice came out hard. “Jon Snow is not my nephew.”

Lady Olenna tilted her head on the side. “The bastard son of Rhaegar Targaryen and Lyanna Stark,” she said theatrically. “I thought the Imp would imagine something better to justify this boy’s claim. Tyrion Lannister was always a clever man. I thought about marrying Margaery to him once. Too bad he refused. We may not be in all that mess right now. But it seems he was already too much besotted with his young wife. He ordered me to leave King’s Landing immediately after I proposed it, unless I wanted to die, or something like that, I’m not sure.” She sighed. “I may as well tell you. We received a proposition from Lord Tyrion. He seems to be the one behind Jon Snow’s crowning. He said that if we joined him against Cersei, he would strongly consider a royal match between Jon Snow and a Tyrell. Think about it. We could almost marry Margaery to a fourth king. How many women can boast about it? Too bad you have her. He also offered us the head of Cersei Lannister on a plate when we would take King’s Landing. The Seven Kingdoms will bleed as long as Cersei sits on the Iron Throne. Join us. Together we can end her tyranny. That’s what he wrote on the piece of paper he sent by raven.”

“And you’re going to accept his offer?” Drogon straightened behind as Daenerys said this. Olenna Tyrell looked up at him.

“I suppose that if we want to live, the answer should be no.”

“You’re not wrong.”

She smirked. “I used to be betrothed to a Targaryen, a long time ago. But he was a fool. I’m glad I didn’t marry him. But you don’t seem to be a fool like him, and you don’t seem to be mad like your father.” Olenna Tyrell paused for a moment. “Will you really take care of Margaery?”

“You have my word.”

Once again, Olenna Tyrell nodded. “Very well. I can’t bend the knee for my son, but I can convince him to do it. Give me a day, and tomorrow Mace will swear whatever oath you ask him.”

“You have two hours to convince him.”

For once, the matriarch seemed surprised. “Two hours?”

“As I told you, my armies, including the Dothrakis and the Dornish armies, are closing on your borders. If you want me to go back in time to stop them from plundering and ravaging your lands, your son must be here in two hours, bending the knee and pledging House Tyrell to me in perpetuity.”
Olenna Tyrell bowed the head, accepting defeat. “Very well, I’ll talk some sense into him. He’ll be there as you demand.” The woman stood up and her men came to take her seat. “I would still suggest you to investigate about this Jon Snow. There’s probably no truth to his claim, but better have proofs that he’s lying than none.”

On that, the former Lady of Highgarden walked away with her guard. When they were far away, Daenerys turned to her advisor. “Do you think they will accept?”

“They should,” the Red Priest answered. “It is in their interest. You can give them more than Jon Snow will ever be able to give them, and you can take what they have when Jon Snow cannot. But people don’t always think rationally. They might see you as a foreign invader.”

“Westeros is my home. I was born there.”

“True, but you spent the last twenty years on the other continent, and you arrived with Dothrakis and Unsullied in Westeros. For many people you are the foreign invader. They will say you brought barbarians to ravage their lands, destroy their villages, rape their women and murder their children. All the things the Westerosi do between themselves. Still, they feel better knowing that those atrocities are committed by people from their country rather than people from another continent.”

He said the last with a disgusted voice. Daenerys could only agree with him. The Lannister murdered Rhaenys and Aegon, and they sent assassins after her and her brother Viserys when they were only children. When Robert Baratheon learned that she was pregnant, he sent assassins to murder her and her children. The Dothrakis did the same in Essos, but she wouldn’t allow them to do it here. She made it clear with their leaders.

They waited for an hour or so. She could feel Drogon growing impatient. Finally, they saw a new group of riders coming from Highgarden, larger than the one who accompanied Olenna Tyrell.

“If they try anything, your Grace, go to your dragon and flee without me. I’ll hold them,” Revan said as they approached. His hand rested on the pommel of his sword, and Daenerys thought she saw it glow in a red light through the scabbard. A carriage was with the delegation just like the other time, but at the head of it rode a fat man more richly dressed than the others. They stopped at a good distance. Even from there, Daenerys could see the fear in the man’s eyes. His eyes were fixed on Drogon. Olenna Tyrell came out of her carriage and almost dragged the fat man from his horse. They walked together towards Daenerys. Sometimes it looked like Lady Olenna was pushing the man next to her in her direction.

“Are you Mace Tyrell?” Daenerys asked when they were close enough.

“Yes, your Grace. I am.”

He looked up at Drogon, then back uncertainly at Daenerys. She raised an eyebrow, waiting for him to do something. The Lord of Highgarden looked at his mother, who gave him an insistent look. He cleared his throat. “Your Grace, I am here to honor the oath my ancestor, Harlen Tyrell, made to your ancestor, Aegon the First of His Name.” He unsheathed his sword and got on his knee. “House Tyrell is yours, your Grace. The Reach is yours. We will fight along your side. Your enemies will be our enemies. Your allies will be our allies. We will serve in war, in peace, through winter and summer, and serve you for perpetuity.”

Daenerys looked at Olenna Tyrell who raised an eyebrow. Daenerys couldn’t stop herself from smiling for a second. She went back to her stern expression and looked at the lord kneeling before her. “Mace Tyrell, Lord of Highgarden, Defender of the Marshes, High Marshal of the Reach, Lord Paramount of the Mander, rise as Warden of the South.”
He did, and the Reach was hers. She had three kingdoms. Four were left to conquer, along with King’s Landing and the Iron Islands. She still had one queen and two kings to deal with.

Chapter End Notes

You could say that in these talks, Revan was for Daenerys who Davos was for Jon. Both Jon and Daenerys are not the best to negotiate, and it is quite evident from their first meeting at Dragonstone. Neither of them is quite ready to make any compromise, and they didn't prove very good at convincing other people when it came to negotiate with enemies. Just like Jon with the wildlings and Lyanna Mormont, Daenerys needed an intermediate to see these talks come to a satisfying outcome without burning people alive.

Please review

Next chapter : Mira
Chapter Notes

I was somewhat unsure as I wrote this chapter. I didn't really know how to write it. I hope you like the result.

I know that some of the people who read this fic find Mira's storyline boring, or useless, but you must keep in mind that when I started to write this fanfiction, it was some sort of exercise to guess how Game of Thrones could have turned in the eventuality that Tywin Lannister had died just before the Purple Wedding, and an attempt to complete the stories of the show and the video game. However, if you're not interested in Mira's story, you can skip this chapter. You won't miss anything vital to the story. Just don't skip every Mira chapter, since some are very important to major plots, such as the one where Jon is hailed King in the North.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

MIRA XI

Mira looked at the numbers in the ledgers spread before her. The records that Maester Ortengryn kept had been destroyed in the fires that destroyed Ironrath. They received a message from the Citadel a few days ago, at last, saying they had chosen a new maester for Ironrath, but it would take him some time to arrive in the thick of winter. They had their first real storm yesterday, and this was far from the worse they would get through this winter. They had a long summer, and the winter was likely to last longer. Ironrath was in part buried under snow. What would it be after a real storm? Mira had to start all over again, writing new records the best she could. She tried to keep track of their stocks in food, water, wood, medicine, clothes and everything that could matter, but it was a difficult task. She had never done this before. Maester Ortengryn once showed her one of the ledgers he was keeping, and she never saw something so complex until she arrived in the south. The records kept by the maesters at Highgarden and at the Hightower were even more detailed. When she took a look at the list of expenses for the royal wedding, in Lord Tyrion’s room back in King’s Landing, it was even worse.

She did her best, and that didn’t seem enough. Nothing seemed to be enough, now that winter was here. The Starks were always right in the end. Winter had come, and they weren’t ready for it. No one was ready for it. She looked at Ralten who stood before her, covered with sweat and snow, and tired. Everyone was always tired lately.

“We are done clearing the main alley and the portcullis, my lady. With your leave, we would go back to our other occupations,” he told her.

“Of course, Ralten. Go back to rebuilding your homes. Do you think you could be ready in time for the next storm?”

“It’s difficult to say, my lady. We don’t even know when the next one could hit.”

Again, Mira regretted they didn’t have a maester. Ortengryn could foresee a storm with his instruments. She didn’t have the necessary knowledge for that. They had to be ready for one to hit at any time.
“Of course, my lady, if we didn’t have to produce ironwood shields while rebuilding Ironrath…”

“Ralten, we have no choice. The King in the North needs those shields. We both know that our men at the Wall need them more than ever. It’s not a wildling invasion we must fear now, but a war with the dead.”

She said it on a kind but firm tone. She was sorry to burden their men with the extra work of crafting shields while Ironrath was still far from rebuilt, but they had no choice. These were the orders of their king, and to not have a roof over their heads would be the least of their worries if the White Walkers got through the Wall. She had read things about the them since Jon Snow revealed they were back, and it sent chills along her spine whenever she read about the subject.

“I know, my lady, but the men are tired. Half the habitations are not yet ended, and instead of working to survive winter, some get to craft ironwood weapons. The fact you reduced the rations didn’t help for the morale either.”

“I’m fully aware of that, Ralten, but there’s nothing we can do about it. We didn’t get to choose whether the White Walkers would come back or not.” Mira was tired just like everyone, but her weariness was nothing when compared to that of her men. She rubbed her eyes. “We are all in this together, and if we don’t work together, then we’re dead.”

“I know, Lady Mira. I never thought about a rebellion or stopping to work. I was just… venting some frustration.”

She looked at the smith with empathy. “Believe me, there are times I really want to vent it on someone as well.”

They both allowed a short and nervous chuckle to escape their throat. Mira took her head between her hands and sighed, then turned back her attention to Ralten. “I’ll write another message to Lady Sansa, and I’ll ask her for some food from the stores of Winterfell. I can’t promise anything, but I’ll try to find a way to raise your rations.”

“Thank you, my lady. But you should try to not tire yourself too much.”

“Everyone is exhausted, Ralten. I can’t rest while the others work.”

“I know, but still, considering the situation…”

“Ralten, it’s no. Thank you for your concern, but I’m not going to give myself a good time while you and the others exhaust yourselves day and night. Is the smithy ready?”

“All ready, my lady. Though we lack steel. Not that we need it so much right now. We need time and food more than anything. As for wood, we don’t lack any. It was very kind of you and Lady Talia to let us cut trees in the grove.”

“You are more important than the grove.” She and Talia allowed the people of Ironrath to take wood from the grove behind the castle to rebuild their houses. The trees could grow again in time. They couldn’t let the people of Ironrath die. Too many already died.

“Thank you all the same.”

“I’ll bring some steel so you can work it when we’ll need it, Ralten.” She knew the few places in the North where iron was being extracted. If only they could have access to the Iron Islands and their resources, but they were still at war with them. Last they heard, they were even threatening Oldtown. Mira feared for her friends there. She didn’t want the fate of Lannisport to fall upon this city as well.
Mira really felt exhausted. “You should go back to work, Ralten.”

“Yes, my lady. Oh, and Lady Mira, it’s good to have you again at Ironrath.”

The smile he gave her was warm and sincere. “Thank you, Ralten.”

“Take care of yourself, my lady.”

Ralten left Mira alone. She let her head drop on the book right in front of her. Damn it! That wasn’t the time to be tired, but there was nothing she could do about it. It wasn’t the time to reduce the rations either. Her stomach grumbled more often than not, and she could feel the need to eat more often than ever. She felt as if she was starving, but she couldn’t eat as much as she liked while she forced the other people at Ironrath to ration their food. She wished she could just stay here, her head resting on the table, until she fell asleep.

She looked at the fireplace, which was lit. She insisted to keep it cold, to spare wood, but Talia almost forced her to have it lit, to keep her warm. Talia could be stubborn when she wanted, just like Mira, but her sister’s stubbornness had been superior this time. Mira spent too much time away from the North. Her own stubbornness caused many problems to Lady Margaery back in King’s Landing, but it was still nothing compared to the problems Talia would have caused.

Mira had received news a few days ago that Lady Margaery had survived. It was a miracle, literally. She had been sure that she was dead. Everyone believed it. If she survived, then maybe Sera was alive too. There was hope. Despite everything that happened, there was hope. She just wished the raven that brought the news of Lady Margaery’s survival didn’t bring other news with it, news that would make things with her husband much more complicated. She dreaded the time they would have to decide what to do.

She forced herself to straighten up and went back to work, checking numbers and reports, writing letters, then bringing them to the rookery where she sent the ravens with them. She wrapped herself tightly into furs. Talia was right. She had to keep herself warm. She hoped the ravens wouldn’t get caught in the snow if another storm came.

Later, she was in the library of Ironrath, or what was left of it, reading something about the Long Night. The Children of the Forest had fought along the First Men against the White Walkers and the dead, providing them with weapons of dragonglass and magic that could destroy the dead. Then they built the Wall to stop another attack in the future, knowing the dead would come back. They were right. According to the man who wrote it, Brandon the Builder was the one to build the Wall after the dead were defeated, but the writer also talked of another man who defeated the dead with a magical sword, a sword that could destroy the dead forever.

One of the men guarding the Great Hall came to see her. “My lady, our sentinels spotted the Hightower banners on the horizon.”

Mira looked up from the book and stared at the man. Then she stood up and quickly walked to the castle’s gate. She was careful to not walk too quickly. When she arrived at the gate, she thought about climbing on the battlements to see them arrive from afar, but she decided against it. Again, she had to be careful.

Talia arrived not long after. “Are you feeling well?” her sister asked.

“I’m fine, yes.”

“Happy to see your husband again?”
“Yes.” Mira couldn’t stop herself from smiling. Gerold had been away for three months now. It was time that he came back.

“I still wonder why he brings all his men back with him. Shouldn’t they go at the Wall, like Asher?”

“The men of the Reach aren’t used to winter like us. Even Sansa’s men are more used to winter. There are winters in the Westerlands, but there is no snow in the Reach, and the lands of the Hightowers are in the southern part of it. Some of the people we brought with us can barely remember the last winter. They will be better here at Ironrath, and we can put them to work to rebuild it.”

Talia nodded. A few moments later, they began to raise the portcullis. Through it came a group of men in ragged clothes, all of them with a beard, looking even more tired than the people at Ironrath. One of them almost dropped from his horse. Mira couldn’t believe how he changed in such a short span of time. She was used to see her brothers like Rodrik or Asher like this, but that was the first time she saw her husband in such a sorry state. He limped more than he walked to her. Mira took the last steps towards him and he all but fell into her arms. He said nothing, but she thought that she heard him cry.

Two hours later, they were sitting together in her chamber. Ryon had come back with them as well along with Asher’s friend from Essos, and Mira had spent time with him, but now it was the turn of her husband. She made sure he could take a bath and shave himself. He already looked much better. What shocked her the most was when she realized that one of his fingers was missing on his left hand. He drank mulled wine as he told her everything.

“That was hell. We had to travel in the snow from Ironrath to Highpoint, and there we had to lay a siege. We lost many men when we attacked the walls. The Whitehills wouldn’t abandon. They fought to the last man. There were so many who died. And then on our way back… we got caught in the storm. My men… some were lost. We never found them back. Others got frostbite.” He showed his hand to emphasize his words. “Do you know how many men I have left?” She didn’t think she wanted to know, but winter had come, and they had to face the hard truths. She shook her head to show she didn’t. “On the thousand I left with, only six hundred are left. I lost almost half of them.”

“I’m sorry.” She was.

Her husband sighed, exhaustion plain in his voice. “How did it come to that? I lost more men to the cold and the weather than to the fights. Your brother barely lost anyone. How can that be?”

“People born in the North are used to that kind of things. We are better prepared.”

“If I had known that it would turn like this…” He didn’t finish his sentence. Instead, he drank another sip of wine. If Mira was tired, then it was way worse in his case, and she couldn’t blame him for that. She looked at the missing finger. She never thought he would get injured in this way. She thought he might be hurt into battle, but not that the cold of the North would claim a part of his body.

He looked at her. Despite being tired, his eyes were glistening, like they always did. “I missed you.”

She smiled weakly. “I missed you too.”

He kept looking at her for a very long time. Their supper was brought to them not long after. Mira told him what had happened to Ironrath while he was away. He was obviously hungry, so he didn’t say much. He looked at her very much, however. When they were done, she stood up. She had something to tell him. However, as she raised, she felt herself getting unbalanced, dizzy.
“Are you all right, Mira?” her husband asked, concerned.

“Yes, I am. Sorry.” She placed her hand on the table to find back her balance until the black holes before her disappeared. She blinked a few times. She felt as if she could let herself drop into the bed and fall asleep immediately.

“You look as exhausted as I am, even more.”

She sighed. “There was a lot to do while you were away.” She looked straight at him. “There’s something I want to tell you.”

“No. Wait.”

He walked to her and, without warning, he kissed her. His arms came around her hips and his hands joined on her back. His lips tasted the wine, probably because of the one he just drank, and they were hot. Mira let a moan escape her mouth when he broke the kiss and she could breathe. They had been separated for months. She didn’t think she would get attached to her husband like that. She kept her eyes shut as their foreheads touched, feeling the warm air he pushed away when he breathed on her chin.

“I really missed you, my love,” he told her. He was breathing heavily. His hands had come up and were now around her face.

“I really need to tell you something,” Mira said, though she wasn’t sure she had enough energy left even for that.

“We’re both tired. Can’t it wait for tomorrow?”

Mira couldn’t see him come close since her eyes were shut, but she could feel his breathing getting close. She opened her mouth and met his. He kissed her again. Her hands came around his neck. She really missed him too.

“So, can it wait?” He asked again when he broke the kiss another time, his finger playing with her lips.

“Yes, it can.” She would tell him tomorrow.

They kissed again. He tightened the grip around her hips, pressing his body against hers. His mouth trailed on her cheek. Then he did something he never did before. His right arm went lower down her knees and, without an effort, he raised her from the ground, holding her in his arms. She could barely react since he returned to kissing her lips. He brought her to her bed, and there they made love.

Later, Mira didn’t know when exactly, she woke up. She was lying on her belly, her husband’s arm that was missing a finger around her, his face against her rib. The candle had burned out next to them. Since her bed was made for only one person, she was very close to the side of it, her head only an inch or two from the end. The fire was still cracking in the fireplace, though it wouldn’t last long. There was a cold breeze running on her back that Gerold’s arm blocked on the region it covered.

She rested her head against the pillow and closed her eyes. Gerold had never carried her into his arms before. Perhaps it had to do with the fact that he was stronger now, after all these months in campaign. They had made love very slowly. They were too tired to make it like they usually did. She was glad that he was here, though she wished he hadn’t lost a finger. Still, he was alive and well, and that was much more than she could say of many other people she loved. She turned her head to look at him sleeping. Mira had never been a romantic. She always perceived marriage as a duty and that she would learn to live with the man she would marry. Things had gone very well. She even fell in
love with her husband. She brought her hand to his face and caressed his cheek.

She remained like that for a long time, until she decided she wanted to stretch her legs. Slowly, she climbed down her bed, removing her husband’s arms from her back and placing it back on the mattress. She covered herself with a sheet and went to the window that she opened. The cold wind entered the room immediately. She looked down on the courtyard, where a few lights could be seen there and there. Everyone was asleep. They would wake up early in the morning to continue to work on the reconstruction, hoping to finish before they were too deep into the winter. Several houses and buildings were still to be rebuilt. There were fewer lights than Mira remembered from her childhood.

She heard a grunt behind her. “Damn, it’s cold.”

She should have thought better before opening the panels. She closed them immediately. “Sorry, Gerold. I just wanted to look outside.”

He was now lying on his back. “I fail to understand how you managed to grow up in this place.”

“The weather is not very forgiving, but we can manage.” She came back into the bed as she replied and slipped under the furs. As she did so, he caught her at the waist from behind.

“Well, as long as I have you, I like it here.” He kissed her in the neck and she smiled in contentment at the feeling. He moved to kiss her hair after a moment. “I like them.”

“Is there something you don’t like with me?” she asked him, almost playfully.

He stopped kissing her and said nothing for a moment. “No.” He moved to face her. “I love you.” He kissed her deeply, and before long she was again lying on her back.

“Gerold, we already did it twice,” she protested. He didn’t answer, and they made it once more. They fell asleep not long after and didn’t wake up until the morning.

She opened her eyes before her husband, and she could see that the sun rose up. She wished they could still have a few hours of sleep before them, before they had to face the day. She knew it wouldn’t be an easy day, and this night had been beautiful. She had missed him so much. His arms were around her, and she positioned herself to be more comfortable. She didn’t want to let him go.

She stayed like that for maybe fifteen minutes, enjoying some more time alone with the man she loved, but in the end she moved away from him, releasing herself from his grip, which cause him to wake up.

“Hey.”

“Morning,” she explained with a single word as she sat down.

“I wish the Citadel could make the night longer,” he grumbled.

Me too. “I’m afraid maesters can only tell us how long it is. They didn’t find a way to change its duration yet.”

She stood up and put on a nightgown. She went to her vanity and started to brush her hair herself. The glass in her chamber hadn’t survived the two destructions of Ironrath, so she had to brush them without a reflection to guide her. In the meantime, Gerold got out of bed and dressed himself for the day as well. She felt his presence right behind her.

“You should let your hair free more often. I like them better this way,” he told her.
“With winter, I’m afraid it wouldn’t be wise. They would fly all over my face and blind me.”

“Too bad we’re in winter then. And in the North.”

He sounded nervous. It would be better to talk about it now. “You’ve read the message I sent you? The one from your home?” she asked.

“Yes, I have.” His voice was heavy. “You read it? I saw that the seal was broken when I received it.”

“I sent it to you because the message was important,” she gave as an answer.

He sighed. “We’ve got to go back home. The Tyrells pledged themselves to Daenerys Targaryen, and my family is sworn to them.”

They had received the raven a few days ago. Lord Hightower ordered Gerold to bring back all his men in the south to fight with Daenerys Targaryen. This meant that the Hightower men were now officially enemies of the North. Mira had sent the message to her husband by rider. As much as she hated this development, she couldn’t hide it from him.

She turned to face him. “Is that wise? We are in the thick of winter. There was just a storm, and more are coming. If you bring back your men right now by the Kingsroad, most will not make it to the Reach.”

“I received an order from my grandfather. I have no choice,” he said, sounding exasperated.

“Your grandfather doesn’t know most of your men will die on the road. Write to him and explain the situation. It would be better if your men could stay until the war is over. You’re not many, anyway, and you helped against the enemies of the King in the North. I think Jon Snow will accept to let you stay as a neutral party until you can return safely to Oldtown by ship.”

“I can’t do that!” he shouted. “I… My family wants me to come back! They order me to come back!”

She was surprised by his outburst. He had been looking away from her as he shouted, and when his gaze fell upon her, his face was angry. She even thought there was… hatred. It didn’t last long. His expression softened, his lips quivering. He looked away once more, then went to sit on her bed, looking on the floor.

Mira looked at him, worried, for a time. He was shaking, just like after the battle at Moat Cailin. She left her chair and came to sit by his side. His shaking was more evident closer to him. His hands were joined on his knees. She slowly placed her own right hand on them and moved it over his, trying to soothe him.

“What’s going on?” she asked him after a long moment.

He exhaled sharply. “I killed him.”

“Who did you kill?”

“Ludd Whitehill.” He breathed thrice before he resumed to speak. “I killed him. I… I put my sword through his head.” He kept breathing heavily. “He… He said horrible things about you. He said that he would… I had to kill him.”

He shuddered again. It didn’t seem to get any better. “It can’t be easy to kill someone,” she said.
“You know… You remember, before we left. When I said I would… kill Altos, if he laid his hand on you again?”

“Yes, I do.” She wouldn’t forget that. If there hadn’t been other men in the training yard to stop him, Gerold might have killed his brother. The news of the Boltons’ disgrace arrived just in time and they left the Hightower before it could go any further.

“I… I don’t think I could, now. I… I just killed…” He couldn’t finish his sentence.

“I’m sorry, Gerold.”

“Stop being sorry!” He said it harshly and pushed her hand aside. He kept staring right in front of him, or at the floor. Mira remained there, silent. She never saw him like this.

“Do you want some time alone?”

“Yes, please.”

“I’ll come back later.” She would talk to him then.

She stood up and left her room after putting on a gown. She went to the rookery, but there was no new message. She looked at the horizon, trying to see if there was another storm coming. The days were getting darker, and not only because nights were longer. The day itself was darker. They didn’t see the sun in days now. Mira thought that she remembered that light storms like the one they just had were often followed by a stronger one. Gerold’s men couldn’t leave. They weren’t used to travel in the North during winter. Furthermore, who could tell if the garrison of Moat Cailin would let them go south? They could be intercepted on the Kingsroad before that, and even if they managed to march through the entire North, they would have the Riverlands then the Crownlands to get through, before they could be in the Reach. If they were lucky enough, Daenerys Targaryen could have taken King’s Landing and perhaps forced the Riverlands to surrender, but that would still make the North and the Neck to walk through.

The Hightower army couldn’t leave. They would have to write to Lord Hightower and explain the situation. It wouldn’t be easy to keep all these men inside Ironrath, especially with the new mouths to feed, but they could manage. They would still have better chances of survival if they stayed here.

From where she stood, Mira saw her sister in the courtyard, discussing with one of the men who were working on the reconstruction. She decided to speak with her and left the rookery. Many men from the Hightower army had been sleeping in the hall for feasts, and they were still there when she passed by. The snow was crunched under her feet as she walked through the yard. Her sister was no longer there. One of the men told her that Talia had gone to the battlements. Mira climbed to them and found her sister looking over the crenellations.

“Nice view,” Mira said to attract her attention.

“Yes.”

If they had the sun, the snow covering the ground all around them would be shining. Instead, it was completely white, without reflection. It was a dull white, without anything special. The mix of green and white should have given a certain beauty to the scenery, but Mira couldn’t find any.

“Are you fine?” Talia asked her.

“Yes, I’m fine, Talia. Don’t worry about me.”
“I would worry much less if we had a maester. Did you tell him?”

“Not yet. I’m afraid he was pretty shaken by the battle at Highpoint. He wasn’t prepared for that.”

“You’ll have to tell him, you know,” Talia insisted.

“I know. Let me take care of this. He’s my husband after all, not yours.”

A quick smile came upon Talia’s lips, but her concerned expression came back instantly. “We won’t have enough supplies for everyone, not with all the men your husband brought.”

Mira looked ahead of her, to the snow covering the landscape. “They wouldn’t survive to a march to the south. I mean, most of them wouldn’t survive.”

“Perhaps they could be sent to the Wall?” Talia suggested.

“Maybe,” Mira conceded. The Wall was closer. However, the weather would be harsher there than in the southern part of the North. Surely there was a way to keep the men from the Reach here. If only Gerold had gone to the Wall with Asher right after Highpoint fell, they wouldn’t face a decision like this.

“You have to tell him,” Talia told her once again.

“I know.” She knew it only too well. She had to tell him. She turned to look at her sister, displaying a wicked smile. “What about Gawen’s letter?”

“He’s being very gallant, but I wish I could spend more time with him. We barely know each other.”

“You’ll spend time with him. And better to marry him than Torrhen Whitehill.”

Talia’s expression showed that the two sisters more than agreed on this. They left the battlements after some time, Talia to see how the crafting of ironwood shields was going, and Mira to speak with her husband. She found her husband into her father’s former solar. The place had been cleaned, but it wasn’t used for now. This room would belong to Asher when he would come back.

He looked at her when she entered. “This is where your father worked?” he asked,

“Yes. He made me come here when he told me that I would go south.”

“I would have liked to know him. He seemed to be a good man from what I heard.”

“He was. Gregor the Good.” She gathered her courage and prepared to tell him, but he spoke before she could.

“We are leaving in the hour.”

She gasped. “What?”

“I already gave the order to my men. We’re leaving for the Reach. I suggest you gather your things very quickly.”

He proceeded to walk out, but Mira stopped him before he crossed the door. “Wait, Gerold, you can’t do that. Your men will die out there.”

“I have no choice, Mira. My grandfather gave me the order to bring back his men.”
“You must explain to him that…”

“There’s nothing to explain!” he shouted. He stepped away from her. “I brought his men so they could free Ironrath and give it to you and me. The first goal was accomplished, but I can’t fulfill the second without fighting your own family. I don’t want that! We’re leaving!”

He was angry, and very angry, but to the opposite of this morning, he didn’t show any sign of calming. “Are you furious because you can’t have Ironrath?” she asked prudently, fearing the reaction as much as the answer.

“Strangely, yes!” He paced, looking away from her. “My family gave me this army because they believed that I could become Lord of Ironrath. That was the only reason. And now… I arrive here, to discover that your family is still alive and that your brother is Lord of Ironrath. You didn’t need me to take back your home. Yes, I’m furious!”

Mira was stunned by his words. This wasn’t how the man she married used to be. He continued to speak. “My family is probably laughing at me as we speak. I brought an entire army in the North, for nothing. All these men dead, for nothing. And now they are serving a queen who’s an enemy of the King in the North. We are at war. I can’t stay here. My grandfather is telling me to bring back his men. They are to fight for Daenerys Targaryen now, not for Jon Snow.”

“Gerold,” Mira started slowly. “This war in the south doesn’t matter. You know where the real war is. It’s not Daenerys Targaryen or Jon Snow or Cersei Lannister or Euron Greyjoy who is an enemy now. The dead are the real enemies.”

He scoffed. “Please forgive me, Mira, but I have a hard time believing in those tales about walking dead. Do you really believe them?”

She hesitated to answer. “I’d like very much to believe that they don’t exist, but a wise man once said that we should never believe something because we want to believe it.”

He looked away again. “I’ll wait to see these dead men before I believe they are real. We’re leaving.”

He walked past her at a furious pace. Before he could leave the room, she raised the voice. “I’m not coming.”

He had his back turned on her, but he stopped the moment she said the words. Then he slowly turned to face her. “What?”

“I can’t come,” she said with a voice that let no place to discussion. “Listen Gerold, I…”

“I brought an entire army here to give you back your home! That’s not enough for you?”

“It has nothing to do with that…”

“You are my wife. You will come.” He seized her arm, but Mira shove his arm away. He was going too far.

“Are you going to attach me to a horse to force me to follow you?” she asked, furious as well now.

She saw doubts in him for a moment. “You are my wife. Your place is at my side.”

Mira felt anger rise in her. He never treated her like this before. “My name is Mira Forrester, and this is my home. My family is here, they are in danger, and I’m not going to risk the life of the people I
love. I will not leave.”

He stared at her, a mix of anger and despair on his face. He turned and walked away. “I don’t want to see you again.”

These were his last words she heard before he disappeared. Mira stayed there for a moment. What did just happen? Gerold had accused her of bringing him in the North for nothing. He yelled at her, something he never did. It was as if he blamed her because Asher was Lord of Ironrath and not him. How could he say things like that? Was that really the man she married? Did he only marry her for Ironrath? His family had accepted the marriage with her for this reason, she had no illusion about it, but she didn’t think Gerold only loved her for this.

She stayed there for a moment. Perhaps she should go to him, try to talk to him, but she didn’t want to. Her parents had disagreements, but never of that sort. Her husband could be furious, but now she was furious as well. She was furious after him. She didn’t want to see him either. She wouldn’t see him. She wouldn’t try to hold a man who treated her like this.

She left her father’s solar and went to her chamber. She locked the door behind her and sat on her bed. She remained there for a long time, thinking about everything that had happened. Her breathing began to get jerky, and after some time tears were running on her cheeks. Some ran down and fell on her knees. She looked down. She never got the chance to tell him. He would never know. He was gone. She positioned her hand on her belly. That was what she needed so much to tell him. She hadn’t bled in three months.

Chapter End Notes

Perhaps it is because Game of Thrones is settled in a medieval universe where people live with violence and death as omnipresent, but I find it strange that we saw no one actually fall apart or feel a trauma after battles. Psychological problems that could go as far as suicide are very present among the modern armies when the soldiers go back to their lives as civilians. I tried to make Gerold an example of this, though I don't know about the traumas soldiers can go through in detail. He was just broken up by this war and by the fact he just killed a man out of hatred, no matter how evil the man was, and that's what caused his reactions here. We previously saw after Moat Cailin how war affected him, and this time his reaction is stronger. And of course the trauma had dire consequences on his relationship with Mira, just like it regularly happens in real life. And it happened at one of the worst possible moments.

Please review

Next chapter : Jon
"Three patrols didn’t come back. They were supposed to arrive yesterday, and they didn’t. We have no idea of where they might be."

Edd looked at Jon as he gave his report, and Jon knew what his friend thought. They could have been killed by the Walkers. It wasn’t sure, but it was possible, highly possible.

"Perhaps it would be better if we sealed the tunnels," Edd suggested.

Jon had thought about it day and night for the last days. It wasn’t an easy decision to take. They still had men patrolling out there. If they were still alive, then sealing the tunnels meant condemning them to death. On the other hand, it could also prevent the dead from getting through the Wall by using them. But even then, how could they know if the dead needed these tunnels? Maybe they would only climb the Wall. If that was the case, then sealing the tunnels might deprive Jon’s men of their only means to launch counter-attacks against the dead if they ever had this opportunity.

"Let’s wait for another day, see if our men come back." He was reporting the decision for later, he knew that, but he wanted to give a chance to these men outside. He couldn’t abandon them.

"You know we’ll have to do it one day," Edd pointed out.

"We can’t be sure. Maybe it’s not necessary to seal the tunnels."

"You were the one to propose the same solution when the wildlings were closing on us."

"Aye, it’s true, and look at what would have happened if we had done it. Their people would all have died at Hardhome. My brother would have been stuck north of the Wall when he arrived at Castle Black. Mance had sent men to climb the Wall after the first night of the battle. The Wall wouldn’t have stopped the wildlings, even if the gates were impossible to take. I don’t think sealing the tunnels will stop the White Walkers more than it could stop the Free Folk. Ser Alliser was right. It would cut off our legs, pluck out our eyes, leave us to stay hidden behind the Wall, hoping the storm will pass. We can’t hope for this storm to pass."

"Strange to quote a man who shoved his dagger into your heart."

"That doesn’t mean he couldn’t be right about certain things. We won’t seal the tunnels for now. Not until some of our men out there might still be alive."

"As you wish, your Grace," Edd grumbled. "I suppose the trap is useless then."
“We will use it if necessary. Anyway, with that trap, we can seal the tunnels within seconds. So for now, there’s no hurry to bury them.”

Jon left Edd’s solar. In the courtyard, men were practicing. They were waiting for an enemy who hadn’t shown itself yet. The waiting was killing Jon. He was afraid they wouldn’t be ready, but the more they waited for the dead to attack, the more he grew apprehensive of the upcoming attack. He wondered if the men felt the same. He wasn’t sure. Especially among the Knights of the Vale, he had the impression that they didn’t feel how they were all in danger. How could he blame them? They didn’t see the Night King like he did. Except for a few brothers of the Night’s Watch and the people of the Free Folk, no one saw the dead. Still, they had to be ready, so Jon maintained a constant routine of exercises, guard duties on the top of the Wall and reconstruction tasks. Castle Black was beginning to look like a real castle again. Jon had gone to see Oakenshield and Queensgate since they arrived, and the progress was visible there too, though they still had a lot of work to do. According to Ser Davos the last time Jon saw him, the castles on the eastern side of the Wall were all in a far better state now than when they found them.

Jon had almost no one to take advice from now, except Edd. Ser Davos was riding along the Wall, inspecting the progress of the rebuilding, while most of the lords now led one of the castles’ garrisons. He felt loner than ever. It was as if he was back at the time when he was Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch, where he had to take all decisions for the Wall and no one to advise him, but this time with more men under his command. Sometimes, he wondered what his former sworn brothers thought of his departure. When he asked Edd, he told him that most were very glad to see him again, especially when they realized he brought an entire army to protect the Wall, but many had called him a traitor and a deserter after he left the Watch. Maybe they weren’t wrong, but Jon was tired of fighting back then. He gave everything he had to the Watch, and the Watch betrayed him and killed him. How could he continue to serve it after that?

He looked at the men fighting in the yard. There were very few brothers of the Watch. Three thousand men lived at Castle Black, and there was only one over a hundred who took vows. Jon saw two familiar figures sparring together. One was wearing a black cloak, the other was not. The latter knocked the one with a black cloak on the ground. As Jon walked in their direction, he heard them discuss.

“You’re getting better, Gared,” Asher Forrester said as he gave him a hand to stand on his feet.

“Thanks, Asher. You didn’t change at all in all these years.”

“Maybe not, but you changed, for sure.” He gave Gared a strong pat on the back. Asher noticed Jon coming in his direction. “Your Grace.”

“Lord Asher. Gared.”

“Your Grace,” Jon’s former sworn brother said.

“You feel ready?”

“It’s difficult to feel ready when you must be ready to fight dead men,” Gared replied. “But I feel better fighting them here rather than in the North Grove.”

“We can’t be ready for anything today,” Asher said bitterly. He walked to a nearby dummy, paused before it, then slashed it so hard with his blunted sword that the practice dummy was cut in half. “Anything can happen.”

“You should be careful,” Jon said. “We’ll run out of dummies at the rate you keep ruining them.”
“Sorry, but I found nothing better to clear my mind.”

On that, Asher Forrester walked away. “It’s not easy to discover that your father had bastard children and that he hid them from you all his life,” Gared commented gloomily. Jon looked at him. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to insult, your Grace,” he added quickly.

“No need to apologize.” Jon stared at Asher Forrester walking away. “My brothers and sisters knew all their life that I was their half-brother, but to learn that you have one all of a sudden, like that… This is as shocking as to learn that your father was in fact your uncle, and that your mother was raped by your real father.”

A silence followed what Jon said. “You did well to send Josera to Queensgate. He and Asher didn’t get along very well.”

The half-brothers didn’t like each other, indeed. Gared Tuttle had arrived with a small group of wildlings weeks ago, but also with the bastard son of Lord Gregor Forrester, Josera Snow. When Asher Forrester arrived at the Wall later, after he finished submitting Highpoint, he met Josera with great hostility, and his half-brother returned the feeling. Jon didn’t think it was fair from Asher to accuse Josera of lying when he said that he was Lord Gregor’s son, especially since he lost his sister Elsera in the north. She died in unknown circumstances. Gared and Josera refused to talk about it. After her death, they left a place they called the North Grove and came to Castle Black, hoping to find shelter against the White Walkers.

“That’s not all that bothers Asher, isn’t it?” Jon asked to Gared.

“No. There’s his wife, Gwyn. Her father died, so it didn’t make things easier between them. I still can’t believe they got married.” Gared allowed a short chuckle to escape as a short smile appeared on his face. “And there’s Mira of course. That’s more than enough. I can’t believe her husband abandoned her when she was pregnant.”

Jon perceived the anger in Gared’s voice as much as in Asher’s violent actions. The people serving the Forresters who were present at Castle Black were all greatly upset when they learned that Gerold Hightower rode away to the south with his men, leaving his wife behind with a baby. Mira Forrester was Sansa’s friend, and Jon was revolted by her husband’s behaviour as well.

“Your Grace, if I may, do you think I could go back to Ironrath for a time, once all this madness is over?”

“I’m not the one you must ask for this,” Jon answered. “I’m not the Lord Commander. I’m not even a brother of the Night’s Watch. You’re still one, though.”

Gared nodded, dark mood plain on his face. “If Frostfinger had his way, I would have been thrown from the top of the Wall a long time ago.”

“He can’t do that, Gared. The Watch needs every man it can find.”

“And when they won’t need every man they can find anymore, you can be sure the first thing Frostfinger will do is to carry out the sentence I escaped.” Gared said. He looked straight at Jon. “I meant the words I said before the weirwood. I never intended to abandon the Night’s Watch. I’m not a deserter, and I’m not a traitor. The man I killed was trying to murder me, he engaged the fight. I was only defending myself. I escaped because I would have died if I stayed.”

“You don’t need to convince me, Gared. For a time, I thought you were a traitor, and that you betrayed the Watch when you left. But that was before I was stabbed in the heart by my own sworn
brothers. I understand what you went through, and I don’t blame you for leaving. But it won’t be for me to decide what will be your future with the Watch.”

“I know. Let’s hope Dolorous Edd and Frostfinger stop seeing me as a traitor when the war is done, or else my family will be remembered not only for betraying the house we served, but for forsaking sacred vows to the Night’s Watch.”

Gared didn’t take it well when he was told that his father betrayed the Forresters and served as a spy for the Whitehills. House Forrester was broken just like House Stark was. No wonder that Gared, Asher and Josera were in sour moods all the time.

“Too bad I didn’t get killed and brought back to life by a witch. I could leave the Watch then,” Gared added. He and Jon laughed at it.

“Gared.” A girl with silver hair, wearing clothes of the Free Folk, was calling him. “Want a practice with a bow? You should try to get better.”

“All right, Sylvi. I’m coming. Your Grace.” Gared bowed and left Jon alone. He had just begun to walk away when the horn blew. It blew three times.

For a second, everyone stood still, and then Jon was giving orders to everyone to get in place. He sent more men to go to the Wall using the stairs. When Edd arrived, Jon ordered him to make sure the trap would be activated if he gave the order. Then Jon went to the winch elevator to supervise the battle from the top of the Wall.

As the elevator brought him up with a dozen other men, the winds got stronger. This time, it wasn’t because they were going higher in altitude, but because the storm had come. After an eternity, they arrived on the top of the Wall. The situation was horrible there. Their vision was limited by the snow they received in their eyes. The wind was so cold that it was as if knives were thrown at their cheeks. Jon noticed that the men of the Vale had much more difficulty to stand than the Free Folk or the Northerners.

He arrived close to the commander of this section of the Wall. “Where are they?”

“We don’t know. One of the men of the Watch blew the horn when he saw a storm arrive,” the man replied.

“Who?”

“I don’t know.”

Jon went to see who blew the horn three times. Judging by the storm, he didn’t think it was a mistake, and when he saw who was at the horn, still blowing, he got his confirmation. It was one of the men who was with him at Hardhome. He saw what the White Walkers did when they attacked and he knew how to recognize the signs of their arrival.

He returned to the archers’ position. They were ready to shoot, though they had great difficulty to keep their bows and arrows still. It was difficult to see farther than a dozen feet ahead of you. Jon could barely distinguish the fires that were used for flaming arrows.

Then Jon saw him. The storm broke around a place in the clearing before the Wall, and he was there. Jon would throw his hand into the fire if it wasn’t the Night King. He seemed to be alone. He was no bigger than an ant from there, but Jon would recognize him anywhere, no matter how far or how close he was. Jon felt his eyes on him.
“Archers! Knock!” He shouted. He wasn’t sure if anyone heard him. He looked around, and some of
the people obeyed him. Only some. He turned to the two men who had knocked their arrows next to
him. “Go on each side. Tell the people east of us to follow the signs the group on their left is giving,
and tell each group of archers to give these signs to the people on their right. Do the opposite for the
people west of us. They must follow my words.”

The two men ran to carry out his orders. As they left, the ground shook. Jon saw a man yell as he
made a fall of seven hundred feet. He heard a strange cracking sound. What did this? The Wall had
shaken without explanation. Could the wind do that? Could the wind shake the Wall? He looked at
the Night King. He was kneeling on the ground a moment ago, and slowly he stood up. Jon saw a
great crevice that began at his feet and continued to…

Jon remembered something Bran told him, about the battle at the cave. Jon saw that the Night King
was kneeling again.

“Get hold of something!” he shouted with all the force of his lungs.

The crevice grew wider, and when the force hit the Wall, it was stronger than the last time. Jon could
barely keep his feet with his hold on the spear planted in the ground.

“Your Grace, what is it?” a man asked.

“The Night King is trying to bring down the Wall,” Jon answered, though not loud enough for
anyone to hear if he wasn’t standing next to him.

A third wave of shock came, but this time it seemed lighter than the previous ones. The men
managed to prepare better for this one and almost no one lost his balance. More important, no one
fell from the Wall.

The storm seemed to quiet down after the third attempt. Jon looked at the Night King. Did he doubt?
Could the White Walkers doubt? He remembered the expression of surprise from one of them when
his sword stopped his.

“Prepare to shoot! Knock!” Jon shouted.

All around him, the men did as they were told. They were ready to rain fire on whatever would
approach the Wall. The Night King was too far for arrows to strike him, but if he got any closer, Jon
would do everything to end this once and for all. Longclaw was in his scabbard, ready to be used.

The Night King made a movement. Jon thought he was raising a sword or something similar. They
all heard a piercing cry. Hundreds if not thousands of wights emerged from the woods.

“Draw!” The dead kept running to the Wall. Jon waited for them to be close enough. “Loose!”

A large volley of arrows flew and fell on the dead. Jon distinguished many of them falling. He sent
another volley.

“Knock! Draw! Loose!” The second volley was identical to the first and had the same results.

“Knock! Draw! Lo…”

Before Jon could give the order, a powerful gust of wind hit him, forcing him to cover his face.
When he looked around, he saw that all men were forced to do the same. The blast of wind stopped
them from doing anything for several precious seconds. Cold was biting them like a direwolf. When
Jon could finally go back to the border of the Wall, the wights had reached it. They were beginning
to climb the Wall. And he told Sam that he hoped the dead couldn’t climb it.

“Position archers with harnesses. We must take them down before they reach the top.”

They had to hold archers to the Wall while they looked down to shoot at the dead men climbing, and the only way for that was to use harnesses. They had to be careful. The men holding these harnesses couldn’t fail, or the archers would fall to a certain death, like it had happened to one of them when Mance attacked the Wall. As men took positions, Jon saw that a figure was detaching itself among the wights who attacked the Wall. Because it wasn’t a wight. It was a White Walker, different from the Night King. He was walking slowly to the gate. Jon saw that there was already a strong contingent of dead men at the gate.

“Is the oil ready?” he asked.

“Yes, your Grace.”

“Drop it at my signal.”

Archers kept shooting at the wights who approached the Wall and at those who climbed it. It was useless to tell the men to knock or to loose now. The White Walker was approaching the gate. He got closer, closer, closer. Jon suddenly thought of Ygritte. If she was here, she could certainly shoot an arrow at him, and she would certainly reach him, even at this distance. She never missed her target. It would only take her one arrow with a head of dragonglass to kill the White Walker. However, Ygritte wasn’t here, and the White Walker was. When he came close enough, Jon gave the order.

“The Oil! Now!”

They dropped four barrels full of oil with an enflamed stem. They fell, and for a few seconds they waited. Just at the moment when the White Walker was right under them, they touched the ground. An explosion followed. Jon saw several wights trying to escape the fire. If the dead couldn’t feel fear anymore, they surely felt the pain. Melisandre would surely like this sight.

The fire cleared in front of the gate, as if someone just blew it off like you blew off a candle. The wights were all dead or about to be dead, if they could die. The White Walker, however, still stood tall, in the same position than when he walked to the gate. He raised his arm and smashed it against the gate. A moment later, pieces of steel flew all over the battlefield. To Jon’s horror, the White Walker walked into the tunnel. Many dead were now converging on it. The gate was gone.

Jon ran to the horn, cursing himself on the way. The gate was made of steel. They knew the weapons of the White Walkers could destroy swords, make them shatter in a thousand pieces of steel. Why didn’t he consider that they could do the same with everything made of steel, including gates? He arrived at the horn.

“Give the signal for the trap,” he shouted to the sworn brother.

He nodded and made three fast blows, followed by two that were longer. Jon waited. Seconds later, he fell the ground shake again. This time, however, he was glad to hear it shaking.

“Send them another load of oil barrels. Keep raining fire on them. Don’t stop. Fight!” He kept giving orders. Volleys of flaming arrows kept burning wights under them. The barrels of oil made another carnage before the gate.

Jon continued to command the men. The wights agglutinated at the gate one more time, and after another load of oil burned them all, they didn’t try to get through the gate again. There was no gate
now, anyway, and no tunnel. Jon and Edd conceived this plan in case they would have to block the tunnel very quickly. They made a system with ropes enrolled around beams that held the ceiling of the tunnel. Having men pull these ropes broke the beams and caused the ceiling to collapse, burying the tunnel under rock and ice. No one could leave and no one could enter. The White Walker and all the wights who managed to come with him into the tunnel would be stuck there.

Jon thought after some time that fewer wights were sent towards the Wall. The Night King couldn’t have exhausted his army already. Jon knew he had at least as many men as Mance Rayder, certainly more, and he didn’t send much more men yet than Mance when he launched the first attack on the Wall.

A horn blew. Jon looked at their own on the Wall, and saw that it wasn’t this one that was blown. It was the one of Castle Black, down there. The castle was being attacked.

Jon found Asher who was firing like most of the men “Asher. The Wall is yours. If the climbers get too close, drop the scythe on them.”

“Aye, Snow.” Jon chose six men to come with him. As they walked to the cage, he heard the Lord of Ironrath shout. “Come on, boys. Let’s send those fuckers back to Hell.” He heard a volley of arrows go.

As the winch cage brought them down, Jon saw that there was indeed a battle in the main courtyard. However, it wasn’t any common battle. When they were close enough, he distinguished the White Walker that he thought they buried under the Wall. Jon saw that he already killed a dozen men. He drew Longclaw. This was the only sword in this castle that could destroy this man or whatever it was.

When the cage opened, he jumped immediately. To his great horror, the bodies on the ground raised at this moment. One of them was close, maybe no more than ten feet. It looked at Jon with its blue eyes. Jon didn’t hesitate and plunged his sword into the dead man, and he fell immediately, unmov ing. He looked at the courtyard and saw that the other dead men were beginning to attack the living. He turned to the men he brought with him.

“Burn the dead with anything you can find. I take care of the Walker.”

Jon went down the stairs and ran to the White Walker. He turned to face Jon at the last minute and brought his sword down on him. Jon parried it. The White Walker delivered strong blows, but Jon parried or ducked them. Then he saw an opening and brought his sword through the White Walker’s head. The next moment, it was gone, reduced to rubble.

Jon looked around him and saw that there were a few wights still fighting. He ran to one of them and cut through his leg, then his head. When he looked at what was left of him on the ground, he realized he knew this man. He spoke with him no later than this morning. He was a young squire to a knight from the Vale. When Jon looked around again, he saw that only one wight was still on his feet. A man with the sigil of House Cerwyn on his arms shove a torch to his chest, and the wight screamed in pain. He had an armor from the Vale as well.

Jon looked at the head he just cut from a dead man’s body, his blue eyes without life staring at him. He spoke with him only a few hours ago. He couldn’t remember his name, he didn’t even know where he precisely came from, but he spoke with him, and now he just killed him. He heard the horn from the Wall. The enemy was retreating. They won.

“Your Grace.” Edd brought him back to life by calling after him.
“How did this happen? How did he get through?”

“No idea. We brought the Wall down on him, but he managed to get through all the same. We were all surprised. The men tried to stop him, but you know it was useless. You arrived just in time.”

The White Walker managed to make his way through the debris they threw over him. If they could get through it, then no one was safe. “Did any wight come through?”

“None. Only the White Walker.”

Jon sighed in relief. There was this, at least. “Make sure the tunnel is blocked. Keep guards before it at all times. We must write to Winterfell to tell them what happened, and to the other castles. We must tell them to keep their tunnels blocked, and tell Eastwatch and the Shadow Tower to seal their own too.”

Edd nodded and left to carry out the orders Jon just gave. Jon realized that everyone around was looking at him. Free Folk, Northerner, Vale man, they were all staring at him. No one said anything, but they were all looking at him. Jon reminded himself that he had to look sure of what he was doing. He couldn’t let his men doubt him. He was their king now.

“Everyone at your posts. Bring those who are injured to the maesters. Burn the bodies of the dead. Unless you want them to come back.” Because they will come back. And the next time, we might not be as lucky as we were today.

Chapter End Notes

Expect more and more chapters in this style, with a lot of action, from now on.

Please review

Next chapter : Sansa
Sansa XXX

Chapter Notes

It's been a long time since we had Tyrion and Sansa together in the same chapter. Let's bring them back.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

SANSA XXX

"Are you sure you want to eat these now? We may not see them before long," Bran said, looking at the peach in his hand.

"You deserve to have some after the two years you spent north of the Wall. They won’t last much longer, anyway," Sansa assured her brother. “And I don’t believe we will get more from the Reach anytime soon."

Since House Tyrell declared for Daenerys Targaryen, they couldn’t hope to receive food supplies from the Reach in the near future. Sansa had been more than happy to learn that Margaery survived, but the news were quickly darkened by the announcement of House Tyrell to support the Targaryens. Sansa found some solace in the idea that Cersei would die soon. Daenerys Targaryen would never let her live. However, she doubted that the Mad King’s daughter would be more merciful with her and Tyrion. They supported Jon, after all, and Tyrion’s family played a vital role in the downfall of the Targaryen dynasty. The Tyrells fought for the Targaryens in the last war, unlike the Lannisters and the Starks, and Jon was acknowledged by the four kingdoms who rebelled against the Mad King.

She and Tyrion had a long discussion about this new development when they received the news concerning the Tyrells. Daenerys Targaryen had three dragons and the support of both Dorne and the Reach. She already conquered the Stormlands, and everything indicated that after taking King’s Landing, she would direct her armies and her dragons towards Casterly Rock, Riverrun, the Eyrie, and finally Winterfell. Tyrion claimed they had no chance to defeat Daenerys Targaryen. An alliance between the Lannisters and the Gardeners in the times of Aegon’s Conquest was easily defeated by the dragons and a small army. They couldn’t hope to assemble an army large enough to face the Dragon Queen with the threat at the Wall, and even if they did, the odds of winning were very limited.

Tyrion had sent orders to Daven’s army marching on King’s Landing, and also to Genna at Casterly Rock about what to do if the Targaryen’s army marched against them. Tyrion was disappointed to have failed in convincing the Reach to join them, but he confessed that even if they knew that Margaery was alive and proposed Mace Tyrell to marry her to Jon, they would certainly not be able to stand against three dragons and a powerful army of Dothrakis, Unsullied and Dornishmen. A war in the south was to be prevented at all cost if they were to have a chance to defeat the White Walkers.

As a result, they didn’t send more men in the south. Half their forces were at the Wall with Jon, while the other half was kept in reserve in the many castles in the North. Even Ser Brynden Tully remained in the North. Daven Lannister’s army would be joined by another army of the Vale to march on King’s Landing and deal with Cersei Lannister, but they had no other major force south of Moat Cailin. Their armies were kept to fight the White Walkers and the dead.
“Your husband didn’t join us, Sansa?” Arya asked.

“No. He wanted to give us some time between brothers and sisters, in family,” Sansa answered.

“If Jon was here, the whole family would be reunited.”

They were breaking their fast together, Sansa, Arya and Bran, before the day began. They didn’t have much time for themselves. It wasn’t to be said that they spent no time together at all, but most of the time Sansa spent with Arya during the day was about ruling the North, administering Winterfell, or taking decisions about the war. As for Bran, he spent most of his time in the godswood, having visions. Sansa still didn’t completely understand what Bran meant when he said he was the three-eyed raven. Bran said it was complicated and struggled to explain her what it meant, or he didn’t want to tell her what it meant. Sansa wasn’t sure she wanted to know. Bran knew things he wasn’t supposed to know. He often looked lost in his thoughts. Sometimes, he forgot to eat. Without Meera Reed to look after him, Sansa didn’t know what would happen to Bran.

“Did you have news from Jon recently?” Bran asked.

“His last raven said they garrisoned all the castles along the Wall,” Sansa answered. “He said nothing apart from this.” Jon’s ravens were reports more than letters. At best, they knew he was alive with them, but nothing more.

“We should all be with him,” Arya said. “You remember what Father used to tell us? He said we had to stay together, that a lone wolf died in winter, but that the pack survived.”

“Jon told us to stay here for our safety, Arya,” Sansa told her.

“I don’t need to be safe. I spent two years wandering through the Riverlands, and then I spent months among the crannogmen. I don’t need protection.”

“What about Bran? You want him at Castle Black, where he could get killed by a wight?”

“Arya, you can protect yourself,” Bran said, “but I can’t. I had nothing to do at Castle Black. Jon has to fight them, and he can defeat them, but I can’t. When he told me to leave, I refused at first, but he was right to send me back home. I’m more useful here.”

Arya grumbled something that looked like an approval. “Still, I don’t like being stuck here while our brother is risking his life.”

Sansa almost corrected her sister by saying Jon wasn’t their brother, but she kept it for herself. It would only infuriate Arya. She didn’t think less of Jon since she learned he was their cousin. Truth be told, Sansa considered him more like her family than many years ago, before she left Winterfell for King’s Landing, but she tried to call him her cousin all the same. It was still better than bastard, and better than to specify to everyone that Jon was only her half-brother.

“Are you still doing well in the training yard?” Sansa asked her sister, trying to change the subject. “I saw you fight three squires at the same time and knock them all on the ground.”

“Aye.” Arya said with pride. Sansa tried to take an interest in Arya fighting, just like Arya tried to get involved in the ruling of Winterfell. After her time spent with a woman as her sworn shield at her side, Sansa had come to tolerate that Arya didn’t want to be a lady. Despite their differences, they managed to spend time together. Arya was less bitter towards her than before. “Though I wish Brienne was still here. She was good at fighting, and it was amusing too to train with her.”

Brienne had left Winterfell two weeks ago. A message had arrived from Evenfall Hall, informing her
that her father died in King’s Landing during the events around the destruction of the Great Sept of Baelor. Sansa never saw Brienne so affected in her whole life. She had no family left. Her father was her last family member who was alive, and now he was gone.

“I’m sorry, Brienne. You have all my sympathy,” Sansa told her in her solar when she saw the tall woman the day after the raven from Tarth arrived.

“Thank you, my lady.” Sansa never saw Brienne in this state before. It was as if she barely managed to stand on her feet. Sansa remembered how she felt when her father died, and when Robb and her mother died. She knew how horrible it was to go through this.

They remained silent for a long time. Sansa decided to break it. “You wanted to see me, Lady Brienne. Why? Is there something I can do for you?”

There was a long pause before Brienne talked. When she did, it was with a croaked voice. “I need you to relieve me from your service, my lady.” Sansa was shocked by this. That wasn’t what she expected. “I must go back to Tarth. I must bury my father’s bones.”

“Oh. Of course, I understand. But surely, you don’t have to leave my service to bury your father.”

Brienne seemed at a loss of words for a time, then she spoke, her voice trembling. “My lady, I swore to your lady mother to bring her daughters to safety. You and your sister are now safer than you’ll ever be. You don’t need my protection anymore.”

There was something strange in the way Brienne talked. She didn’t seem to believe what she was saying, and Sansa doubted that with wights and White Walkers not far from them, they could say that she and Arya were safe. “Lady Brienne, why are you leaving? Is that because now you’re the Lady of Evenfall?” Brienne didn’t seem to understand what she just said. Sansa knew that Brienne should be the new Lady of Tarth Isle if her father died, since she was her only living child. Her brother died drowning at the age of eight, and her two sisters died not long after their birth. However, the tall woman once told Sansa that she wasn’t interested in being Lady of Tarth. “That’s not it. Why are you really leaving?”

Lady Brienne of Tarth gulped, looked down, then faced Sansa again. “My father died in King’s Landing, my lady. The people from Evenfall didn’t tell me how it happened, but I know that my lord father was summoned by Randyll Tarly to be Master of Laws. I refuse to believe that he died in an accident. I want to discover what happened to him, and there’s only one place where I can find it.”

Sansa knew exactly what this meant. “Brienne, I can’t allow you to go there. Cersei controls King’s Landing and the Crownlands. You will never get to her. You’ll be killed before you can see her.”

“I only want to discover what happened to my father.”

“And… what if you find out that he was killed by Cersei, or on her orders?”

“I once vowed I would avenge Renly Baratheon, my lady. I would have killed Stannis if I fell upon him by chance, and I would have killed Walder Frey and his son Walder if you allowed me to for murdering you lady mother, and I would avenge you as well if someone killed you. The same goes for my father.”

“Brienne, Cersei doesn’t have long to live. Daenerys Targaryen is conquering all the southern kingdoms as we speak. Cersei has a few months to live, at most. No one supports her. If Daenerys doesn’t kill her, our own men will take care of that when they attack the capital.”

“I must find out how my father died, my lady,” Brienne insisted.
Sansa looked at her sworn shield for a moment. “You’ll get yourself killed if you go to King’s Landing.”

“I know it’s possible, Lady Sansa, but it is a risk I must take. I have a duty towards you, I didn’t forget it, but I have a duty to my father’s memory as well.”

Sansa didn’t want Brienne to go. After being around her for so long, she had come to appreciate this woman. However, she served her when she had no obligation to do so. Few people would have kept an oath they made to a dead person. Sansa could refuse Brienne’s request, but was it fair to demand her to remain at her service forever when she showed more devotion than any other knight would have? Could she refuse this woman the right to get her revenge for her father’s death? Sansa knew better than anyone how horrible Cersei was, and she couldn’t blame Cersei for wanting her dead. Sansa wanted the woman dead as well. But Brienne was risking her life. On the other hand, Sansa didn’t feel she could refuse her, not after she entered her service of her own freewill, when she had no interest to do so.

“Lady Brienne, I won’t force you to stay, but I suggest you join the army Ser Daven Lannister is leading to King’s Landing. You’ll have better odds of surviving, and they’re going to the capital anyway. You’ll be able to discover how your father died after the city is taken.”

Brienne nodded after a moment. “Yes, my lady.”

“I do not free you from my service, Brienne, but I allow you to go south for an undetermined period to find out how your lord father died and to bury his bones.”

“Thank you, my lady.” She unbuckled the scabbard at her belt and handed it to Sansa. “This sword belongs to your family, my lady. It was made with the steel of your father’s sword, and it might help you against the dead if they ever get through the Wall. Ser Jaime told me to use it to defend you with your father’s steel. I won’t be defending you while I’m in the south.”

Sansa thought about it. She wasn’t sure if she wanted to take it back from Brienne, but if it was forged with the melted steel of her father’s sword, it might one of the few things left from him. Sansa accepted it. “You can take whatever you want in our armory, the best sword you find is yours. We’ll give you everything for your journey to King’s Landing.”

“Thank you, my lady. It was an honor to serve you.” After an hesitation, she added something more. “And to serve your husband. I will come back to you as soon as I can.”

Sansa missed Brienne, and Arya too. They trained together almost every day, and Brienne said she was surprised and impressed by Arya’s skills. Sansa also had to admit that she felt less safe without Brienne around.

“I think it’s time for you to see Maester Wolkan, isn’t it?” Bran asked. They were done with their breakfast.

“I think we could still spend some time with you in the godswood,” Sansa offered.

“Of course.”

“I’ll bring you there,” Arya said. She went behind Bran and began to push his wheelchair. Sansa followed behind.

The sun was high in the sky, for one of the first times since they arrived in the North. Maester Wolkan said it indicated that a storm was coming soon. Still, for the time being, Sansa enjoyed the feeling of the sun on her skin. They made their way through Winterfell, people bowing respectfully
before them. They were before the weirwood in no time. For half an hour, they exchanged stories about their childhood.

“Do you remember when you ambushed me with snowballs?” Sansa asked them.

“Aye, your hair was all messy. You complained that you had to brush it for hours after that,” Arya said on a playful tone.

They all laughed together. “It had to be one of the times I hated you the most,” Sansa told her sister, without a hint of seriousness.

“Wasn’t it when you found out that she sheep shifted your bed for the first time?” Bran said with a wicked smile.

New laughter erupted. Sansa found out that it was pleasing to laugh about how stupid she used to be when she was young with her siblings. It also helped her to lessen the guilt over her stupid actions in the past.

“Now, forgive me, but I must go, or else the others will make their training without me,” Arya said all of a sudden. “We’ll see you later, Bran.”

Arya walked away, and Sansa stood up to follow her. “I must go as well.”

“Sansa, wait.” She stopped and turned to look back at her brother. “You spoke about sheep shifting to your husband? In King’s Landing?”

Sansa smiled. “Arya told you?”

“No. I mean, yes, she did, after I asked her about it, but I saw you back then. You were walking together in the gardens. Your handmaiden Shae was following you.” The mention of Shae brought back unpleasant memories to Sansa. She hadn’t thought about her in a very long time. “Ser Edric Sarsfield and Lord Desmond Crakehall laughed when you crossed their path, and you told Tyrion you could sheep shift their bed. You said that while sitting on a bench.”

He couldn’t have gotten all these details from Arya. He saw their discussion in one of his visions. She never really knew how to react when Bran told her things that happened to her in the past. Sometimes his abilities were very helpful. He could confirm that Jon’s mother was Lyanna Stark, and that Baelish betrayed their lord father, but it was unsettling to hear from him events that happened to her in their smaller details.

“It was before you heard about what happened to Mother and Robb,” Bran continued. “You looked happy.”

“Yes, I was,” Sansa recognized. It had been one of the most beautiful moments in the beginning of her marriage. A smile crept to her lips.

“Did you love him back then?”

“I don’t know,” she answered after a moment. “I… I liked him, yes. He was… He was different from the other Lannisters. He was always kind with me, and he really cared about me. He never asked or wanted anything from me. He was the only one who didn’t try to get something from me, or to use me.” Even Margaery, who tried to help her, did it in part for her family’s interest. She thought that Shae was her friend too, but she ended up betraying her. As for Brienne, she hadn’t arrived yet at this moment.
However, Sansa didn’t know if she loved Tyrion then. She enjoyed her time with him, it was true, but did she love him? When he was arrested, she worried more about her than about him. She could only say that she loved him aloud at her sixteenth name day, the night they consummated their marriage. She couldn’t find the force to tell him before that. She had loved him before this day, for sure, but she wasn’t sure when she really fell in love with him.

“You didn’t seem happy at your wedding.” She looked back at her brother, who had a sorry expression on his face. “You were beautiful. You had a golden gown. Mother would have liked to be there.”

Sansa remembered very well her wedding. Sometimes, she wished they could go back in the past and make the wedding again, this time without Joffrey, without Tywin Lannister, without Cersei, only with Tyrion and all the people she loved present. She remembered the dream she made after they became man and wife, where her family was present for her wedding. It had looked so perfect.

“I’m not sure our mother would be happy to see me today,” Sansa replied ruefully. “She wouldn’t have wanted me to marry a Lannister. And she would certainly never approve of me marrying the Imp.” She punctuated her last words with bitterness.

“I saw what Joffrey did to you,” Bran said, catching her attention once again. “I saw what Ser Meryn did when Robb won at Oxcross. It was brave, what Tyrion did for you.”

“And we weren’t even engaged back then.”

“He’s a good man. If mother would disapprove your marriage with him… then she’s stupid.” Her brother’s words surprised her. “Especially after what happened to his first wife.”

“You saw that as well?” Sansa asked, worried.

“I saw everything. All of it. It was… horrible.” Bran’s expression on his face told everything she needed to know.

Sansa shook her head. “Tywin Lannister was a horrible man. He organized the Red Wedding, he had Mother and Robb killed, but… How could he do that to his own son? I can’t understand. Who could do that to his children? Why?”

She had tried to think about all the men and women she knew who had children, and she couldn’t imagine any of them acting in such a way, even the worst ones. From what she knew, even Roose Bolton never mistreated his son Ramsay, and he was a bastard and a monster. Why did Tywin Lannister do this?

“He did it for revenge,” Bran stated.

“Revenge.” Sansa scoffed. “How can someone be held accountable for being a dwarf or for his mother’s death at his birth? How can we take revenge on him for that?”

“It wasn’t on Tyrion that Tywin Lannister wanted to take his revenge.”

Sansa looked at Bran. “What do you mean?”

“He wanted to take his revenge on someone else through Tyrion.”

“But who? Who… Who could he try to punish by mistreating Tyrion?”

Before Bran could answer, Podrick called her from behind. “Lady Sansa. Please excuse me, but
Lord Tyrion is asking for your presence. We received important words from Castle Black.”

On their way back to their rooms, Bran asked Sansa if he could see Joanna later. Her brother had gone to see her the first day he arrived. He held her in his arms and told Sansa that she was beautiful. Bran seemed to like her, though he quickly gave her back to Sansa. *She should spend time with her mother,* he told her.

A few minutes later, they all sat around a table in her father’s solar, she, Tyrion, Arya, and Bran. Ser Bronn was there as well. Tyrion had a very serious expression on his face as he held a raven scroll in his hands.

“The White Walkers launched an assault on Castle Black.” Sansa’s heart raced as Tyrion gave her the scroll and continued to speak. “A dozen of men died, and a White Walker managed to get through the tunnel under the Wall despite the fact it was sealed. This attack was stopped and the White Walker died, but Jon Snow is asking for more men at the Wall. He’s also telling us to be prepared for anything.”

“Is Jon all right?” Arya asked.

“The raven is signed by him, so I suppose he’s still alive.”

“I should have seen them coming,” Bran said.

“Can you see the future, Bran?”

“No, I can’t. Only the past.”

“Then you have nothing to blame you for. No one could have seen it coming.”

“It’s my fault all the same.” Bran was now reading the scroll after Sansa gave it to him. “The Night King tried to bring the Wall down. The White Walker could get through it because of me.”

Tyrion frowned. “What do you mean?”

“During one of my visions in the cave, I came across the Night King. He touched me, and he left a mark on me. That’s how he could get inside the cave. I went through the Wall by the tunnel at Castle Black. That’s why the White Walker could get through. There are sorts and magic that protect the Wall and prevent the dead from getting through, but now… They’re useless. I broke them when I came back.”

A heavy silence fell. “Do you think they can cross the Wall at any place, or only where you crossed, at Castle Black?”

Bran shrugged. “I don’t know.”

Tyrion seemed to think hard about it. “There are no other attacks that were reported. Hopefully, Castle Black is the only place where the Walkers can get through. And at least, the Night King failed at making the Wall fall with his powers.” He didn’t seem entirely sure, however.

“How many men do we have in the North?” Arya asked.

“Forty thousand, if I remember well,” Sansa answered.

Tyrion confirmed it with sign of head. “Half of them are at the Wall. The others are the forces of the Riverlands led by the Blackfish and the Lannister forces who didn’t go south with Daven.”
Sansa had seen her granduncle when he came back to Winterfell after he took the Dreadfort, and then he had gone to establish a strong garrison at the Last Hearth.

“We should send them all to the Wall if the dead are attacking us,” Arya said.

“It would be a terrible mistake. They are stationed at several keeps and castles close to the Wall. We even positioned some of them at Queenscrown, and we must maintain garrisons in those places,” Tyrion opposed.

“Why? We don’t need them there. Unless you want to occupy the North,” Arya accused him.

“Arya!” Sansa said.

“I’m not trying to subjugate the North,” Tyrion protested. “I’m just covering our back. To position all our men on the Wall could be a death sentence.”

“Why? The dead are attacking the Wall, not Winterfell or Karhold. It’s the Wall we must defend,” Arya argued.

“Lady Arya,” Tyrion began. Arya’s eyes threw him daggers. She hated to be called that way. “I suppose your maester gave you lessons of history.”

“Aye. What’s the link?”

“Did he ever talk to you about the Empire of Ghis?” Arya looked puzzled. “The Old Empire of Ghis was the first known empire in Essos. It fell five thousand years ago when the Valyrians destroyed them. Old Ghis fought five great wars against Valyria, and they lost each of them. It was during the fifth that the city was destroyed. However, it’s not Valyria who really destroyed the empire. The Ghiscarics made the mistake of building great fortifications on their borders and stationed all their troops into the fortresses they built. They wanted to stop any foreign invasion before their enemies set foot in their territories. However, in the end of the empire, their enemies attacked them at one precise point. They managed to get through the fortifications, and once it was done, they met no resistance as they marched through the provinces of the empire. That’s what killed the Ghiscari Empire, and that’s exactly what’s going to happen if we send all our men at the Wall. If the White Walkers were to make a breakthrough, they would meet no resistance on their way south because all our forces would be stationed at the Wall. And about a few thousand years later, historians will talk about the great fall of the North thanks to this error… if there are still historians left to write about this.”

“So we just sit here and do nothing?” Arya asked with hostility.

“I never said that. In fact, if you waited before jumping to conclusions, Lady Arya, you would know by now that I intend to go to Castle Black with three thousand men.”

Sansa looked in horror at Tyrion. “You can’t be serious.”

“I am. I will leave for the Wall tomorrow. I’ll gather the men on the road at the other castles. This should be more than enough help for Jon Snow.”

“You can’t go there,” Sansa argued. “We need you here at Winterfell.”

“I must go with my men. I can’t tell them to go to the Wall while I remain behind.” He looked at her softly. He meant that he had no choice but to go with his men.

“I’ll come too, then. I’m tired of doing nothing here,” Arya declared. “If Jon is fighting the dead,
then I want to be with him.”

“No, Arya, you can’t go there as well,” Sansa protested.

“I’ll go, whether you like it or not. You’re not Mother.”

Couldn’t they understand? She didn’t want to lose them, not again. She almost lost Tyrion when he was accused of his father’s murder, and for years she thought Arya was dead. She didn’t want to see any of them die.

“We leave tomorrow,” Tyrion said. “Bronn, make sure we don’t forget the gift our friends in King’s Landing gave us.”

“We’ll finally get to use it?” the knight asked.

“Let’s hope it won’t be necessary, but we brought it with us to fight the dead after all.”

“I’m on it.” He left without another word.

“Bran, I know you don’t necessarily control your visions or choose them, but can you try to find out what the Night King is preparing?”

“I’ll try,” Bran said.

“Good. We leave at dawn.”

The meeting was over with this. Arya and Bran left.

“You cannot go,” Sansa said as soon as they were alone.

“I have to.”

“Why?”

“I told you.” He looked at her, a sorry and tired expression on his face. “I forced my men to stay here, in the North, during winter, to fight living dead. Most of them don’t believe they exist. The armies of Euron Greyjoy are plundering our lands and destroying our cities. There are men who have families in Lannisport. They want to go home, and I tell them to stay here to fight dead men. What do you think they will do if I tell them to go to the Wall, while I stay behind with my wife, warm inside the walls of Winterfell?”

His voice wasn’t hard, or reproaching. He was just explaining her why he was doing it. Still, she had to try to keep him here. “You went into battle once, and your head was almost sliced in two.” His scar was only a white line now, no longer deep like it used to be at the beginning of their marriage, but it was still there, a reminder of what could have happened if Ser Mandon Moore swung his sword farther.

“I won’t go into battle until it’s necessary this time. Anyway, a wall is separating us from the army of the dead. I won’t come face to face with one of them.”

“Then you don’t need to go. They don’t need you to fight.”

“I’m sorry, Sansa. I told you why I must go, and I won’t change my mind.” No, he wouldn’t. She could see it. “Furthermore, I have to discuss important matters with your cousin, our king. I must do that in person. It would be impossible to do it by raven. It’s too important.”
“What is it?”

Tyrion sighed. “The Reach decided to side with Daenerys Targaryen. We have to fight the White Walkers on the north and the dragons in the south. We don’t have enough men to fight them both. When the Dragon Queen will have dealt with Cersei and the Greyjoys, she will turn her gaze to the North. Truth be told, I don’t see how we could win against Daenerys Targaryen.”

Yes, they discussed about it very often. “So, you will suggest Jon to bend the knee?” They had discussed about it, but couldn’t take a decision concerning this.

“It might be the only solution, unless we want to see the North burn. He wouldn’t be the first King in the North to surrender before a Targaryen. Torrhen Stark did the same three hundred years ago.”

“Perhaps, but Torrhen Stark’s father didn’t fight Aegon’s father. She is the daughter of the Mad King. What if she decided to kill us all the same?”

“We cannot defeat three dragons, Sansa, not to mention the army she brought. Furthermore, she may be able to help us.”

“Help us?”

“Fire kills wights. Or it stops them, or destroys them. I’m unsure about the nomenclature. What breathes fire?”

“You’re thinking about an alliance with her? Against the White Walkers?” Sansa asked, incredulous.

“Well, these dragons may be our best chance to defeat the White Walkers, especially if they get through the Wall.”

Sansa wasn’t sure at all about the idea of an alliance with a Targaryen. Jon was a Targaryen, true, but he grew up with her, and they knew him. They didn’t know much about Daenerys Targaryen. She remembered a discussion she had one night with Tyrion, about how they would all be in danger if she came to Westeros.

“Don’t you think she will want Jon dead? He’s a danger for her, after all.”

Her husband seemed thoughtful and worried at this. “I regret insisting on revealing his origins now. But we have no choice. We can’t defeat three dragons followed by a powerful army. The Gardeners and the Lannisters couldn’t defeat Aegon together, so how could we? We have fewer men, we’re fighting against White Walkers, and we have no weapons capable of killing dragons. I’m afraid we’ll have to bend the knee. We already instructed Genna to not resist if the Targaryen army came to the Westerlands. Even if the Rock could hold, the rest of the Westerlands would fall quickly. I have no wish to see the next Harrenhal in the Westerlands.” He sighed. “I need to discuss it with Jon. We need to get out of this mess without too many deaths, and only with the dead burning if possible.”

Sansa nodded. “Promise me you won’t place yourself in a dangerous situation. Stay far from the fight, just like when you fought the Boltons.”

“I promise. There were times I hated my life, but I don’t want to end it yet. Especially not when we just had our first child.”

Sansa smiled. “I don’t want her to be the last.”

“She won’t be.” He cupped her cheek and put a slow kiss on her lips. “Now, I think it’s time to hold court. I’ll be in the shadows, like always.”
“Tyrion,” she said as he took her hand to accompany her. “Do you think you could convince Arya to not follow you?”

Tyrion grimaced. “I doubt she will listen to me. And if we ever forbid her from leaving, she’ll find a way to get out all the same.” He gently rubbed the back of her hand. “She knows how to defend herself, Sansa. She’s a survivor, like you.”

“I just… don’t want to lose her again.”

“I’ll try to keep an eye on her.”

With that reassurance, she followed him. They paid a short visit to their daughter before they went to the Great Hall. Sansa still marvelled at how beautiful she was. As for Tyrion, he complained half seriously that she took too much after his family. Her blond hair was getting more visible every day, a shining gold like Cersei and Jaime. Sansa didn’t care about this detail. Joanna was her daughter, no matter how she looked like. As she looked at Tyrion holding their daughter into his arms, the fear that Joanna might lose her father before even knowing him resurfaced. She couldn’t allow Tyrion to die. She would make sure that her husband survived this war, at any cost.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry to separate Tyrion and Sansa again, but they will be back together.

Tyrion's speech about the defensive system of the Ghiscari Empire is in fact a criticism that many modern historians make of the military system of the Roman Empire that caused its fall during the Barbarian Invasions. The Hadrian Wall (that inspired the Wall of ASOIAF to GRRM) was part of this defensive system.

Please review

Next chapter : The Battle of Oldtown
The tide was good, and the wind was favorable. If Euron arrived now, they would have the better odds to defeat him. They were in the middle of the night, and although Yara would rather face her uncle during the day, she knew better than to expect him to satisfy her wishes. He would launch his assault on Oldtown in the darkness.

Their fleet consisted in about two hundred warships, plus three hundred merchant ships converted for the war. Yara knew that Euron’s fleet consisted in about six hundred ships, not all made for war either. However, the Ironborn were always prepared to fight, and their ships were all made to fight at sea, even the so-called merchant ships.

Yara knew that this was their only chance. The Redwyne fleet had faced Euron’s armada in a first battle before her fleet arrived at the Arbor. They lost half their ships. If they had engaged all their vessels into the battle from the beginning, it would have been worse, but when the commander of the Redwyne fleet saw that they had no chance to win against Euron, he ordered his men to fall back. Some of these ships were not yet repaired. Yara’s fleet had some losses on the way from the Iron Islands to Meereen, then from Meereen back to Westeros, but they were insignificant. Overall, with the lack of maintenance on her own ships and the hasty repairs of the Redwynes, their fleet was quite homogeneous when it came to the state of the ships.

The crews were a different matter. The Arbor lost some of their most experienced sailors in the first battle, and many people on the ships of the Arbor were green boys. Against Euron’s armada, constituted of men of the Iron Islands born to fight, Yara feared they may not be able to stand. Euron’s ships were probably in better shape than hers as well. Some had just been equipped. She wouldn’t refuse a favorable sea to fight her uncle.

Yara didn’t lose hope. They could defeat her uncle. Euron was dangerous, but not invincible. For a start, he was sure to win. Her uncle Rodrik Harlaw, the Reader, said that it was Euron’s greatest weakness. As always, the Lord of Harlaw came to that conclusion from his many readings. Many men of war, who won victory after victory lost one day because they were too confident, and more often than not this one defeat erased everything they gained with their previous victories, no matter how many times they won. One hundred victories could turn to ashes for one defeat.

Yara had always loved her mother’s brother. She always loved the Ten Towers of Harlaw better than the castle of Pyke on her father’s island. She visited her uncle’s home before she sailed for Deepwood Motte, and when she came back from it, and each time she saw Alannys Harlaw. Her mother was only a shadow of the woman she used to be. She had become frail, and spent her time searching for Rodrik, Maron and Theon. Yara didn’t have the time to see her after her father died. Her uncle was the one to tell her the news, but according to him, it didn’t affect her much since her thoughts were no longer coherent.
Yara regretted they didn’t bring her mother with them when they escaped for Meereen. Her uncle assured her that he took every precaution to ensure her mother’s safety. The Reader also said that Euron would surely give no attention to a mad woman at the end of her days anyway, but Yara wasn’t entirely convinced. She could hear the doubts into her uncle’s voice when he said so.

They had no news from the Iron Islands since they left, except for the various assaults Euron launched against the Westerlands and the Reach. Yara’s mother could be dead and she had no way to know it. However, she learned from Lord Paxter Redwyne something about another member of her family. Theon was dead. He was executed at Winterfell by the Starks and the Lannisters. His final words were *what is dead may never die*.

She lost everyone. When she was a child, Yara watched her two elder brothers die as they fought the Starks who attacked her father’s castle. Then she was forced to watch her father, in chains, kneel before Robert Baratheon, and finally, she lost her third brother, her little brother, who was forced to leave and to become the Stark’s pet.

The years following her father’s failed rebellion had been hard. The Iron Islands were weak, forced to limit their fleet and to pay a heavy tribute to the Iron Throne, but worse had been her father coping with his failure. Balon Greyjoy wasn’t a good king, or a clever one, but he was brave, and fiercely attached to the traditions of his people. After Theon was gone, he considered him lost to him, and he raised Yara to be his heir. Yara became captain of her own ship, and she did well. Her men respected her, and they were ready to follow her to the death. Her father was proud of her too, so much that she was more his son than Theon was when he came back.

Yara was disappointed with who Theon became when she saw him for the first time in ten years. She shared her father’s disdain for Theon’s behaviour, but that didn’t stop her from seeing how he was unfair with Theon. She never told Theon at the time, but he had been right about their father. *You gave me away like I was some dog you didn’t want anymore. And now you curse me because I’ve come home.* Yara didn’t tell Theon back then that he was right, but despite the fact that her brother was a fool, he was right about their father. She didn’t tell him because it was more important at the time to be united to fight the North and it wasn’t the time to flatter Theon’s ego, but to convince him to fight for their family. Balon Greyjoy didn’t consider Theon as his son anymore. When Yara said she lost two brothers the day Eddard Stark and Robert Baratheon took Pyke, her father said he lost three sons. When she said Theon was his son, her father replied he wasn’t a man anymore. And now they were both dead.

Theon died saying the words every Ironborn said, and he was killed by the people who convinced him he was one of them. Her father was murdered by his own brother. Yara was all that remained of the Greyjoy line, all that was left of her family. Her mother didn’t have long to live. She wouldn’t allow Euron to live, not after everything he did. She would defeat him today, no matter what it took. And when she would have him, when she would take his ship, when she would have him at her mercy, on his knees, she would kill him.

Euron was spreading the fear of the Iron Islands through all Westeros right now. He sacked Lannisport, and now he was about to try the same with Oldtown. Yara wouldn’t allow it. In another time, she might have done the same thing as her uncle, but since Aegon’s Conquest and the death of Harren the Black, the great lords of Westeros paid no mind to the Iron Islands. Every once in a time, the Ironmen would rebel and raid their territories, raping a few women, destroying a few villages, until the greenlanders attacked them, conquered them and humiliated them. And then they went back to ignoring them. Her father was a brave man, but he failed to accept that any rebellion was doomed to fail. Her uncle Rodrik was right. The Ironborn could no longer live like they used to centuries ago. They needed to make peace with the rest of Westeros.
Following her uncle’s advice, Yara decided she would build the greatest fleet the Iron Islands ever saw. This fleet wasn’t meant to be used to conquer or sack the Seven Kingdoms, but as a leverage to negotiate with the other lords. She wanted to offer an alliance to King Tommen, if he accepted to recognize the independence of the Iron Islands and to acknowledge her as their queen. The alliance would include the assistance of the Iron Fleet if the king of Greenlanders found himself in peril and the help of the Iron Islands against the Boltons, then at war with the Lannisters and the Starks. In exchange for that, she would only demand the regions of the Sea Dragon Point and the Stony Shore. These regions were almost uninhabited. They would provide some new lands for her people, who struggled to survive on their islands. War only ever brought pinecones and rocks to her people, at best. They needed lands, not wars.

Yara had planned everything to put an end to this war. She even sent back to Robett Glover his son Gawen as a sign of goodwill, while safely keeping his wife and their daughter at the Ten Towers. She would release them once her proposition of an alliance would be accepted. However, her other uncle, Euron, took the Seastone Chair away from her at the Kingsmoot. Before Yara could explain the purpose of her fleet, Euron recuperated her idea of building the fleet, but to conquer the Seven Kingdoms. So Yara left the Iron Islands with the best chips of the Iron Fleet and her allies, she set sail to Meereen and made a pact with Daenerys Targaryen, before Euron could try to do the same. She also had the wife and the daughter of Lord Glover sent back to him before Euron could seize them. She wouldn’t allow her uncle to have any hostage of value.

So far, the invasion of Westeros went well. Yara’s fleet helped to transport the Dothrakis and the Unsullied to the Stormlands, then they sailed for the Arbor while the Dragon Queen claimed Dragonstone with an easy victory at sea. The eastern men seized the Stormlands and the Reach declared for them. Yara respected Daenerys, and how she managed to become queen despite the fact everything and everyone were against her. Yara faced the same challenges for years, and even now she kept facing them. She knew very well that many lords at the Kingsmoot who hailed Euron as their king, just like her other uncle Aeron, the Damphair, chose him because she was a woman. However, she still believed that Daenerys should have taken the Iron Throne immediately, when she had enough ships and enough men for that. Instead, she listened to her betrothed prince and the eunuch, deciding to gain allies and take the southern part of Westeros before taking King’s Landing.

Yara almost envied Trystane Martell for being betrothed to Daenerys. It might have a role in her disdain for him. Their plans might have gone well on the land, but on the sea, it was another story. The fleet of the Arbor lost against Euron. They should have avoided any fight against him and wait for Yara’s ships to arrive, then they would have faced Euron with a decisive advantage. Instead, they lost hundreds of ships. Now here they were, weakened, waiting for the most powerful armada in Westeros, led by Euron’s ship, the Silence.

Qarl joined her at the prow. “No sign of Euron yet?” he asked her.

“No, but he’s not far,” she replied.

“It might be long before he arrives.” A wicked smile formed on his face.

“Not now, Qarl. Go back to your post.”

“Come on, Yara. We both know we could die. Best have one last stumble before it’s all over.”

She faced him. “We’re not going to lose. You hear me. Defeat is not something we can consider, and I won’t accept it. When Euron comes, I will kill him.”

He shrugged. “All right, but you don’t know what you’re missing.”
She smirked. “I know very well. We may have time later, after the battle.”

Qarl walked away. He and Yara started to sleep together years ago. Yara enjoyed both men and women in her bed, but Qarl was the one she preferred among men. It didn’t stop her from fucking tits on a regular basis, and Qarl never blamed her for that. They both knew she wasn’t the only woman he slept with either. In other circumstances, she might have gone to her cabin with him, bringing a girl with them if there was one near, but for now her mind was all focused on Euron. He would pay for her father’s murder, and once it was done, once Euron, Aeron and all their friends were dead, she would help Daenerys Targaryen to conquer Casterly Rock, Riverrun and Winterfell. She would make the Greenlanders who executed her brother pay for what they did.

“Ships ahead!” the man at the mast shouted.

Yara turned to him and shouted in return, her heart pounding. “How many? How do they look?”

“Hundreds, my queen. There is one at the head, he’s bigger than the others… It’s the *Silence.*”

It took a second for Yara to steel herself, and then she started shouting orders. “Warn the other ships! Blast the horns! Put the fleet in combat formation! Everyone at your posts! Archers in position! Get ready the scorpions and the spitfires!”

Her crew followed her orders as if they were born to obey her. They were all loyal, and they went through so much together. They would die for her, as much as she would die for them. But that wouldn’t be necessary today, for they wouldn’t die today. Euron shall die, along with all men loyal to him. It would be his end, not hers. And when they won, she would reward all her men for their loyalty all these years.

In the dark, Yara could distinguish the silhouette of the *Silence*, bigger than any other ship on this sea, coming from the north. Yara knew that Euron’s ship was fast, faster than any other ship of the same size, but he wasn’t as maneuverable as the smallest ships of her fleet. She ordered the convened signal to be sent to the other ships who would join her own. They were ready.

She climbed on the bridge and addressed her men. She discerned Qarl among them. The thought of a night with him was enough to give her a very good reason to kill Euron.

“Men, I sailed with you a thousand times,” she said loud enough for everyone to hear. “I do not intend for this one to be the last. What about you?”

“NO!” They all shouted together as one.

“My uncle Euron is on the other side. He’s leading an army bigger than our own. He has more ships, and all their crew are Ironmen. We have to work with Greenlanders.” She made a pause. “I never wanted this. I wanted to give a future to our people. A future different from the one my father gave us. A future different from the one Euron is offering us. I wanted to be your queen, because I believe in us. I believe in us, people from Orkmont, Blacktyde, Saltcliffe, Harlaw, Old Wyk, Great Wyk and Pyke. We are Ironborn. We’re not servants. We’re not slaves. Euron believes we are his slaves, and he believes we are his servants. He killed my father, his own brother, to become king. Some of you were there, you heard him, and everyone who wasn’t there knows that I’m telling you the truth. I never wanted for our people to fight against each other, but here we are. We do not fight for glory, or for riches, or for honor, or for the Old Way. The Ironborn who took Winterfell fought for glory, and they’re dead. The Ironborn at Deepwood Motte fought for the Old Way, and they’re dead. What did it bring them? Nothing. Euron wants us to fight the Seven Kingdoms, to bleed our people as much as theirs. He’s ready to have every man from the Iron Islands die to realize his dream of sitting on the Iron Throne. He wants us all dead, and we’re going to stop him today. We’re going to kill him, and
all the men who chose to follow him, until none of them are left. And when we’re done with him, we will let the Dragon Queen he wanted to seduce order her dragons to feast on his rotten body!”

Her men brandished their swords, and she followed them. “Death to Euron!” a man shouted, and soon it was repeated by everyone on this ship.

“DEATH TO EURON! DEATH TO EURON! DEATH TO EURON! DEATH TO EURON! DEATH TO EURON! DEATH TO EURON!”

They waited for the enemy fleet to get closer. The shadows of the enemy ships were approaching, the Silence’s shape looming closer and closer. Yara had the impression it was bigger than in her memories. As the ship drew closer, mixed feelings of excitement from the effect of her speech and dread from the fear of the Crow’s Eye filled her. She would face her uncle soon, and the one to get out of this alive would rule the Iron Islands.

She waited, and when the time was right, she gave the order. “Now!”

Scorpions and spitfires threw their projectiles at Euron’s fleet. The projectiles, ablaze or not, fell on the ships around the Silence. Yara gave the specific order to not target Euron’s ship. Flaming boulders set afire a ship or two around her uncle’s flagship, and slowed the others. Euron’s ship couldn’t slow down in time. It was heavier than the other ships, and heavier ships needed more time and more distance to stop. Yara ordered the Black Wind, her own ship that she commanded, to sail forward, leaving a row of ten ships behind her, displaying her standard in full view.

As she expected, her uncle couldn’t resist the temptation. The Silence followed them as she made the Black Wind take a northeast direction. Her ship turned the most abruptly it could. Euron’s ship managed to follow, but he got too close from the row of ships Yara left behind. Harlaw was not the largest of the Iron Islands, but it was the richest and most populous. Her ships’ crew were Ironborn just like those of Euron, and they were to be feared, even if a lord like Rodrik Harlaw ruled them. Her uncle’s men released a hell of flaming arrows and boulders on Euron’s ships. The sails caught fire, and the Silence started to lose speed. Yara ordered her crew to make another abrupt turn that brought them side by side with Euron’s ship. In the meantime, she knew that at least two other ships tackled the Silence from the other side, while the others sailed past him to protect them as they seized the enemy’s flagship.

Yara and some of her men threw grappling irons on the Silence. Archers kept firing arrows from both sides. Yara felt an arrow fly an inch from her face as she threw her own grapnel. They placed ladders between the two ships and ran on them to the enemy.

Yara rushed first, leading her men into battle, yelling like she never did before. When she jumped on the floor of the Silence, it was to swing her sword at the same time, separating a head from its owner. What followed after that was pure chaos. Yara discerned the boarding had succeeded on the other side of the ship. Euron’s crew was fighting from two sides. She killed, cut and punched every man she came across. None of them made any sound as they fought. They were all mute, but mute or not, Yara would kill them all.

Someone hit her in the ribs and she hit the board, stopping herself from falling into the river at the last minute. She turned and brought her sword up just in time to block an axe. She attacked her assailant on the right, then on his left, and as he tried to cut her head with one swift move of his axe, she lowered herself, then cut his arm when he attempted another blow at her. She heard him scream. He was defenseless. She struck him in the face, and when he was on the floor, she took him by the air and put her sword on his neck.

“Where is Euron?!” she yelled. She got no answer. Reminding herself this man couldn’t speak, she
slit his throat.

“Yara!”

Looking on her right, she saw that Qarl was in difficulty. She ran to him just in time to pierce his opponent, about to cut him in two, right through the heart. The man fell on the ground with a thump, drowned in the sounds of chaos all around them.

“You owe me a second fuck for that,” she told Qarl, and then they were laughing and going back into battle.

Yara fought like a fury. She knew her father would be proud to see her like that. She always wanted him to be proud of her, and here she was, bathing in the blood of dead opponents in the middle of the sea. If only Theon was there. They could have fought together for what was rightfully theirs. She fought on all decks, on the bridge, in the holds. She killed many men. Not all of them were Ironborn. Some had black skin, as dark as the night that surrounded them before the battle began. However, she didn’t find Euron. When she saw that the battle was almost over, she headed for the captain’s cabin, hoping to find Euron there. She only found a woman with very short hair as dark as her own skin, half naked. Just like the rest of the crew, she could tell nothing to Yara. She was no threat, so Yara let her live. She went through all the ship, finding no trace of Euron. When she emerged on the upper deck again, she saw Qarl holding his arm, blood coming out from it.

“Where is Euron? Did you see him?” she asked.

“No. I didn’t see him.”

Paying no kind to Qarl’s injuries, since they didn’t seem very severe, she proceeded to help her men kill the last of the crew still fighting. Whoever she asked, none of them could tell that they saw Euron. This made no sense. Had her uncle escaped? Something told her it wasn’t that, but she feared the alternative. Yara would never be able to abandon the _Black Wind_. Did Euron feel any different about the _Silence_? Looking around her at the sea, she saw the two fleets engaged into a big battle. There was no evident sign of who would come out as the victor. Fire was everywhere. All ships were ablaze. She should go back to her ship and help her men and her allies. A much as she could despise greenlanders, they made an alliance, and she would respect this alliance and fight alongside them.

Looking at Oldtown before she moved back to the _Black Wind_, Yara realized something terrifying. They were fighting at the entry of the Honeywine. They were supposed to destroy Euron’s fleet as much as to defend the city of Oldtown against an attack by sea. Euron’s ships were not supposed to get through the mouth of the Honeywine and to approach the city docks. They had failed. There were ships in the river, Euron’s ships. What other ships could have started fires on both sides of the river? Oldtown was going to burn.

Chapter End Notes

In the books, Rodrik Harlaw is the character I like the most among the Ironborn, and Yara comes second. I hope that I wrote her well enough.

Although I have a fair knowledge of battles and wars in the Antiquity and medieval times, I cannot claim to know much about battles in the sea, so I focused on the engagement between the flagships instead of showing in detail the general movements
of the fleets, which could have been too much unrealistic, considering my limited knowledge.

Please review

Next chapter : Battle of Oldtown, part 2
The full moon bathed the camp in her white light. Doreah once told her the moon was an egg, and that once there were two moons, but one wandered too close to the sun and opened from the heat. Dragons poured from it and drank the sun’s fire. Irri and Jhiqui had laughed at her, claiming the moon was a goddess, the wife of the sun.

Daenerys had never truly believed in any god. She knew her family worshipped the Seven and Viserys talked to her about them, but she never prayed to them and, considering how very few Viserys actually knew, she couldn’t claim to quite know the religion of her country. She knew a little more about R’hllor, but not much. Daenerys spent her life without faith. The only thing in which she ever believed was herself. After her brother sold her like a horse to Drogo, she could only rely on herself. She was always alone. Every time she got close to someone, it was to lose him, or to discover he betrayed her. The only thing she had and that no one could take away from her were her dragons. They were the only children she would ever have. She hatched their eggs, fed them at her breast from the moment they came into the world, protected them against every danger they could face.

“We shouldn’t be here.” Jorah’s voice behind get her out of her thoughts. She slowly turned away from the moon and faced the inside of her command tent, where Jorah and Revan were arguing over a map of the Reach.

“I disagree, Ser Jorah the Andal.”

“Just because you saw a great city with a tower taller than everything that was ever built by man burn in your fires doesn’t mean it will happen, or that it will happen now.”

“The Lord of Light gave me this vision for a reason. The fire was coming from the sea, and the sea was on fire too.”

“I can’t see the future in the flames,” Jorah said, staring straight at the Red Priest’s masked face, “but I do know this is a mistake to go in the Reach with an army of Dothrakis.”

“The Dothrakis are the only ones who could travel fast enough to reach Oldtown before it was destroyed.”

“You seem to have forgotten the village the Dothrakis burned near Brightwater Keep. And the women they raped on our way down here.”

“There are hundreds of thousand people in Oldtown. The destruction of a village and a few women raped is a small price compared to saving an entire city. Thousands of men are worth more than a hundred.”
“The Dothrakis committed crimes against the inhabitants of the Reach. They angered our allies.”

“As did the Lannisters and the Starks in the Riverlands during the War of the Five Kings, and as did the Ironborn in the North and here in the Reach, but at a much larger scale.”

“Perhaps, but they did this against enemies, not against friends and allies.”

The opposing ideas behind each man’s position were visible, and their confrontation was getting dangerous. Daenerys was beginning to fear they would draw their swords. “Enough! I won’t have you kill each other when I need you both. You are my advisors and you will show each other the respect you deserve.”

They both bowed before her as a way to apologize. Daenerys was quite conscious that the Dothrakis were unruly and difficult to control. Despite her best attempts, they wouldn’t change their ways, not entirely. The ravages they left behind them in the Stormlands were barely contained by Jorah and Trystane Martell. When Daenerys took command of them, just before they entered the territories of the Reach, she made it clear that she wouldn’t tolerate rapes, murders and plunder. Even then, that wasn’t enough. Daenerys remembered only too well the destruction of the Lhazareen cities by Drogo years ago. The Dothrakis were all blood of her blood now, but it couldn’t relent them from following their way of life. At first, they remained quiet. Their ties to her forced them to show restraint as they progressed through the Reach, but when they approached Brightwater Keep, they destroyed and plundered an entire village. Daenerys had gone to see the smoking ruins and was horrified by what she saw there. The small sept was utterly smashed down, the idols of the Seven stolen. There were fresh bodies, some still burning, everywhere in the streets. It wasn’t difficult for her to find out the Dothrakis who did this. They brought back with them the spoils of their plunder, and some had girls into their tents and other people they claimed as slaves. She freed them all and had Drogon burn the Dothrakis responsible for this.

Daenerys knew she was taking a dangerous path. The Dothrakis lived for war, battle, destruction and rape. Revan advised her to only bring Dothrakis with her as they marched on Oldtown, since they travelled quicker than the Unsullied and the Dornish, but she wondered if it had been the best choice. She should have released them on the Crownlands and Cersei’s armies instead. She could stop a rebellion among the Dothrakis by promising them great battles and victories in the near future, but she feared that she was only postponing the inevitable. The Dothrakis were too difficult to keep in check.

“Your Grace, if I may, I think we should leave the Reach behind us and march on King’s Landing. Grey Worm and Prince Trystane are telling us that they can’t get through the Blackwater River. They need our help,” Jorah said.

“We are only a few hours from Oldtown. It would be stupid to retreat when we are so close to our destination,” the Red Priest countered.

“This operation in the Reach is a waste of time.”

“It’s not,” Revan declared with the same assurance he always displayed. You could perceive it in his voice, without the need of seeing the expression on his face.

“The Tyrells have enough men to face the Ironborn on their own, especially with Lady Greyjoy’s ships who joined theirs. Euron Greyjoy is not the real threat. Jon Snow is the real threat. He claims to be Lord of the Seven Kingdoms, even to be a Targaryen, and unlike Cersei Lannister, he has powerful allies and a powerful army behind him. He’s the one we should worry about.”

“Oldtown will not hold without the queen and her dragons. We received the fealty of the Tyrells
because they believed not only that Daenerys Stormborn would avenge their son and keep their
daughter alive, but also because she promised to help them against the Ironborn. She will break this
promise if she stands aside while Euron Greyjoy sacks their city."

“The Tyrells will do what they believe to be in their interest. We don’t need to save them from the
Greyjoys. They know they cannot defeat the queen, and we have Lady Margaery in hostage. They
won’t dare anything against her.”

Revan leaned over the map to look at Jorah straight into his eyes. “We don’t want the Tyrells to be
kneelers who bow before our queen simply because she has dragons and a powerful army. We don’t
want them to fear her. We want them to fear her and to love her at the same time. We want them to
be willing allies. If we save them from the Ironborn, they will a debt towards us, and we will prove
that they have all the reasons to be our allies when they see the queen is protecting them. They will
be loyal not only because they could be destroyed if they rebel against the queen, but also because
the queen comes to their help when they need it. We will need the Tyrells in the Great War. It is
coming, and we cannot run away from it. When the time comes, we will need all of Westeros behind
our queen, including the Tyrells.”

“I know nothing about this Great War you’re talking about. What matters is the actual war, and our
expedition here is delaying the fall of King’s Landing and giving more time to the Starks and the
Lannisters to prepare.”

Daenerys decided this was enough. “Ser Jorah, there are hundreds of thousand of people in
Oldtown, and I promised to the Tyrells that I would help them against the Ironborn. I will not
sentence all these people in the city to death to get the Iron Throne sooner. I will sit on the Iron
Throne and I will have the crown I came for, but not today.”

What kind of queen would she be if she couldn’t defend her own people, or if she didn’t want to?
She would defeat Euron Greyjoy and stop his ravaging over the Seven Kingdoms, then she would
turn her armies against Cersei Lannister, and finally against this Jon Snow. She didn’t know if the
visions in the fire that Revan, Kinvara and all the Red Priests had were true, but since Euron Greyjoy
sacked Lannsport, it was logical that his next target would be Oldtown. He already took the Shield
Islands and raided the nearby coasts. He even defeated the Redwyne fleet in battle. She couldn’t
allow such a man to kill her people behind her back while she sat on her father’s throne.

“As you wish, your Grace,” Jorah said.

“We live to serve the Mother of Dragons,” Revan added.

“Now, I want you to sleep. Tomorrow, we will arrive at Oldtown.” The Red Priest left on her word,
hands crossed behind his back, but Jorah lingered behind. “Is there something else, Ser Jorah?”

“Khaleesi, I don’t believe this is wise to trust the Red Priests,” he said, concerned.

“They helped us in Meereen.”

“Stannis Baratheon had a Red Priestess among his advisors, and look at what happened to him.”

“I am not Stannis Baratheon. I do not believe in visions in the flames, and I do not follow the Red
Priests. They are the ones following me.”

“They are dangerous, your Grace. They want to spread their beliefs through all the Seven Kingdoms.
They are not loved by the Faith, nor they are by the followers of the Drowned God, and the people
in my countryland will never follow the Lord of Light. The faith in the Old Gods is powerful in the
North. You will need the support of the people and the religious authorities on your side if you ever hope to rule the Seven Kingdoms. You won’t have it if you have Red Priests following you everywhere.”

Daenerys stepped forward and looked directly into the knight’s eyes to make what she said clear. “I will not dismiss people who served me loyally because they have different beliefs than the people of this country. Everyone is free to practice the religion of their choice and I will not break this rule with anyone, no matter their faith.”

“Khaleesi, please…”

“Ser Jorah, I thank you for your counsel. You’re dismissed.”

“Your Grace.” He left, a grim expression on his face. He didn’t approve. Daenerys listened to her advisors, but she was the one to decide in the end. It wasn’t to Jorah, to Varys, to Kinvara, to Revan, to Trystane or to anyone else to take the decisions in her stead.

She should have to get some sleep just like she ordered her men, but she chose to visit her children before that. She travelled through the camp, the moon illuminating her and everything around. Four Dothrakis among those who were the most loyal followed her. She hoped she was wrong, but after forbidding them to kill, rape and steal as they wished, she suspected that some Dothraki or another could try to kill her.

When she arrived near the place where Drogon, Rhaegal and Viserion slept, she found Revan sitting before a campfire, his hands over the flames, muttering something.

“I told you to get some sleep,” she told him.

“I don’t need much rest, your Grace. The Lord of Light provides us with much of what we need. Red Priests often spend most of their nights praying.”

“Couldn’t you do that in your own tent?”

“I could, but I would rather pray with the dragons near me. They are fire made flesh, a gift from our Lord. A gift he made to you, his Chosen One.”

Daenerys was glad of the help the Red Priests provided, but she was growing tired to being called the Lord’s Chosen One or Azor Ahai reborn or the Prince That Was Promised.

“I suggest you do not try to convert the Dothrakis to your faith. They don’t hold the Lord of Light in high regard,” she said.

“I won’t. I’m not here to force people to believe in the Lord of Light. I’m here to convince them to follow the one he chose. If they refuse to serve him, the Lord of Light will deal with them himself.”

Before she could reply to this, a rider came. He spoke to her in Dothraki. “A man in iron suit just arrived. He says he came from the stone city and that he wants to see the Khaleesi.”

A messenger from Oldtown? “Show me to him.”

When she entered her command tent, he was there, panting and exhausted. Revan had followed her and the Dothraki captains were there as well. He fell to his knees before her.

“Your Grace, you have to help us. The Ironmen are attacking us.”
“They’re attacking you? Right now?”

“Yes, your Grace. They came in the thousands. More ships than we ever saw. They set fire to the city on both sides of the Honeywine. They attacked our fleet. They landed legions of men on the mainland. When I left they were beginning to scale the walls.” He looked at her with pleading eyes. “We need your help. We won’t stand for long.”

Daenerys looked at Revan. His mask prevented her from seeing the expression of his face. He didn’t move and gave away nothing of his true feelings. He said the Ironmen would launch an attack against Oldtown, and that the city would burn, and he was right. It was happening right now, as they spoke. There were about three hundred thousand people in this city, and her army was only a few miles away from them. They had no time to lose. She gazed at all her commanders.

“Assemble my khalassar. Ride to the stony city as quickly as you can. Kill every man from the wooden horses on the black salt sea and have no pity for them.”

The Dothraki commanders left, obviously eager to fight. She went to see Ser Jorah, but their paths crossed not long after she left her tent.

“Khaleesi, what’s going on?”

“Oldtown is under attack. Yara Greyjoy and the Redwynes may be in difficulty. I’m heading right now to help them. I want you to lead the Dothrakis in their attack against the Ironborn on the mainland.”

“What about the ships, your Grace?”

“I’ll take care of Euron’s fleet myself.”

A flash of understanding passed through his eyes. “Khaleesi, this is too dangerous. One arrow at the right place and you could die.”

“I won’t stand by while my men are fighting. Lead the khalassar against the Ironmen. I’ll make sure Euron’s fleet no longer poses a threat.”

On that, she walked away. The Dothrakis were leaving their tents and climbing on their horses all around. They were always ready for battle. When Daenerys reached her dragons, they were awake and agitated. They felt something was going on. Daenerys lost no time and climbed on Drogon’s back.

“Valahd.”

Her dragon rose from the ground and flew to the horizon. She looked behind and saw Rhaegal and Viserion following. The Dothrakis were leaving their tents and climbing on their horses all around. They were always ready for battle. When Daenerys reached her dragons, they were awake and agitated. They felt something was going on. Daenerys lost no time and climbed on Drogon’s back.

“Valahd.”

Her dragon rose from the ground and flew to the horizon. She looked behind and saw Rhaegal and Viserion following. The Dothrakis were already moving forward. As soon as she was high enough in the air, Daenerys could distinguish the city of Oldtown, and she immediately saw the red streaks that proved that at least a part of the city was burning. As she neared the city, she saw other streaks of red, this time on the sea. There was a battle of ships going on. The force of the Iron Islands was in its ships. If she could destroy Euron’s armada…

She ordered Drogon to fly forward. There was a large band of ships fighting against each other ahead of her. Many were burning. She couldn’t attack at this place. She risked to destroy friendly ships by throwing fire on the enemy. Things had been easier in Meereen. All the ships in the bay were her enemies. She only had to throw fire over the ones she wanted. She noticed great spans of fire along the Honeywine. The Hightower was on an island in the middle of this river, but on both sides, the fire was spreading. It seemed the fire originated from there. She saw ships on the river
throwing flaming projectiles on the city. Houses, taverns, shops and markets were set aflame, all full of innocent people. How many children were there among the districts burning? She hadn’t allowed her children to burn babies in Meereen. She wouldn’t let the Ironborn do it here.

Daenerys forced Drogon to turn left down, diverting from the initial trajectory directed to Euron’s fleet to head against the ships burning Oldtown. The shape of the ships grew, and they were close enough…

“How?”

Drogon released a hell of fire on the ship as he made a pass over it. When she looked behind, she saw its sails, its decks and its people burning. She could discern the movements of the crew as they tried to quench the fire eating their flesh. Rhaegal sent another wave of fire on the ship his brother just attacked, while Viserion targeted another vessel. They made several passes, each time transforming a wooden horse into a burning shell that would soon drown into the river. Daenerys thought there were about twenty ships in this river, the others fighting at the mouth or farther. She burned them all, even those who tried to escape. They had nowhere to go. You couldn’t escape the wrath of the dragon.

Daenerys made her dragons fly higher. The fire had spread deeper into the city. She couldn’t stop it. Her dragons could start a fire, but not extinguish it. She watched over the city, and saw lights outside the battlements. It was the Ironborn attacking the city. There were torches running in the streets below. She ordered Drogon to throw fire in the air, only to illuminate the scene. When he did, she saw that people were fighting. Euron’s men already succeeded in scaling the battlements. There was only one thing to do.

She positioned her three dragons to follow the battlements and went down again. When the time was right, they all unleashed their fire on the battlements of Oldtown. She couldn’t stop the men who already made their way into the city, but she could stop others from going in. Fire burned flesh and wood. The men were cooked alive in their armors, the ladders were ablaze, the rams destroyed. The gates were surrounded by so much fire that they couldn’t be crossed. Fire didn’t burn stone, but it could heat it enough and surround it with enough fire to make it impossible to get through.

As she kept bathing the battlements with dragonfire, Daenerys heard a familiar sound. She heard the same when they captured her after she fled from Meereen, and when Drogo led them into battle. Her khalassar had arrived. At their head, she noticed a man with a flaming sword. She had her dragons turn around and go to the shore. The Ironmen left small boats in number there. That was how they arrived. Daenerys headed in their direction and threw fire over the floating devices. These men had come this way, but they wouldn’t go back, unless they could swim to their ships. Daenerys watched the head of the Dothraki army collide with the Ironmen. They wouldn’t need her help. She turned her attention to the ships.

In Meereen, the sun was high when she launched her counter-attack against the masters’ ships. At night, she couldn’t discern the symbols on the ships. She couldn’t tell which ones were enemies and which were allies. However, she knew for a certainty that Euron’s ships had come from the north. Some were still away from the main battle. She chose them for her targets.

The minutes that followed were a slaughter. Ships burned, men jumped into the sea to save themselves from the fire devouring their vessels. Daenerys felt something similar to how she felt during the battle at Dragonstone, but stronger. She felt as if she was a dragon herself. She burned everything that presented itself before her. Her enemies were dying by the thousands. She was saving a city, just like she did back in Meereen. Sometimes, she looked at the battle on the mainland. In the dark, it was difficult to see who had the upper hand, but she doubted that her Dothrakis would
let the Ironmen outmatch them.

She heard a terrible shriek on her right. She looked and saw nothing for a moment, then she noticed a massive form falling from the skies. From his size, it could only be Viserion. Rhaegal was still flying, not far from him. He kept falling, his wings flapping in a desperate attempt to gain attitude again or to stop his fall. No, that couldn’t be.

She ordered Drogon to head down, to save the smallest of her children. Nothing else mattered anymore now. Viserion was about to touch the water. If he fell under it, he could never come up again. Dragons couldn’t survive water, or so she thought. She wasn’t willing to risk the experience to discover it.

Drogon was almost at the level of the water, preparing to receive Viserion on his back to prevent him from drowning, when at the last moment, his brother deployed his wings and managed to stop his fall. He released a powerful scream, not one of pain this time but of hatred, and headed to a ship that he burned from the head to the stern. He was safe. Her dragon was safe. For a moment, Daenerys let relief fill her and forgot the battle going on around her. She was reminded of it by a flock of arrows.

She wasn’t high enough. Drogon’s wings were only a few feet over the water. They were an easy target. She gained back altitude, until she thought she was safe enough. Rhaegal and Viserion joined her at this moment. All her three dragons were flying in a triangular formation. She looked at the battle below her again. She noticed that on the mainland, the fights were getting closer to the shore. The Ironmen were being beaten back into the sea. Many ships were in fire, but some were not. The battle over the sea wasn’t over. On the other side, in the south, all ships were engaged, but some were not on the northern side of the sea. She attacked them.

The crews of these ships tried to shoot her and her dragons down with arrows and scorpions. Daenerys made sure they never got a clear shot at her and always kept Drogon moving. Ships kept burning as arrows and bolts missed Drogon, Rhaegal and Viserion. More were ablaze than intact soon, and after some time, she saw a first attempting to escape. A second one followed, then a third, and soon many of Euron’s ships were trying to sail away. Daenerys didn’t let them that chance. Her dragons burned most of them as well. The Ironborn had to understand what were the consequences of reaving, roving, raiding and raping the Seven Kingdoms.

She saw more of Euron’s ships trying to escape, but she realized that she couldn’t know for sure if they were Euron’s or Yara’s ships chasing them now. She looked at the mainland and judged that the battle in front of the battlements was almost over. She noticed that Viserion’s right wing wasn’t moving as it usually did, and that he had a huge bolt, probably fired from a scorpion, near it in the belly.

Daenerys landed not far away from her men, but far enough from the battle to take a look at Viserion’s injury. When he landed next to Drogon, she saw that the bolt was still deep into his flesh. She pulled it as strongly as she could, earning several screams of pain, but she succeeded. The bolt dislodged from the scales. She couldn’t be sure of how serious the injury was. Right when she was about to look closer, one of her Dothraki captains arrived.

“Great Khaleesi, the men in iron suits are running like wailing women. Jorah the Andal and the man in red have gone inside the stony city with a few of us to kill the rest.”

Dothrakis inside Oldtown. Daenerys wasn’t sure whether this was good or bad news, but she supposed this had to happen. Would Jorah and Revan be able to control them? There was only one way to find out.

“Search the area. Kill every enemy you can find.”
“Yes, Khaleesi.”

Daenerys ordered Viserion to stay on the ground to recover from his wounds, then she climbed back on Drogon and flew with him and Rhaegal over the city. She brought Drogon to a lower altitude. His great shape threw a long shadow over the city, even in the dark of the night. She tried to find the enemies, but it was too difficult to discern them from the friends. Something caught her attention however. She saw a flame, an isolated flame, but it wasn’t a torch, or the beginning of a fire. It was a sword. The man who wielded it was fighting on the steps of a huge sept. Daenerys made Drogon land on the roof of the sept. Daenerys didn’t recognize the man he was fighting, but his opponent was large, almost the size of a bull, with a helm in the shape of a kraken, with a gigantic axe between his hands. The flaming sword and the axe danced together, colliding again and again. The man with the axe tried to use his size to bring down his opponent, but the man with the flaming sword was quicker. The Ironborn brought his axe down fiercely. The flaming sword ducked, then with a swift move, cut the head of the bigger man. *In my experience, large men do triumph over smaller men far more often than not.* Hizdahr zo Loraq was wrong.

Drogon and Rhaegal released a powerful scream at this moment, and all the men fighting on the steps turned to her. They stopped to fight exactly at the same time, Dothraki and Ironman. Revan got on his knees immediately, his flaming sword still shining in his hands. The Dothrakis followed his example. After some hesitation, the Ironmen did the same.

When the morning came, the situation was more or less under control. Euron Greyjoy’s ships were all taken or destroyed, or they escaped to the Iron Islands. The fires in the city were contained, though the City Watch was still fighting them with the help of her men. They had gathered in the solar of Lord Leyton Hightower. Lord Leyton was there along with his son and his grandson, Lord Paxter Redwyne, Yara Greyjoy, her uncle Lord Rodrik Harlaw, two Dothraki commanders, Revan and Daenerys. She asked for Jorah to come at this meeting, but he was late. They began without him.

“Your Grace.” Lord Hightower bowed to her, remaining in his chair. Judging from his cane, Daenerys suspected that standing up could be a struggle for him. “In the name of the people of Oldtown and of my own house, I want to thank you for your help. Oldtown would have been lost without you.”

“Thank you, my lord. You’re welcome,” Daenerys replied.

“We are forever in your debt, your Grace. However, I must admit that we would rather see the Dothrakis and the Ironmen leave our city as quickly as possible. Their presence makes our people feel… unsafe.”

“The Dothrakis and Queen Yara’s men helped to defend your city, and right now they’re helping your men to stop the fires devouring your streets. They will leave when I see fit.”

“Of course, your Grace.” He eyed worriedly, with a hint of hatred, the Ironmen and the Dothraki commanders.

“Now, to the matters at hand. Did you manage to find Euron Greyjoy and his body?”

“No. There’s no trace of him,” Yara Greyjoy answered.

“Our men are leading researches. They will find his body,” Ser Baelor, Lord Leyton’s heir, assured.

“I wouldn’t bet on that. Euron lured us into a trap. He wanted us to attack the Silence while he attacked Oldtown. He planned all this. As long as I don’t see his dead body, he is a living threat.”
“He could have been on any ship in his armada, or on the mainland when his men assaulted the battlements. We can’t know for sure,” Lord Harlaw stated. “Some are saying they saw him on one of his ships, others say that he led the assault on the battlements. There were even some who claimed they killed him.”

“Keep searching him,” Daenerys ordered. “In the meantime, Lord Hightower, your men are to follow me to King’s Landing. Even if Euron Greyjoy is alive, his armies were almost destroyed. They can’t pose a real threat to the Reach anymore. Queen Yara and Lord Redwyne will take care of the enemy’s remnants and free the Shield Islands before they set sail to the Iron Islands and put an end to Euron’s rebellion against the Iron Throne. The armies of the Reach are to gather at Highgarden, and then to join my Unsullied and our Dornish allies on the Blackwater.”

“Your Grace, you want me to help an Ironborn to declare herself Queen of the Iron Islands?” Lord Paxter asked, unbelieving and revolted.

“Queen Yara will respect the integrity of the Seven Kingdoms. By assisting her into taking the Seastone Chair, you are protecting your lands. Yara, how much time do you expect it will take to reconquer all the Iron Islands.”

“Depends. We lost many ships in that battle, and many are heavily damaged,” the Queen of the Iron Islands carefully answered.

“Euron might still have a few tricks for us,” Rodrik Harlaw added. “He had many allies in the Iron Islands, and the Kingsmoot chose him. There will be resistance. I suggest we proceed with caution.”

“Lord Hightower, Lord Redwyne.” Daenerys turned back the conversation towards the lords of the Reach. “Winter has arrived. There are several kingdoms who are unprepared to face it. I’ll need you to send supplies to King’s Landing as soon as it is taken to prevent people from dying of starvation.”

“Which kingdoms are we talking about, your Grace?” Lord Leyton’s grandson asked.

“The Crownlands, the Riverlands, the Westerlands, and the North. These kingdoms suffered through the recent wars. If we don’t want hundreds of thousand people to die, we’ll need to feed them.”

“We would feed our enemies? We would feed people we are fighting against?”

“Altos, be careful!” his father told him.

“You are Ser Altos Hightower, aren’t you?” Daenerys asked the young man.

“First son of Ser Baelor Hightower, your Grace, and second in line in inheritance to the Hightower.”

Daenerys looked straight at him. “The people of these kingdoms didn’t choose who would rule them. They didn’t choose the wars and the fights they had to endure for the last years. They didn’t ask for the Lannisters and the Starks to burn their fields and kill their children. They had to support this war, a war that was the choice of someone else. I will not let them die because a few lords decided to turn their lands into a battlefield and because their lives meant nothing to them. I didn’t come to be like those who preceded me. I came to save my people, and I will save them. If your family refuses, then you are disobeying an order from your queen. I suppose you are familiar with the sentence for treason, Ser Altos?”

His face turned blank. “You can count on our support, your Grace. We will do as you wish,” Lord Hightower quickly said.

“Good. Now, Lord Hightower, how many men can you provide for our assault on King’s Landing?”
Before Lord Leyton could answer, the door opened. She looked at it to see Jorah enter with two men in maester’s robes. One was fat and playing with his fingers, looking afraid as they approached, while the other was black of skin and slender with curly black hair.

“You’re late,” she told him, not without reproach.

“I apologize, your Grace, but I had business in town,” he replied.

“Who are these people?”

“This is Samwell Tarly, your Grace.” He indicated the fat young man between him and the black one. “He is the brother of Dickon Tarly, the Lord of Horn Hill. He is a student at the Citadel and a member of the Night’s Watch.”

She looked at him. “You are Lord Tarly’s brother?” she asked. He nodded. “I met your brother. You don’t look very much like him.”

“If I had, my father may not have sent me to the Wall.” Samwell Tarly spoke with nervosity.

“I know what happened to your father in King’s Landing. I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Ah, thank you.” He almost sounded surprised that she offered him her condolences. “But I’m glad that my brother is still alive.”

“Why are you here?”

He seemed to hesitate. Jorah looked at him. “Tell her,” he told the boy. He really was nothing like his brother.

“I… We saw Euron Greyjoy. Alleras and I. We saw him.”

“Where? When?” Yara asked immediately, her attention drawn to the conversation by this new development.

“At the Citadel. He was with some of his men. They… He stole a horn I brought with me from the Wall, and a book, and he escaped.”

“But not before I shot an arrow in his leg with my bow.” The other novice stepped forward and offered his hand to Daenerys. “It is a pleasure to meet you, your Grace. People call me Alleras, but my real name is Sarella Sand. You may have met some of my sisters. Obara and Nymeria are with my father’s army, and Tyene brought Lady Margaery Tyrell to Storm’s End.”

Daenerys was first surprised and somewhat shocked by his brazen behaviour, but then she realized it was her brazen behaviour. She knew immediately who she was. Trystane told her he had a cousin in Oldtown.

“You are Prince Oberyn’s daughter. You’re one of the Sand Snakes.”

Her smile widened. “Glad to meet you, your Grace.”

Everything was silent for a moment. Daenerys didn’t take the offered hand. After a moment, Ser Baelor reacted. “She’s a woman?”

“You’re very observant,” Yara commented sarcastically.

“Alleras… but… I don’t understand,” Samwell Tarly spluttered. She turned to look at him over her
shoulder, a satisfied smile on her lips.

“I got you, didn’t I? The Citadel doesn’t accept women. It was the only way for me to get inside.”

“And the Citadel is refusing women for good reasons,” Lord Hightower declared. “You broke a sacred rule of this institution. You sullied the order of the maesters with what you did. You could be executed for this.”

“She won’t be.” Daenerys faced the Lord of the Hightower. “Lady Sarella Sand is the niece of Doran Martell, the daughter of his brother Oberyn. The Martells are our allies. I will not have you execute a woman only because she did something you consider is only fitting for men. If I followed your thoughts, Lord Hightower, I would never have come to Westeros to claim the Iron Throne and my dragons wouldn’t have been there to save your city, and Euron Greyjoy would be feasting in your halls as we speak.”

That made Lord Leyton shut his mouth, and caused Yara Greyjoy to smile in an accomplice way. Daenerys returned her attention on Sarella. “You said you shot an arrow on Euron Greyjoy. Did he die?”


“He may be dead then,” Yara Greyjoy said.

“I wouldn’t bet on it,” Lord Harlaw said, using his niece’s very words. “Euron may have found a way out. He disappeared for years and all we heard about him were rumors, until he came back to murder his own brother. He may still be alive.”

“Well, at least we know now where he was a few hours ago.” Daenerys then spoke to Sarella. “I thank you, Lady Sarella, for this information. I won’t hold you any longer.”

“Your Grace.” Ser Jorah spoke. “Please, there is something else.” He shot another look at Samwell Tarly, as if he needed to encourage him to speak. The boy did.

“Your Grace, there’s something about the horn Euron Greyjoy stole. This is a horn I found at the Fist of the First Men, north of the Wall, with a bag of dragonglass. The thing is…”

“According to some chronicles in the Citadel, this horn has the power to wake a kraken, if used in the right way,” Sarella Sand completed.

Daenerys looked at her. “A kraken?” Did she hear well?

“Yes, your Grace. And I verified. The book that Euron stole was a work about this very horn. It told how to use it to wake up the kraken.”

“If my uncle is trying this, then he’s really a fool. The kraken is a story to make the children afraid in the Iron Islands. My mother used to tell me those before I went to sleep when I was young,” Yara Greyjoy said.

“Euron is intelligent and cunning, and but he also displayed signs of madness ever since he came back,” Lord Rodrik began. “He cut the tongue of all his crew on the Silence, and many rumors reported he lost his mind during a storm, and that he even claimed afterwards that he was the storm. He may have come to believe that it is possible to wake a kraken. That would explain why he took his time before he attacked Oldtown. He made raids on the shores to attract the armies of the Reach far from the city and to disperse them, and then he attacked the city to steal that horn.”
“Well, he will have a good surprise when he realizes this is only a simple horn and that blowing it
doesn’t bring him anything. I hope he’ll realize it before I kill him.”

“Your Grace, there is something more important.” This time, Samwell Tarly spoke without having
Ser Jorah to encourage him. “I was sent to the Citadel by Jon Snow, when he was still Lord
Commander of the Night’s Watch. I was supposed to replace Master Aemon, who had died not long
ago. But… there’s something you must know. When I went north of the Wall, when I found that
horn, I was with the previous Lord Commander, Jeor Mormont, Ser Jorah’s father. We went at the
Fist of the First Men to stop the wildlings who were marching on the Wall. But it wasn’t the
wildlings we met out there. It was the dead.”

Daenerys frowned. “The dead?”

“Yes, your Grace. The dead. They almost killed us all. We were only three men to come back alive
at Castle Black. And later, Jon Snow went to Hardhome to save the wildlings who gathered there.
The Night King attacked them, and the wights killed most of the men and women there. We could
only save a few thousands.” He took a pause. “I saw one of them, your Grace. A White Walker.
Two, even. I even killed one of them.”

The room was in silence for a very long time, until it was ended by the laughing of the youngest
Hightower. “White Walkers don’t exist. They are a tale to make children afraid at night, just like this
kraken story.”

“You saw them?” Revan stepped forward, getting closer to the fat young man. “You really saw
them?”

“Yes, I did,” Samwell Tarly said.

“And you really killed one of them?”

“Yes.”

Revan stared at him from foot to head. “You don’t look like a warrior. How did you do it?”

“With a dagger made of dragonglass.”

“Dragonglass? Obsidian?”

“Yes.” Samwell Tarly looked at her. “Your Grace, I found out that there is a large deposit of
dragonglass on Dragonstone. If you could send some of it in the North, it might save Westeros.”

“I think we heard enough about fairy tales of dead men walking on the ice,” Yara interrupted. “We
have more pressing matters to attend to.”

“These are not tales,” the young man protested. “I saw them. Jon Snow saw them as well, and the
Lord Commander Mormont too…”

“That’s enough.” Daenerys put an end to this. “Escort Maester Samwell and Sarella Sand back to the
Citadel.”

Samwell Tarly protested as he was being escorted out of the room. The discussion turned around
dispositions to march on the capital. After this was over, Daenerys walked out and was shown to the
rooms the Hightowers prepared for her. She just stepped inside when Ser Jorah came in and closed
the door behind them.
“Your Grace, may I have a word?”

“You may.”

“I think we should take Samwell Tarly’s word more seriously.”

Daenerys frowned. His expression was deadly serious. He wasn’t joking. “You believe him?”

The knight sighed. “Your Grace, my father died north of the Wall. He was Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch, and this man claims that a dead man tried to murder him in his sleep. My father went north of the Wall for this reason, to face this enemy, and he got killed for that. In the North, everyone knows about these stories concerning the White Walkers and when they last came. These are not only stories. The dead haven’t been seen in thousands of years, but what’s telling us that they’re not back?”

Daenerys studied him closely. That was no jest, for sure. Kinvara talked to her about these ice demons, but she was a priestess, following a religion who claimed the Great Other had servants on this earth. Ser Jorah, however, wasn’t a religious man. He didn’t believe things only because they were written in books or said by a priest. He was the one to make her understand that the people of Westeros were not waiting for her return, like Illyrio Mopatis made Viserys believe. Could there be some truth in what he said?

“You truly believe this is a real threat?” she asked him.

“I know one thing. My father wouldn’t have gone so far north of the Wall if the wildlings were the only danger.”

His father died north of the Wall. Daenerys was aware of the shame the knight from Bear Island felt, and how his family resented him. His father was gone, and he would never see him again. He lost him, and he was trying to find a reason to his father’s death.

“I will think about it,” she finally said, making no promise.

“Your Grace.”

After Ser Jorah was gone, Daenerys took a look at the city from the balcony. Half of it was still burning or had already burned. She spared the lives of the Ironmen who knelt before her at the Starry Sept after Revan defeated their commander, but she had no pity for the others. Every Ironborn who was found inside the walls of the city and who fought for Euron would be killed on the spot. Those who were taken on the sea were left to their queen, Yara Greyjoy. As for those found outside the city on the mainland, the lords of the Reach would take care of them. Daenerys would show no mercy to those who sacked and burned Oldtown. They slaughtered innocent people, women and children, unharmed people. Those on the sea fought against soldiers, so she would allow Yara to welcome them back if she wanted, but there would be no mercy for the others.

The Starry Sept was miraculously spared, though the same couldn’t be said about the Citadel. Whole buildings were destroyed. All that only for a book and a horn. If Euron Greyjoy was still alive somewhere, Daenerys would make him pay if she ever found him, and if Yara was the one to find him, then she had no doubt he would die quickly.

Daenerys thought about something one of her advisors told her back in Meereen. I wonder how she is. There was something she could do for him. She left her rooms and looked for the first person whose path she would cross. She quickly fell upon a young woman with brown hair, wearing pearls around her neck.
“Your Grace.” She quickly curtsied before she resumed her path.

“Wait.” Daenerys stopped her before she could go farther. “I was wondering if you could help me.”

“What can I do?”

“I’m looking for a young woman. Her uncle is advising me. His name is Malcolm Branfield. He told me that she was recently married to a member of House Hightower.”

The young woman frowned. “Branfield?”

“Yes. The wedding may have taken place about a year ago, or something like that. I don’t remember her name, but I know she came from the North. Surely you know who I’m talking about.” There weren’t many Northerners here. Ser Jorah didn’t go unnoticed, and Daenerys doubted that a northern lady would go unnoticed in such a place. She and Ser Jorah both married a Hightower.

“Well, that must be Mira. She is my sister.”

“Your sister?”

“By marriage. She is married to my brother. She told me that her mother was from House Branfield.”

It had to be her then. “Could you tell me where I can find her?”

“I’m afraid you would have a long way to make.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Mira left several months ago with my brother. They went in the North when the Lannisters invaded it to depose the Boltons. Last we heard from her, she was back at her home, at Ironrath.”

So, Malcolm’s niece was in the North. She would have to tell him when they saw each other again. She knew he desperately wanted news of his niece. “Thank you, Lady…”

“Elys. Elys Hightower, your Grace. May I ask something from you?”

“Go on.”

“Mira and my brother Gerold left Oldtown when the Lannisters invaded the North. They helped them to fight the Boltons. Mira’s home, Ironrath, had been taken by another family who was loyal to House Bolton. My brother and his wife joined the Lannisters with a small army to take back Ironrath. However, I’m unsure about their situation right now. We sent a raven to Gerold to tell him to come back, but I’m not sure if he will make it, and they are surrounded by lords loyal to Jon Snow.”

She was worried. “I will defend them, if that’s what you want.”

“It may be more complicated than that. Mira was born in the North. It’s possible that she decides to support Jon Snow. Her brother is now Lord of Ironrath and their family was sworn to Winterfell for generations. But my brother loves her. Could you try to make sure she’s not killed? She’s not the Lady of Ironrath, anyway. It wouldn’t be vital for her to bend the knee before you in the name of her family, and anyway she’s a Hightower now.”

Daenerys thought about this for a time. “I didn’t come here to kill everyone. So far, your family was loyal, and I have no intention to kill innocent people. I won’t kill your sister-in-law unless she is threat to me.”
“She won’t be.”

“If you say so.”

Truth be told, Daenerys had no wish to kill any Forrester. Malcolm Branfield was a loyal servant for her, and Asher Forrester helped her to free the people of Meereen. However, if the Forresters fought against her, she couldn’t guarantee that none of them would die. However, Asher’s sister would certainly not be on the battlefield, so she wouldn’t die there. She would give a chance to every lord in the North to bend the knee, but if they didn’t, she would have no choice but to kill them. Hopefully, it wouldn’t come to that.

Daenerys later went to see the efforts to extinguish the fires. There was still a lot of work to do. She also visited the Citadel, whose remaining buildings were transformed for the most part in improvised infirmaries. Many people suffered from serious burns all over their bodies. Others were missing arms or legs. The Silent Sisters did their best to gather the bodies in the streets. Men formed chains to bring water from the sea and the river to end the many fires. Despite the sorry state of the city, she found some solace in the fact that Dothrakis, Ironmen and Reachmen worked all together to save this city. They passed buckets of water to each other to stop the damages from getting worse.

At nightfall, she was satisfied enough with everything that was being done. The situation was much better in Oldtown than it had been in Meereen. She thought she could get a good night of sleep when she entered in her rooms, but as she closed the door, she realized a light was coming from the bedroom. She quietly walked into it, to find the Red Priest looking into flames made into a bowl, on a support.

“What are you doing here?” she asked him.

He didn’t answer immediately. The shades of light and shadows that danced on his masked face gave him a more threatening look than usual. When he finally spoke, it was in a dark voice, almost a whisper.

“There are those in my order who can see the future into the fire, but fail to interpret it appropriately. There are others who seldom see visions, but are very good to interpret them. Very few are good at both, even after years of practice. Kinvara is one of the few that I ever met who were capable of having visions and to give them the right interpretation at the same time on her own.” He sighed. “I was never good at either of them. When I have visions, they are of the past, my past. A past I tend to forget, since it happened so long ago.”

Daenerys listened to him in silence, an aura of mysticism surrounding the air. “What do you want?” she asked.

“Look into the flames, your Grace. Tell me what you see.”

She didn’t know why, but she felt compelled to do what he said. She stared into the flames, and for a long time she could see nothing. And then, she saw shapes taking form, black shapes. Snow was flying in the air. It reminded her of her visions in the House of the Undying. A great tempest raged. A great crowd was marching towards a castle she never saw. At the head was a man with blue eyes. Blue eyes as cold as winter. He wasn’t a man. Not anymore.

The vision stopped, and all Daenerys could see was fire, the fire burning right in front of her. “What did you see?” Revan asked.

“Snow. A great storm. And a man with blue eyes, and a mass of men walking behind him.”
The Red Priest breathed deeply. “Your Grace, do you know when the order of the Red Priests was created?”

“No.” She knew a few things about the faith in R’hllor, but she didn’t know all the details of the organization.

“My order is ancient, more ancient than all the civilizations you know. The Red Priests existed long before Aegon invaded Westeros, before the Valyrian Freehold dominated Essos, even before the Empire of Ghis. We were created about eight thousand years ago, when the Shivering Sea froze and the servants of the Great Other with their blue eyes and their undead men came for us. That was when Azor Ahai stood to defend the world of Essos, before any true military power could oppose the Long Night. He fought against the servants of the evil and their creatures, and he and his followers destroyed them. He lost everything in that fight, his friends, his family, the woman he loved. When the demons were repelled and the Shivering Sea turned back to water, he created the order of R’hllor. He was the first High Priest, and his followers were the Red Priests. He gave them the mission to protect the world from the servants of evil, and to be there when the Others would come back.”

He looked up to her. “The Wall was erected to protect your continent from those you call the White Walkers, and the Night’s Watch was given the duty to protect it. In Essos, we didn’t need a wall of ice to protect us from those we call the Others. The Shivering Sea is protecting us. But the Red Priests were left behind to remind everyone of this time, and to remind them that one day the enemy would come back. I don’t know how or when, but the servants of the Great Other are going to come for us, sooner or later. Every priest in Essos says the same. They all see it through their visions, and the High Priestess Kinvara sees them more clearly every passing day. And I know one thing: if they get through the Wall, if they take Westeros, then Essos will be next. The Shivering Sea will freeze just like in the ancient times, and every man, woman and child will die on both continents, and there will only be a few islands left, and perhaps Sothoryos, where human life will continue.”

Daenerys gazed at him. She couldn’t see the expression of his face, but she could feel how serious and preoccupied he was. “You believe Samwell Tarly when he says the dead are back?”

There was some hesitation. “We can never be sure of anything, your Grace. But if he’s right, then ignoring the threat could be a death sentence for everyone who lives in this country you want to rule.”

Was it true? Daenerys made dreams who became true. She could remember her visions in Qarth. She saw herself in the throne room in King’s Landing, with snow falling all around and the roof destroyed. She saw the Wall. She also saw Drogo and their child. Was it her future? Was she destined to go north to fight these ice demons with blue eyes? Was that the right thing to do? She came back with the biggest army ever assembled to take back what was hers, and to break the wheel. Could she abandon her dreams, everything she fought for years to achieve, to fight against White Walkers and dead men?

“What do you think I should do?”

Revan turned his gaze into the fire. “Samwell Tarly said that Dragonstone sits on great amounts of obsidian, and that obsidian can destroy the dead. If that’s the case, then we need to mine it and turn it into weapons.”

“You want me to waste men to mine a stone I didn’t know I had only yesterday, when we have enemies everywhere?”

“You don’t need that many men to mine obsidian. Fire can kill these demons as well. A few hundred
men should be able to extract enough obsidian to make a difference when the time to fight comes, and they can extract the mineral and send it to you by ship as soon as it is ready.”

“And what do we do with our enemies? Cersei Lannister? Euron Greyjoy? Jon Snow?” She couldn’t abandon her war against them, against the people who tried to usurp her throne.

“One way or another, all Westeros will have to stand behind you when the time comes. You already have three kingdoms at your side. Euron Greyjoy and Cersei Lannister will never accept you as their queen, nor will they accept to make an alliance with you against the Others, but their power is dwindling. They can be dealt with quite easily. As for Jon Snow, we will need his armies as much as we will need yours. Whether you defeat him and absorb his forces into yours, or you force him to bend the knee and fight with you. In all cases, we need the other kingdoms in order to defeat the servants of our Lord’s enemy.”

She looked into the flames. She saw something that wasn’t quite a man, with blue eyes as cold as ice. If he really was coming on the Wall, if Kinvara, Jorah, Samwell and Revan were right…

“We march on King’s Landing on the morrow.”

She declared that while a few hours ago she decided they would stay two days to rest and to give time to Lord Hightower to regroup his men. She would need to talk to her commanders and to Lord Leyton. And she would need to send ravens. Whatever threat was in the North, she would face it, and she would protect her kingdoms and the people who lived there.

Chapter End Notes

The massive Ironborn who fought Revan is a cameo of Victarion Greyjoy. I wasn't sure whether to include him in this fanfiction. He was never mentionned in the TV show, but his existence was never denied either. However, since he never claimed the throne of the Iron Islands in the TV series, if he was to exist, I would have to make him quite different from who he was in the books. So, to not make him disappear entirely, I introduced a cameo. And it gave me the occasion to show a duel between my favourite character from Star Wars and one of the best warriors among the Ironborn. :)

We got to see several characters together in this chapter : Daenerys, Yara, Rodrik Harlaw, Sam, Sarella, Gerold's brothers and father, Jorah, and I tried to make them act like they would have in this situation. I wanted to include a private discussion about White Walkers between Daenerys and Rodrik Harlaw, to show what an intellectual mind would think of them, but I decided to skip it, since we already had the discussions with Revan and Jorah. Too many discussions about one very subject in the same chapter would have been redundant.

I'm going to take a break. A short one this time, I reassure you. It will only last two weeks. I struggle to keep on with the updates lately. My regular readers may have noticed it. I need some time to reorganize myself after moving into a new city and a new job. I'll come back in two weeks, with better chapters I hope.

Please review

Next chapter : Kinvara
I am back. This chapter was written with the objective to know what was happening with the rest of Daenerys's forces while she was fighting the Ironborn in Oldtown, but it also contains several important conversations between Kinvara and other characters. Someone we haven't seen for a very long time makes a return in the story.

On the other side of the river, the forces loyal to the Mad Queen Cersei Lannister made sure no one could cross the river. Several banners that she couldn’t recognize stood tall, for everyone to see. When they tried to cross it with boats, a rain of arrows fell on the men. They destroyed all bridges on the Blackwater, and any attempt to build a new one was doomed from the beginning, and there were posts all along the river to stop them from crossing at any point. Even if a small detachment crossed far away from their camp, the enemy would spot them and send forces to plug the breach. They were stuck south of the river.

The Blackwater was the last real obstacle separating them from King’s Landing. Cersei Lannister convinced a few lords to fight for her by brandishing the fear of foreign invaders, mainly the Unsullied, the Dothrakis and the Red Priests. If only she knew how her assumption concerning the Red Priests was false. Not all of them came from Essos. Still, it was sufficient to convince a few frightened men and their lords to fight for this woman.

Kinvara couldn’t see it from the shore where she stood, but she knew that far away was King’s Landing, capital of the Seven Kingdoms. She never saw it with her own eyes, but she heard many things said about it, and her visions allowed her to see a few parts of the city. The Dragonpit. The Great Sept of Baelor. The Guildhall of the Alchemists. The Red Keep. This building came back very often in her visions. Once, she saw a beggar in the streets, right in front of the gate of the keep. When the lords, the ladies, the princes, the princesses, the kings and the queens went out, they didn’t see him. What mattered for them were their fine clothes, the gold in their chests, the exotic food from the other side of the world that they ate at dinner and the size of their retinue. They didn’t care for the people and their problems. They didn’t think it was their business, or that they were responsible for them. What was important to them was their gold, their silver and their power. When they seemed to care for the people, it was always false, fake. Most knew that the kings were at the service of the lords, the knights and the rich merchants. Starvation, misery and diseases were not important matters. You seldom heard them spoken about behind the gates of castles and palaces.

Kinvara would be in King’s Landing soon, and she would help the only queen who truly cared for the people to sit on the Iron Throne. For once in history, it would be occupied by someone who deserved it. Cersei Lannister could fight them, but she would only delay the inevitable. Soon, she would be dead. And now the rains weep o’er their halls, and not a soul to hear. This song would be sung for Lannisters soon enough. When Daenerys Targaryen would come, this would be the end of Cersei Lannister and whoever followed her in her crimes.

She went back into the camp, among the tents of Dothrakis, Unsullied, Dornishmen and Storm men.
The army was an amalgam of many soldiers from different lands and continents, with different languages and customs, but they all fought for the same cause. Unity would be crucial when the Great War would be there, and Daenerys Targaryen was the only one making this unity possible. For that, she needed to sit on the Iron Throne. She didn’t believe Kinvara for now when she said the servants of the Great Other were coming for all of them, but she would understand when the time comes. She had faith in the Lord of Light, and if Kinvara persisted in her fight against the Others, she knew they could win.

In a clear space, men from Dorne were fighting together, practicing for an upcoming battle. Hopefully, it would come very soon. Kinvara noticed a young woman among them, her arms bare, her hair brought into a bun, handling a spear better than many Unsullied. In Essos, few women fought. Their options were mostly limited to being wives, whores or priestess. Some could also be servants where there was no slavery, but their fate wasn’t that different from a whore most of the time. Kinvara had experienced every role a woman could play in this world. Seeing this girl fight against men, train with them, was something foreign for her. Even among the Red Priests, women seldom fought with swords. She only knew one who did. They could use their powers into battle, but although some Red Priests did learn to fight, women never did. She never learned to fight herself, but she didn’t regret it. She had other ways to deal with her enemies.

“I need some practice,” her fellow priest said next to her.

“Then go with them. I’m not holding you,” she replied.

Geralt joined the people practicing without another word. He seldom talked and preferred swords to words. Kinvara watched them fight. When the girl left the fighting to take a pause, Kinara walked to her. Obara Sand was one of the many cousins of Trystane Martell, and her mother was a whore.

“You fight well,” Kinvara told her, stating it as plainly as if she said the weather was good today.

“Are you going to talk me into believing in that god of yours?” she retorted, drinking some water from a gourd.

Kinvara smiled. “If we were to always do that, we would become boring quite quickly, wouldn’t you agree?”

“Yes, I agree.” She didn’t show any enthusiasm to their conversation.

“Why do you fight?”

“Why would I answer to you?”

“Why wouldn’t you? Most of the women never wield a weapon in their whole life, but you do. You’re quite a special girl.”

The Sand Snake smirked. “When I was a child, my father came to take me to court. I had never seen this man, and yet he called himself my father. My mother wept, said I was too young and a girl. Oberyn tossed his spear at my feet and said, girl or boy, we fight our battles, but the gods let us choose our weapons. My father pointed to the spear and then to my mother’s tears. I made my choice.”

Kinvara nodded. “Tears are quite inefficient as a weapon.” If not, then there wouldn’t have been so many men to use the girl she once was.

“Hear, hear. What is your weapon then?”
“My lord is my weapon.” The young woman scoffed. “I wouldn’t underestimate him if I were you.”

“I don’t need gods. I only need the choices he left me to make.”

“And yet, it is said that those who live by the spear will die by the spear.”

“All men must die. Valar morghulis.”

“Valar Dohaeris. But we’re not men.”

They exchanged wicked smiles. Would the baby who was abandoned have turned into that, had her father taken care of her, or had her mother not left her in a street? “You’re lucky that your father took care of you. Most men don’t care about the children they father on whores.”

“My father didn’t take care of me. He taught me to take care of myself.”

“A wise man. Women who rely on men to survive don’t last long.” Obara Sand smirked again. “But women who kill everyone in their way don’t last either.”

Obara kept smiling. “Not if everyone in their way dies.”

“The spear is a good weapon, but it can be pointed both ways, and it’s not invincible. I hope it never turns against you.”

“It won’t.”

She was very sure of herself. She was about to go back to the training when Kinvara said one last thing. “It is said that Oberyn Martell disapproved the murder of children, and that he didn’t hold children responsible for their father’s actions. I hope you live up to your father’s memory.”

Kinvara walked away before the Sand Snake could reply. She hoped that she would think about what she said, even if she doubted it. Obara was very sure of herself, and she wanted revenge. Kinvara understood her, but if you allowed vengeance to control all your actions, it would eat you away until there was nothing left of you. Duty was the best defense against it. Duty prevented you from doing things you shouldn’t, but the Sand Snakes were not people of duty. They were people who did what they wanted, when they wanted.

There was also the question of which duty to choose. Some duties were as fatal if not more than personal desires. Following your duty blindly could bring you to commit atrocities. She saw several Red Priests in her life, and many other people, doing what they thought to be their duty when committing crimes and atrocities, and this was also the case for people who were dutiful towards their family or their lord or their city. She had discovered that doubt was the only way to prevent people from failing their duties by trying to follow them. Once you didn’t allow doubt in your mind any longer, you were doomed.

Kinvara walked to the command tent and found Trystane Martell inside, slowly drinking some wine while looking at a map.

“High Priestess,” he shortly greeted her when she arrived.

“Prince Trystane.”

“Is there something you need from me?”

“No. For now, all we can do is wait.” The people of her order had waited for a very long time for
this to happen. They waited for centuries for Azor Ahai reborn to come, for the slaves to break their chains, for the great that would seal the fate of men.

“There’s no way to cross this river,” the prince said with exasperation. “All our attempts failed. To turn around the river, we would need to march far in the west and to penetrate the Westerlands, territories we don’t control yet. Obara even led one of the groups who tried to cross the river, and even she failed.”

He sighed deeply. “Do you have water?” she asked him.

“No, I’m sorry. Only wine.”

Lords always had wine, but never water, of course. Water wasn’t costly enough. “You wish Obara didn’t come back alive.”

It was a statement, not a question. The prince looked queerly at her, and she looked at him to make him understand that she knew what was going on in his head. He was looking for the same thing than the Sand Snakes when they killed Myrcella Baratheon.

“I wouldn’t have wept on her ashes,” he confessed.

“Obara is hard to kill.”

“Yes, she is,” he said angrily. It was obvious he wished it wasn’t the case.

“Sometimes the people who seem the most unlikely to survive are the hardest to kill.”

“Really?” He didn’t seem to believe her. “I wonder what makes them so difficult to kill.”

“The will to survive. Those who want to live, they live. Those who want to die, they die. What do you want, Prince Trystane?”

“What?”

“Do you want to live or to die? Do you want to live for the person you loved and who is gone now, or do you want to die so you could join her?” He didn’t answer and looked away. “Or do you want other people to die? Do you want to see Obara impaled on her own spear? Nymeria strangled with her own whip? Tyene poisoned with one of the many vials she has with her? Do you want Ellaria Sand to watch as her daughter slowly dies because of her own poison, and then to kill her once it is done?”

“No,” he answered quickly. “But I wouldn’t weep for them. I can’t say they wouldn’t have looked for it.”

She agreed with him on this. “And once they’re dead, what will you do? What will be left, once the woman you loved is avenged? What will this bring to you?”

“At least, she will rest in peace.”

“I think she will rest in peace only when you are happy. We all want the people we love to be happy.” He looked at her, then back to the map. “You may marry Daenerys Targaryen one day, Trystane Martell. Don’t forget that.”

“Yes, I know.” He didn’t display any enthusiasm before the prospect of marrying the queen. He was obviously still in love with his previous betrothed. Would he ever be able to love another woman?
“We must all do our duty, Prince Trystane. Or else, we’re all lost. And your duty may be to be a consort for the queen.”

Kinvara was aware that Daenerys didn’t make any promise to the Martells. She only told them that she would consider seriously their proposition of a marriage when she would sit on the Iron Throne. From what Kinvara knew of Daenerys Targaryen, she was the kind of woman who did what she thought could help the people. She once said that she was responsible for the people under her rule, and she once accepted to marry a man she despised for the good of her people. If she thought that a marriage with a prince of Dorne was necessary, she would do it. For now, it didn’t seem necessary. The Martells kept fighting for her, but there might come a time when she considered that a marriage could maintain their loyalty. It was better to prepare Trystane Martell to that eventuality.

Kinvara had a duty as well. She had to make sure that Westeros would be ready to face the dead. Revan informed her not long ago that he convinced the queen to have dragonglass mined at Dragonstone for the upcoming Great War that grew closer every day. Revan said that dragonglass could destroy the servants of the Great Other. He said that the queen had begun to consider the real enemy as a threat. It was good, but they still had a lot of work to do.

She looked at Trystane Martell, who was back to studying the map before him, with figurines showing the positions of their allies like their enemies. A river separated camps and outposts, those of the queen on the southern shore, those of the lords still loyal to Cersei Lannister on the northern shore.

“Do you any idea how we could get around their defenses?” the prince asked.

“I am no general. My opinion wouldn’t worth much,” she replied. The Lord of Light granted gifts to everybody, but he never gave all his gifts to one person. Kinvara was never granted a mind for strategy and war.

“You helped me in Meereen. I thought you could do the same here.”

“Not when it comes to armies on the battlefield. It may be better to summon Malcolm Branfield and your other commanders.” She made it to leave the tent, but right before, she told him one last thing. “Perhaps you could wait for the queen to come. Once her dragons are here, our enemies won’t stand a chance. They might even run away at their sight.”

The High Priestess walked back to her own tent where she prayed. The Lord of Light didn’t grant her any vision this time, but he gave her something else that day. When the sun was gone and the darkness settled on the river, someone entered her tent. Someone she didn’t see for a very long time.

The last time they saw each other was in Volantis, back when Kinvara was the Second Servant of the Lord of Light. She made a strong impression on her, and on Benerro as well. Her powers were great, and right now Kinvara could feel them, though they didn’t sound as great as before. Perhaps it was because she tried to mask them now.

“It’s been a long time.” Kinvara kept staring into the flames as she said it.

“The last time we met, you weren’t High Priestess yet,” her visitor replied.

“No. Benerro died, and I took his place.”

“May the Lord grant him rest.”

Kinvara turned to face the intruder. “Do you say the same in your prayers for your king? For his wife? And for his daughter?”
Melisandre looked down. Kinvara almost frowned at what she was seeing. This Red Priestess from Asshai was never ashamed of what she did, and yet now she seemed to be.

“How did you get in here?” the High Priestess asked.

“I have some gifts, High Priestess. You have the same.”

*One of the rare things we have in common.* She probably used her abilities in illusion to get past the sentinels and into the camp without being noticed. The darkness outside certainly helped as well.

“Yes.”

She looked at the Priestess from Asshai with hard and unforgiving eyes. She couldn’t forgive what this woman did since she arrived in Westeros.

“I made mistakes,” Melisandre recognized. That was new. She never recognized that she could be wrong before.

“Yes, you made mistakes. You had people believe wrongly that Stannis Baratheon was Azor Ahai reborn, only for them to die burning on a river or freezing in the snow, and the others you burned them yourself, the last one a child of ten.”

The Lord of Light showed to Kinvara what would happen to Shireen Baratheon before it took place. She had wanted to intervene, to stop that from happening, but she couldn’t. A little girl was killed, burned alive for nothing.

She made a step toward Melisandre. “I saw what you did to the sept in Dragonstone, and to the godswood of Storm’s End.”

“I did what the Lord asked from me.”

“Our Lord never asked us to burn people alive, or to destroy the holy places of other religions.”

“There are precedents…” Kinvara cut short to Melisandre’s attempt.

“There is nothing in our holy texts saying that we must do these things. Our holy texts clearly state, on the other end, that following our Lord must be a free decision, taken by every individual without coercion. If you had grown in a different faith, perhaps you would understand that.”

The girl she was before used to fall asleep at the voice of her father reading about their gods. Her mother never learned to read, but her father had learned to and he tried to teach her when she was young. His success was limited, and it was later that Kinvara learned to read not only in the language of Westeros, but also in many dialects of Essos.

“I made mistakes, and I regret them,” Melisandre said.

“I hope you do. Because of you, Red Priests are seen as fanatics who burn people alive. Now we must clear up the mess you left behind.”

“Everyone can be wrong. Even the honest servants of the Lord of Light. I am no exception.”

“It is good you finally realize that.” When they met, Melisandre acted as if she was the Lord of Light himself. “Why are you here?”

Although Melisandre was a Red Priestess and served the Lord of Light like she did, she wasn’t part of her order. Melisandre was a member of another order of Red Priests, based at Asshai, and she
didn’t depend of Kinvara’s authority. As a result, Kinvara also had no obligation towards her, and she preferred if their meeting was over as quickly as possible.

“I came to see the queen.”

“She’s not here.”

“Not yet, but she will be very soon. One of us contacted me to tell they were arriving. They defeated the Ironborn at Oldtown.”

She had a good idea of who did this. She would need a serious discussion with Revan when they saw each other. This kind of information was to be relayed to her before anyone else, and certainly not to Melisandre in priority. At least, that meant Oldtown was saved. If only they had been able to save the other city as well.

“You want to advise the queen as you did with Stannis.” Kinvara didn’t ask a question, but she said the truth.

“I have important information for her,” Melisandre insisted. “Are you going to stop me?”

“No. I won’t have to. I will simply tell the truth. I will explain to Daenerys how you burned people alive, especially the little girl.” She stared at the Red Priestess from Asshai. “You advised Stannis Baratheon once. It didn’t end well for him?”

“No,” Melisandre replied shortly.

“And I will not allow you to do the same with the Breaker of Chains. To the opposite of Stannis, she’s not only after a crown. She delayed her return to fight for those who were the property of others, and she wants to make things better for the people in the Seven Kingdoms.”

“Stannis abandoned his war against the Lannisters to save the Wall from the wildlings.”

“From the wildlings, not from the servants of the Great Other.”

“He knew the dead were coming. That’s why he went to the Wall when it was entirely against his interest.”

“And yet he died, trying to take Winterfell. His men were slaughtered like cattle, after you burned his daughter.”

“I know that what I did was horrible, and if I could, I would change it. You don’t need to remind me of this again. I was mistaking to believe that Stannis was the Lord’s Chosen One…”

“Yes, you were mistaking, again. Azor Ahai didn’t defeat his enemies all alone. Stannis fought all alone. How many kingdoms served him at the peak of his power? One? One and a half, at best? Daenerys Stormborn already has half of Westeros at her side. Now that she defeated the Ironborn, the Reach will fight for her unconditionally. She has the most powerful army on this land, and three dragons. She has everything to be Azor Ahai reborn, and she has the means to fight and win the great war.”

“Perhaps, but if we want her to win this war, she must hear what I have to tell her.”

Kinvara observed Melisandre for a moment. The woman from Asshai took the wrong path, but Benerro said that she was sure to serve the Lord of Light when she visited the Red Temple of Volantis. Benerro was seldom wrong, and although this woman committed atrocities, Kinvara felt
that she genuinely wanted to serve their Lord. As much as she hated it, her Lord demanded that she gave a chance to this woman.

“I’m listening.”

Kinvara stood by the fire as Melisandre began to speak. “When Stannis Baratheon died, I went back to the Wall, that was being commanded by Jon Snow at the time, before he became King in the North. And Jon Snow died.”

“He died? According to what we know, he’s quite alive.”

“He is, now. But not long ago, he wasn’t.”

“What do you mean?”

“Our Lord brought him back. I made a ritual. I tried to revive him. He was dead one moment, his heart stabbed several times by his sworn brothers because he allowed the Free Folk south of the Wall, and the next time he was breathing, and walking.”

Kinvara approached her. “Are you sure of that?”

“I saw it with my own eyes. I didn’t see it in the flames. I actually witnessed it, and I wasn’t the only one.”

She didn’t seem to be lying. Kinvara walked back to the fire and gazed at it. “Why would our Lord bring this man back to life?”

A moment went on as she looked into the flames, not really trying to see something in them, but more to think about what she just learned. Such an event seldom happened. The people the Lord brought back were normally given a second chance for a specific reason.

“What if he was the Prince That Was Promised?” Melisandre had joined her near the fire.

She looked at the older woman. “It should be Daenerys. Everything points at her.” Most of the elements of the prophecy fitted with Daenerys Stormborn, and not in indirect ways as it was for Stannis.

“Our Lord brought him back for a reason.”

“What reason?”

“I don’t know.”

“Me neither,” Kinvara confessed after a time. “But that doesn’t mean he is Azor Ahai reborn.”

“There was something that I felt in Jon Snow when I first met him,” Melisandre slowly said. “It was a great power. Stannis had a power like this in him, but it was different. With Jon Snow, the power was… greater, but… It was difficult to discern, or to identify. I felt something between him and his direwolf. They shared something. A bond. But there was something else. You heard what they say about him, and his true parentage.”

“Of course. That he would be the son of Rhaegar Targaryen, the nephew of the Unburnt. However, many are skeptical about this.”

“I think it may be true. I couldn’t be sure when I met him, but as I spent more time close to him, I saw more and more similarities between the power I felt in Stannis and the one I felt in Jon Snow. I
think I felt their dragon blood, only I couldn’t recognize it in Jon Snow in the first place because it was mixed with other powers.”

Could it be possible? Were they wrong to believe that Daenerys Stormborn was the Lord’s Chosen One? Was the real savior in the North? Then this meant that he was… No, she needed more than this.

“What was Jon Snow doing the last time you saw him?”

“After he took back Winterfell from the Boltons with the help of his sister and her husband, he wanted to prepare the North for the attack of the dead.” Melisandre looked at her with a very serious expression. “He saw the Night King. That’s why he allowed the Free Folk south of the Wall. He did this to protect them, and because he knew they would all be killed if he left them north of the Wall.”

A prince with Targaryen blood, with dragon blood, who fought the dead, who faced the Great Other. He didn’t send any army against Daenerys Targaryen. Could that mean he was keeping his forces in the North, for the Great War? It was close, but Kinvara couldn’t be sure of how close it was. Perhaps it was even closer than she believed.

She inhaled deeply. “We can’t be sure of anything. The important is to defeat the Others.”

“But if Jon Snow is the real savior, then he is the one we must serve, and not the Unburnt.”

“Maybe,” Kinvara conceded. “However, we can’t be sure of anything.” She looked back at Melisandre. “I will allow you to stay, and I will not tell the queen about what you did. Not yet. I will let you tell her what you saw. But she may still be our best chance. Her dragons and her armies will be useful in the Great War.”

“I agree.” Melisandre accompanied this with a nod.

Kinvara looked back to the flames. Everything they did couldn’t be in vain. Daenerys Targaryen freed the slaves and broke their chains. She was the real hope for Westeros. Their Lord led them to her. Melisandre was blinded by her assurance that she couldn’t be wrong when she went to Stannis. But could the Lord of Light bring her to this man so she could meet Jon Snow? Nothing was sure. The will of the Lord was uncertain.

She kept staring into the flames. The image of a vision she had in Meereen came back, that of a battle in the snow, and of a great shadow. They were at war, many battles had been fought, and there would be many more to come. They needed to win them all. Defeat was not acceptable. She was about to ask her Lord for answers concerning Azor Ahai when Melisandre spoke again.

“High Priestess, there is something else we should talk about.”

“What is it?” she asked, still looking at the flames.

“This power I felt in Jon Snow… I felt it in someone else.”

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter : Tyrion
TYRION XXIX

“You said there were two more attacks after the first one?”

“Aye.”

They were alone in the solar of the Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch, but it was used by the king now. The dwarf and the bastard were together, talking about the war. Jon Snow was tired, and it was more than visible in his way to answer. He seemed to be struggling to stay on his feet, and his eyelids threatened to close on a regular basis. The joy he might have felt when he saw Arya arrive with them at Castle Black was tempered not only by the fact he didn’t want her to come here, but also by his exhaustion. He looked about to collapse.

He was gripping the side of the table on which lied a map of the Wall and its surroundings, breathing heavily, staring at the castles, certainly in the hope that focusing on them would stop him from falling apart. Tyrion remembered how he used to work day and night when he was Hand of the King. He also worked like a mad man when he was Master of Coin, and his days as Lord of Casterly Rock were long as well. However, he always worked more with his mind than with his body, and Tyrion made his mind the most powerful of his weapon a long time ago. He was used to sleep only a few hours every day. He had done so for over fifteen years, wine and books helping him. It was only after his wedding with Sansa that he started to sleep better, and even then, most days he woke up before her, never forgetting to place a kiss on her brow before leaving her to sleep a little while longer. At night, he came to bed after her. Most of the time, she was waiting for him.

It took them a month to reach Castle Black. The place was in a better state than Tyrion remembered. When thousands of men worked together, it was easy to rebuild a castle falling into ruins. The Watch had lacked men for centuries, and now they had enough men. They needed the return of the dead to remind themselves of the reasons why the Night’s Watch existed. Tyrion took great interest in seeing Castle Black and the other castles along the Wall being rebuilt, but it couldn’t fill the void left by Sansa’s absence. It didn’t take long for him to miss her after he left Winterfell. He left her behind with their daughter. He told himself that he was doing all this for them, for the two women who were his reason to live, but he still felt as if somewhat he abandoned them.

Tyrion was afraid about how his daughter would grow up. His own father had been absent for most of his childhood. Tywin Lannister seldom saw his children. He was Hand of the King, and as such, he spent most of his time in King’s Landing. Tyrion remembered the time when he was only a little boy, asking the servants and the maids where his father was, when he would come back. He wanted to see his father again. That was when he was only four or five. When his father had come back, finally, Tyrion had wanted to see him, to run to him and hug his leg in his arms. But instead, two days before Lord Tywin’s arrival, he was locked into his own chambers. He wasn’t allowed to leave them. His father stayed for two weeks at the Rock, and not a single time did he come to see his son. Then Lord Tywin left, and a few days later Tyrion was free to wander in the castle again.
To refuse to see him was probably the kindest thing his father ever made when he came home, because the following times, he didn’t ignore his son. Instead, it was to disapprove him, to curse him, to insult him, to humiliate him, to give him a lesson. And the lessons were not kind. Tyrion still dreamed at night of the one he gave him when he got married with a wheelwright’s orphan. Even his happiness with Sansa couldn’t erase the memory of Tysha. Shae had disappeared, faded away. Tyrion seldom thought about her, and it had been a long time since he dreamed of her, but Tysha always came back in his dreams. That was the inheritance his father left to him, along with Casterly Rock and the Westerlands. Of the three, only the first was an inheritance that Lord Tywin wanted his youngest son to keep after his death.

Tyrion didn’t want to be like his father. Tywin Lannister had been a hard father, a cruel father, but worse, he had never been there for his children when they truly needed him. That was what Tyrion feared the most. He feared to not be there for his daughter, and even to not be there for his wife. He wanted nothing more than to go back to Sansa and their little girl, and to bring them back to the Rock where they would be safe.

What a childish notion it was. Sansa and Joanna wouldn’t be safe at Casterly Rock. They would be safe nowhere. The dead had come, and if they spread through the Seven Kingdoms, there would be no safe place for his family in this world. He had to fight these things, if he wanted them to live, and if he wanted to live with them. Or else they would all die. Sansa. Joanna. Jaime. Tyrion wondered how was his brother. Was he still serving Cersei? He hoped not. Not if he wanted to stay alive. Cersei had no chance against Daenerys Targaryen.

He looked at Jon Snow. The King in the North had discovered that he was the bastard son of Rhaegar Targaryen, that his father wasn’t his father, that his brothers were not his brothers, and that his sisters were not his sisters. The Night’s Watch had been his family for a time, and they killed him. Arya, Sansa and Bran could say anything, that he was still their brother, that nothing had changed, but it would never change the truth that he wasn’t their brother by blood, and that the family of his father tried to slaughter his mother’s family. The only relative he had from his father’s family actually fought to conquer the kingdoms he was ruling. Jon Snow had no parents, no siblings, no wife, no children, and technically, he had no family. He probably didn’t have friends anymore either. He was alone. Tyrion had a reason to fight. He thought about his wife and his daughter every day and every night. He saw their faces before he fell asleep, but Jon Snow had no one to fight for. All he had was duty. Tyrion couldn’t help but feel sympathy for the King in the North.

“There were two attacks against Eastwatch, three against the Shadow Tower, one at Greyguard, two at Icemark, another at Oakenshield…” Jon Snow recited.

“I get the picture,” Tyrion interrupted. “They attack the Wall everywhere.”

“If they threw all their forces on one point, we would be overwhelmed.”

Tyrion frowned. “Yes. Why didn’t they do it?”

“I don’t know.”

“This makes no sense. If the Night King wanted to cross the Wall, and we know he can, at Castle Black if nowhere else, then why didn’t he send his whole army there? Instead the dead are launching small attacks all along the Wall. Why would they do that?”

“I have no idea.”

Tyrion looked at the lad. He was really about to collapse. “You should get some rest, your Grace.”
“Don’t call me like that. And I can’t rest, my friend.” He rubbed his eyes and released a deep sigh. “When Mance Rayder attacked the Wall, he sent a few groups of wildlings at different places, to attract the rangers far from Castle Black, and weaken the position of the Watch here, where he would lead his main strike.”

“You believe the Night King is trying the same thing? To divide our forces and empty Castle Black?”

“Maybe. I don’t know. How does this man… or this thing, whatever it is, think?”

Tyrion had no more clue on that than him. “Well, all the castles are well garrisoned, and I brought three thousand more men with me.”

“It might not be enough.”

“Did a White Walker cross the Wall at any other place than Castle Black?”

“No. Not that we know. After the first attack on Castle Black, I ordered Eastwatch and the Shadow Tower to seal their tunnels immediately. The Shadow Tower was attacked before they could do it, but no White Walker went through the gate.”

“Perhaps Bran only broke the spells protecting the Wall at Castle Black, and they are still strong everywhere else along the Wall.”

“Then this means Castle Black is the only place where the Night King can get south,” Jon said, dull and emotionless as ever.

Tyrion hoped Jon Snow was right. They weren’t sure about the consequences of Bran getting south of the Wall after being touched by the Night King. The boy couldn’t tell himself how it affected their defenses. Tyrion hoped their assumptions were true and that the dead could only cross at Castle Black, or else they would have serious problems. Tyrion thought that they should have gotten used to it, but he didn’t.

“The Night King will come back and attack Castle Black in force, if he thinks like a human,” Jon Snow said. He didn’t sound very convinced by his own words.

“Then the men I brought with me are welcome, I suppose.”

“Aye, but we only have a few months of rations ahead of us, then it’s over. And winter will last much longer than that.”

Tyrion nodded. He knew the situation would be critical on that point, but he had hoped they would have at least one year of provisions. As always, it was useless to hope.

“Are we still receiving supplies from the Vale?” Tyrion asked.

“Aye, I think so. Eastwatch didn’t tell me otherwise.” Jon Snow sighed once more. “It won’t be enough.”

“No, it won’t be.”

It was useless to deny the truth. They had to face it. Of the four kingdoms sworn to Jon Snow, three were spent by the war. Without the Reach, Tyrion knew they had no chance to maintain a strong army at the Wall and to defeat the White Walkers. They needed the Tyrells, or rather their help.
Jon dropped another heavy sigh. “You should rest, Snow. A king dead from exhaustion will not be of any help to us.”

“I know. You’re probably right.”

Jon Snow had a resigned expression on his face. Perhaps he would finally get some rest before he killed himself. However, there was something Tyrion needed to tell him before.

“Snow, before you go to your chambers and fake to sleep, we need to talk about something.”

“Alright, what is it?”

“Without the Reach, we are doomed. We both know it.”

“Most men would rather deny a hard truth than face it.” Tyrion recognized something he told the bastard a long time ago, before all this madness began. “But we’re not like most men, I guess.”

They exchanged a smile. “The Tyrells sided with Daenerys Targaryen.”

“I know.”

“Which means… that the only way for us to survive, is to make Daenerys Targaryen our ally.”

Jon Snow looked at him with a sorry expression. “I already sent three ravens to Dragonstone, asking for dragonglass, and my aunt didn’t answer. We only have one raven left for the island. I’m afraid she doesn’t believe us, and she won’t believe us.”

“She’ll have King’s Landing soon enough, so we’ll have more than one raven to send her,” Tyrion quipped. “The fact remains we need allies. Even if our men are enough to repel the invasion of the dead, we won’t get through winter with the provisions we have right now. This is why we needed an alliance with the Reach, and why I didn’t advise a marriage with a northern lady.”

“Well, now I doubt Lord Tyrell will want to make an alliance with us. His only daughter is being kept by Daenerys.”

“It’s true, but marriage remains the best way to make alliances.”

Jon Snow rolled his eyes. “This is no time to discuss about these things. The dead are attacking us. Winter is no time for weddings.”

“A wedding could save the North, Jon Snow, if it brings us the alliance we need.”

“If you’re thinking about marrying me to Margaery Tyrell, you’d be better to forget about it. My aunt will never allow that.”

“Probably not, but it’s not about Margaery Tyrell that I was thinking. There’s another queen who is not married, and it so happens that she has dragons to burn the dead by the thousands.”

Jon Snow looked at him. Tyrion made an expression to make him understand that this was no jape. Jon Snow’s eyes widened. “You can’t be serious. She’s my aunt!”

“Among the Targaryens, it’s not unusual, or disapproved for that matter.” Jon Snow turned his back to Tyron and walked away from the table. “It might put an end to the war. We cannot fight her and the dead at the same time. You’re her last relative who’s alive. You wouldn’t have to fight over the Iron Throne this way.”
“You want me to marry a woman I don’t know.” He faced Tyrion again, a hostile expression painted on his face. “A woman who might throw me to her dragons, for all we know. I’m a threat for her. She is the daughter of the Mad King.”

“And you are his grandson,” Tyrion countered. The king had nothing to reply to this. “The rumors about her are… uncertain, and even contradicting. She crucified people in Meereen and sacked Astapor, and she has the reputation of burning her enemies alive. At the same time, she didn’t execute Margaery Tyrell even if she was queen of Westeros not long ago, and she let the Tyrells live even if they were allies of my family. She also fought against slavery in Essos. Maybe she is terrible, but she might the right kind of terrible.”

Jon Snow frowned. “How can someone be the right kind of terrible?”

“By being terrible so the people are not worse. Just like your uncle.”

“My fa… Lord Stark wasn’t a terrible man.”

“Wasn’t he? How many people did he kill in his life? How many times did you see him chop someone’s head?”

“He did this because he had no choice. He did his duty.”

“So he did his duty by being terrible, just like my own father when he crushed the Reynes and the Tarbecks.”

“My father never destroyed houses or slaughtered entire families.”

“Too bad. If the Starks destroyed the Boltons before this war, maybe your brothers Robb and Rickon would still be alive.” Jon Snow was fuming, so Tyrion continued to speak before he stormed out. “Your father may have done things that were necessary, but he did horrible things all the same. We all do horrible things. Daenerys Targaryen is not worse than us.”

“I’m not going to commit incest. What would you say if your father had forced you to marry your own sister?”

On that, Tyrion had nothing to oppose. He would rather kill himself than marry Cersei. He wasn’t Jaime. He tolerated his relationship with Cersei because he was his brother, but he never approved it either. Once, to taunt Cersei, he asked why she only opened her legs for one brother. The jape earned him a good slap on the face. It seemed the proposition he came to make to Jon Snow would be refused.

The dwarf and the bastard remained silent together for a long time, and it was the bastard who broke the silence. “I’ve thought about it anyway. I think there is another way. When Daenerys comes North, I will bend the knee before her, and I will join the Night’s Watch. I’ll only have to say my vows again. This way, I will no longer be a threat to her, and no one will suffer. I will demand that she allows you, Sansa, Joanna, Bran and Arya to live in exchange.”

Tyrion could see that he was resigned to this fate. “You would be the first man in history to join the Night’s Watch twice.” The king’s lips barely rolled up. “But I wouldn’t do that right now if I were you. We need a king to lead our armies for the time being, not a brother of the Watch.”

Jon Snow nodded. If Jon Snow was decided to give up any claim on the Iron Throne, Tyrion wished he could bend the knee before the Dragon Queen right away and be done with it, so the Westerlands and Casterly Rock wouldn’t be in danger, but as he just said himself, they couldn’t do that now. Their priority was to defend the Wall, and they needed a king to keep the four armies in the North
united against their common enemy.

Hopefully, Daenerys Targaryen wouldn’t destroy Casterly Rock. Aegon allowed Loren Lannister and Torrhen Stark to live after they were defeated. Tyrion had sent specific orders to the Rock, telling Genna to surrender if the Targaryen army marched on the Westerlands. It was a fight they couldn’t win. With some luck, Daenerys would do like her ancestor and allow Tyrion to remain Warden of the West, and he could go back to the Rock with Sansa and Joanna once this was all over. However, Aegon’s father hadn’t been killed by his brother. Tyrion knew he was in a delicate situation. He was playing a dangerous game, but it was a game he had to play, if they wanted to keep the dead at bay and survive a new Targaryen monarch at the same time. He could only hope Daenerys Targaryen was more like Aegon the Conqueror than the Mad King.

Tyrion had to admit that Jon Snow’s plan may probably be the best. Daenerys Targaryen might not want of a nephew to rule with her. She led armies, conquered cities, had three dragons, and she already had an experience at ruling. She wouldn’t agree on being a consort. She would want Jon Snow to be her consort, and not the other way around, if she ever considered the possibility of marrying him. However, if Jon Snow decided to join the Night’s Watch again, he would no longer represent a danger for her. Still, Tyrion felt sorry for the bastard.

“You know that you’ll spend your life all alone if you go back to the Watch.”

“I know, but it was supposed to be like that a long time ago. I learned to live with that.” He was resigned, as always. “You know, one day, I stumbled on Maester Aemon discussing with my friend Sam. I heard him say A Targaryen alone in the world is a terrible thing. I wonder… Did he ever suspect who I really was?”

After a moment thinking about that, Tyrion answered. “I’m not sure, but if he said that, I suppose he didn’t know who you truly were.”

“Probably. I wish he was still alive.”

“I liked him. He knew the dead were real and coming, and I thought he only believed it because he wanted his life at the Wall to mean something. I should have believed him right away.”

“There are many things we should have believed.”

The silence lingered between them, only troubled by the muffled sounds of the men sparring outside and the cracking of the fire in the hearth. Tyrion left the King in the North, advising him to sleep. That was what Tyrion did the best: advise kings. At least, with Jon Snow, he had a real king to advise, not a boy who spent his days shooting animals in cages. Jon Snow was a capable ruler, as honorable as his father, and somehow less stupid after everything he went through. He would regret him as king. Of all the kings Tyrion knew in his life, Jon Snow had been the best.

The little Lord of Casterly Rock crossed the courtyard of Castle Black and went to the tunnels under the Wall. They were not as elaborate as the caverns underneath Casterly Rock, but they were impressive all the same. Tyrion didn’t take enough time to visit them the last time he came here. However, this time he didn’t go in the tunnels out of curiosity. These tunnels could be the key to save the Wall. Well, no, he didn’t plan to use the tunnels to save the Wall, quite the opposite, but they could save the North and all the other kingdoms. Tyrion hoped it wouldn’t come to that.

He found Bronn supervising his men as they worked. The knight of the Blackwater saw him arrive from afar.

“Everything is in place,” he told him.
“Good. No one noticed you?” Tyrion asked.

“No. We made sure to wait a night when all the men in these tunnels would be ours. The others won’t see anything."

“None of your men will speak? Around cups of ale, tongues loosen.”

“I made sure they would never talk about it.” They both looked at the men in red armor working, their breath freezing in the air. “Are you sure it’s a good idea?” Bronn asked.

“Not at all. But if need be, it could save us.”

“Not all of us.” The former sellsword was hesitant. Tyrion couldn’t blame him. He was hesitant as well. He didn’t dare to talk about it to Jon Snow, or to anyone else. Even Sansa ignored all this.

“We will only use it if necessary. Hopefully, we won’t have to.”

“You can hope, my friend. I think I gave up on hoping a long time ago.”

“Ser, my lord.” One of the men that was set to work in this task came to them. “Everything is ready.”

“Well, what are you waiting for? Work is done, time for ale.”

The soldiers walked away, and as Tyrion and Bronn followed them behind, he suggested something else. “What about some wine? It’s better than ale.”

“And you got me used to the finest things,” Bronn replied. That was a way to say yes.

An hour later, they were both drunk in Tyrion’s solar. Tyrion made sure to bring enough wine with him when he left Winterfell, and it was always better to get drunk with a friend than alone. He didn’t have Sansa to watch him at the Wall, so he could give in to his drinking habits more easily.

“It’s been a long time ever since I saw you like this. It’s good to see the Imp again,” Bronn said.

“Don’t get used to it, Bronn. I’m a married man, now, and a father. I can’t get drunk in front of my daughter.” He didn’t want Joanna to end up like him.

“Oh, come on! Your daughter will have to live. Daisy always drinks with me.”

“You mean that she gets drunk with you?”

“Aye. And she’s good at it. She’s more resistant than I thought.”

“She worked in a brothel, Bronn.”

“I know. But I had to get drunk alone after she got pregnant. Couldn’t support wine anymore.” He took a large sip.

“Speaking of that, she must have given birth by now.”

“Aye, she did.” Bronn emptied his cup and refilled it again. He also refilled Tyrion’s cup. How many times did they fill their cups so far?

“So, boy or girl?”

“You really want to know?”
“Why? Something I shouldn’t know? Is he a dwarf?”

“No. Though you’re not far from it.”


“No, the boy is healthy. Daisy sent me a raven before we left Winterfell. She’s happy.” A wide smile made its way on Bronn’s face as he drank again. Tyrion could understand. He had a child not long ago too.

“Well, I don’t see where’s the problem then.”

“The problem is the name.”

“Why? How did you call him?”

“I didn’t give him a name. It was Daisy who chose. We agreed that she would choose the name if it was a boy, and I would choose the name if it was a girl.”

“How would you have called him if he had been a girl?”

“Chella.”

Tyrion searched his mind for a short moment, before remembering where the name came from. “Chella, daughter of Cheyk? The leader of the Black Ears?”

“Aye.”

“You really wanted to call your daughter after a woman who made a necklace of her enemies’ ears?”

Bronn shrugged. “I thought about calling her Shae, but I think Chella is better.”

Tyrion wasn’t sure how he would feel about Bronn having a daughter named Shae. He wasn’t sure either how Sansa would feel about it, but something told him she wouldn’t like. He emptied his cup and filled it once more.

“So, how did the Lady of Blackwater call him?” he asked.

“You’ll never guess,” Bronn replied.

“Timett? Shagga?”

“I don’t think she remembers their names.”

“Who, then?”

“You know him well. He’s small. Very small.”

Bronn took another sip while still looking at Tyrion, an amused look on his face. “You’ve got to be kidding me.”

Bronn laughed. “No.” He raised his cup. “To Tyrion Blackwater, heir to Blackwater Keep.”

Tyrion shared the toast with his friend. He didn’t expect someone to call his son after him. It was a good thing that his father was dead. Tywin Lannister didn’t suffer the presence of dwarves near Casterly Rock. Tyrion had doubts that he would suffer people with his name.
“When I went north of the Wall, I met wildlings who talked about these White Walkers. I thought they were only stories like those about mermaids and centaurs. It seems they’re not stories as much as I thought,” Bronn said before emptying another cup.

“Northerners were closer to the truth than we thought. I didn’t believe Jeor Mormont and Aemon Targaryen when they told me about the dead. No one believed them. Now we pay the price for our ignorance. All the legends were true.”

“Couldn’t know. Who would believe tales about blue demons?”

“That’s the problem. We didn’t believe them.”

Bonn shrugged. “Thank you for ordering your big aunt to surrender. I don’t want my keep with my wife and my son inside to burn.”

“Don’t thank me yet. We’re talking about the daughter of the Mad King, and your keep once belonged to the man who murdered her nephew and her niece.” Bronn didn’t react to this, other than drinking. “I’m sure they will be all right.”

“You’re shit at reassuring.” Tyrion couldn’t argue with that.

“I know.”

“Perhaps you should send your daughter back there, at Casterly Rock.”

“By the time they arrive, it might already have fallen to Daenerys.”

“What’s worse? Dragons or White Walkers?”

“Well, dragons don’t try to kill us. Not all of us, and not yet.”

Bonn approved with a sign of head. “I think that I drank enough.” The former sellsword. “Wish there were whores nearby, but apparently they all left when the wildlings destroyed Mole Town.”

Tyrion groaned. “You have a wife, a son, and still you only think about fucking whores?”

“Don’t tell me the only woman you want to fuck is your wife. And if I’m going to die tomorrow, I would rather enjoy my time with a woman before I’m gone. Instead I’ll just go to bed. I’m getting old.”

His friend left, and Tyrion went to sleep not long after. In his dreams, he was with Sansa and their little daughter. He was happy. And the next morning, when he woke up, like every morning since he left Winterfell, he regretted that his dreams were only dreams.

Chapter End Notes

Not the most exciting chapter, I agree, especially since in the south Denerys if doing a lot of fight, but I had to insert a chapter where we got to see how things were at the Wall. We must remember that it still stands. While Daenerys is advancing, Tyrion and Jon can only wait and prepare for the coming storm.

Please review
Next chapter: Jaime
Jaime VII

Chapter Notes

After the short interlude of Bronn and Tyrion talking about their families, we get back to the action around the capital. Another battle is closing on us, and many of the next chapters will be centered around the events taking place into the capital. Four very different people will show us the fate of the capital of the Seven Kingdoms.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

JAIME VII

His aunt brought the cup to her lips, and when she put it down, she gave her answer.

“No.”

They were dining together in her private apartments at Casterly Rock. It was an eternity since Jaime had come here. This was his home, and it had been years since the last time he walked in its corridors. However, he couldn’t stay there for long, only one night, and he had come for a very precise reason. And after he asked Genna, all he had for an answer was no.

“If we do nothing, Genna, Cersei will die,” Jaime tried.

“And no matter what we do, she will die.” She just took a piece of pork and laid down her fork.

“How many people have we lost since this war began, Jaime? Kevan lost his three sons, the Westerlands were sacked, Lannisport was destroyed, and entire armies were slaughtered. We lost tens of thousand people. Kevan lost his three sons before he died as well. Stafford is dead, and your own father, he’s gone too. Joffrey, Tommen, Myrcella, all your nephews and nieces are dead. Tyrion brought most what we had left of valid men with him when he marched North, and we lost the few he left behind when the Ironmen burned Lannisport. And now you ask me to send men to help Cersei? After everything she did? After Lancel, after Tyrion, after what she did in King’s Landing? After the destruction of the city?”

“Cersei was only trying to survive, and to save her children.” Jaime felt he didn’t believe his own words, and that Cersei didn’t deserve his words.

“If she truly wanted to survive, she would have left this stinking city a long time ago. Instead she destroyed the Great Sept of Baelor, and all the city around it. All her children are dead. Our alliance with the Tyrells is gone. And you want me to give you men only so they can die fighting against dragons, in the middle of winter? For the woman who tried to kill your brother, and who shared her bed with your cousin? For the woman who declared herself not only queen of the Seven Kingdoms, but also Lady of Casterly Rock? Who placed a bounty on our lord, his wife and their child? No, Jaime. I’m not going to sacrifice more men to Cersei’s folly.”

Jaime stared at his own plate. He barely touched the delicious pork accompanied with carrots, beans and potatoes. “She’s a Lannister. We have to help her.” His voice was hollow.

“Did she kill Kevan?” Jaime looked up. Genna was looking straight. “Jaime, did she kill Kevan?” He didn’t answer. He couldn’t answer. The queen sends her regards. Genna seemed to take his
silence for an answer. She leaned back into her chair. “I lost Tygett to the pox. I lost Gerion a few years later to a stupid quest for a sword. I lost your father, and then I lost Kevan. All my brothers are gone, Jaime. Dorna is crying day and night. Janei will never get to know her father. All the Lannisters lost their father through this war. The only one who still has a father is your niece Joanna.”

Joanna. Tyrion called her after their lady mother. Jaime was a true uncle for the first time in his life. “Do you know if she looks like Mother?”

“Tyrion says she has golden blond hair, and green eyes, just like him. And for now, she is the future of House Lannister.”

Jaime wondered if he would ever get to see his niece. “Are you sure you can’t spare any man?”

“Jaime, I know you love Cersei, but she dug her own grave, and we can’t bring House Lannister with her in this grave. Anyway, Tyrion declared for the King in the North, and he ordered us to give no help to Cersei and to surrender if the Targaryen army was to march on Casterly Rock.”

“Tyrion did this?”

“Yes. He claims that he is fighting dead men on the Wall, but anyway, even with our full forces, we would be no match for Daenerys Targaryen. Loren the Last surrendered, and he lived. I suppose the best we can do is to hope that this new conqueror will offer us the same thing.”

“Tyrion will not fight?” Jaime was no longer surprised that Tyrion abandoned their sister, but he was surprised that he didn’t put up a fight against the Targaryen girl.

“Who could blame him? Your brother doesn’t want to die. Who would want to die, when their first child was just born? We both know what it is to have children, Jaime. You surely understand how Tyrion feels.”

Jaime was agape in front of her aunt’s declaration. “How do you know?” He didn’t try to hide the truth. It was useless to hide it now.

Genna smiled sadly. “I wasn’t far away when Joanna found you with Cersei in the same bath. And when Stannis began to say that Cersei’s children were yours, I knew immediately that it was true.”

There was no hatred on her face or in her voice, nor sadness. Only disappointment. Jaime said nothing. What was there to say? That he slept with his own sister for years? That together they had three children, and that now all these children were dead? It seemed more people than he thought knew about him and Cersei. Tyrion, Kevan, Genna, and who else? It didn’t really matter now. Jaime was tired of hiding. Hiding had never done him any good. There wasn’t much that ever gave him much good.

“Do you know how heartbroken your mother was when she discovered it, Jaime? Tyrion was already on his way. You have no idea how this affected her. She and Tywin were so happy when you were born. They dreamed Cersei would be a queen, that you would be a great knight, and that no one would ever dare anything against you.” Well, he was a knight, and Cersei was queen. This was similar to what the woman in his dream said when he stood vigil for Myrcella. “But after she found you with Cersei… You have no idea how it broke her heart. She began to pray, but she no longer prayed for you and Cersei.”

“What? What did she pray for?”

“Another son. A son who could be Tywin’s heir.” Genna sighed. “You have no idea how you both
hurt her this day. Tywin blamed Tyrion for being the cause of Joanna’s death, but I’m not sure if she would be dead if she hadn’t opened that door.”

His aunt didn’t show any anger towards him. Sadness, sorrow and regret was all he could perceive in her voice.

“That was all Jaime could say.

“I didn’t know.”

“I have known you since you were a baby in the cradle, Jaime. I saw you all grow up and become men and women. You are my nephew, and I always loved you, just like I loved Cersei. But you both never considered the consequences of your actions. And now, the legacy Tywin worked for so hard is gone. His grandchildren will never be kings, or princes, or queens, or princesses, no matter how we call them. The only legacy Tywin has now, it’s Tyrion, his daughter, and the other children he might have one day. They are the ones we must protect. Cersei is lost. After everything she’s done, I won’t help her. I’m afraid the little girl who I saw growing up at Casterly Rock is gone.”

“I wonder if she ever existed.” Jaime thought aloud before he could think about it.

“She existed, Jaime. But now she’s gone. Will you really fight for her?”

“What other choice do I have? I’m doomed as well. I don’t think the Mad King’s daughter will spare me, after what I did to her father.”

Genna looked at him, a sorry expression on her face. “I won’t give you any man, Jaime, but you can try to recruit your own across the Westerlands. Just don’t expect them to follow you blindly. People are weary of the war now. You will be very lucky if you can raise more than two thousand men.”

Considering the hostility he met as he travelled through the Westerlands, Jaime would say that he was very lucky since he was able to recruit one thousand and five hundred men. These were all green boys, no experimented soldier, aside from himself, the one-handed knight. His conversation with Genna had taken place last month, and now he was heading back to King’s Landing. He had tried to make levies in the north of the Crownlands, with more success than in the Westerlands. Cersei’s call for arms wasn’t answered by several lords, and so there were still men to recruit. Of all those he had, he would say that barely five hundred came from the Westerlands. He was following the Kingsroad south to join the capital. He was only a few days away from Cersei. He didn’t enjoy the prospect of being reunited with her for one single moment. He didn’t know himself why he was even coming back to this shit of a city. For days, he tried to decide what he would do once he would be in the capital.

Jaime hadn’t remained for a single night at Casterly Rock. After the dinner with his aunt, he felt that he was no longer welcomed here. Genna could have kicked him out of the Rock if she had wanted to, but Jaime left his home of his own initiative that very night, heading for Kayce. He had been able to recruit thirty men in this city.

Genna’s words remained with him. The knowledge that he might have played a role in his mother’s death made him suffer like she couldn’t imagine. Of course, why didn’t he consider it as a possibility? Cersei always considered that Tyrion was responsible for their mother’s death. Jaime had never wondered why she died. He never blamed anyone for her death. Perhaps he should have. Perhaps he should have searched a reason for the loss of his mother, but he didn’t. He couldn’t even remember how she looked like. And now he had a niece with the name of the woman who brought him into the world. Jaime wished he could ride north alone, only to see her, and to see his brother. He didn’t want to hide anything. He and Tyrion had things to talk about. However, he couldn’t go north. He had to go to King’s Landing first. He had matters to settle there as much as in the North. He was only uncertain about the way to solve them.
Jaime looked to his hands. Black gloves covered them both. If the left one remained still, there was no way for someone to distinguish the golden hand from the hand of flesh. It was with these hands that he held Tommen into his arms. He held the dead body of his son. He knew that Genna was right about Cersei, and more than that. He knew that she killed Tommen. He knew that she wanted Tyrion dead, and his daughter too. He saw so much about Cersei that he refused to see before. No, he saw these things before as well, but he ignored them. He didn’t care, because Cersei was the woman he loved. He was very good at ignoring things. It was what he did since the day he joined the Kingsguard. He ignored the horrors and the crimes that were perpetrated right in front of him. You swore a vow to guard the king, not to judge him. The words of Ser Gerold Hightower were clear in his mind. He didn’t judge Aerys, not before the end. There were many people he never judged, because he believed it was useless to judge them. And now here he was, the one-handed knight. What was left of him? What had become of the young man who wanted to follow the steps of Barristan the Bold, Ser Duncan the Tall, the Dragonknight, the White Bull and the Sword in the Morning? Who was he now? The Kingslayer? Was that all he was?

A white point appeared on his right hand, only to disappear instantaneously. Then a second one appeared, a third one, a fourth one, and on and on, all melting at the very moment they touched his gloves. Jaime looked to the sky and saw the first snows fall on the Crownlands. The Starks are fools, but they are right. Winter always comes. He looked back to his hands. The melting snow disappeared as soon as it touched something, even on the golden hand that emitted no heat. It was melting snow. This was no surprise since they were the first snows of winter.

Jaime watched the encampment from the height where he stood. It was roughly delimited, and the interior was very disorganized. This was no army at all. He only had a dozen knights to supervise over one thousand men. He knew they wouldn’t stand a chance if they fought the Targaryen army. Their army could barely be called an army. What could he do with that once they reached the gates of King’s Landing? Well, in fact, he didn’t have to ask himself this question. There were no gates left to King’s Landing. He wasn’t even sure if this place could be called King’s Landing anymore. When he left, it made him think about the city of Valyria, in the way Tyrion sometimes described its ruins at supper. Five hundred thousand people he saved, only for them to know the same fate years later.

All that seemed so absurd to Jaime. All his life seemed so absurd now. His knighthood, his family name, his love for Cersei, his sword’s hand, his white cloak… Everything seemed so meaningless now. Jaime took one last look at the camp under the melting snow and left his point of observation. As he progressed to his tent, his heavy boots sent mud all around as he plunged his feet in the ground at every step. His tent was in view when Ser Elwood Harte called for him.

“Ser Jaime, there’s someone who wishes to see you.”

Jaime turned around to say that the newcomer could go and fuck himself, but he discovered to his great surprise that it wouldn’t be quite possible for the intruder in question. Brienne of Tarth was standing right before him. She was as ugly as the last time they saw each other, before she left for Casterly Rock, but her eyes were also bright and blue like the last time. He thought with regret that he didn’t ask about her when he came by the Rock. He thought that she was at Winterfell, protecting the daughter of Catelyn Stark turned Lady of the Westerlands, but here she was, standing right in front of him.

“Ser Jaime,” she told him.

“Lady Brienne. I didn’t expect to see you here,” he almost babbled.

“Ser Jaime, we need to talk.”

Something told him that she wasn’t about to talk about a pleasant matter. She looked worn out,
although she continued to stand tall like the true knight Jaime would never be, and there was something in her face he never saw before.

“Of course, my lady.”

He showed her the way to his tent. When they arrived, Jaime offered her a seat, but she refused. He thought she could benefit from it, considering her obviously exhausted state, but he didn’t press it. Instead, he remained standing just like her, their heads at the same level.

“So, what brings you here?” he asked. “I thought you would be guarding my sister-in-law. Are you in mission for her, or did you leave her service?”

“I didn’t leave Lady Sansa’s service, Ser Jaime.” The opposite would have surprised him. “But I’m not on mission for her either. And I did ask her to relieve me of her service, but she refused.”

That surprised him. “Well, I never thought you would want to leave her.”

“This is not something I wanted. This is something I had to do. My father is dead. Officially, I’m going back to Tarth to bury his ashes.”

The words hung heavy in the cold air. “I know. I’m sorry.” How couldn’t he think about it? He almost forgot about the death of Brienne’s father. He didn’t have the time to know him.

“Ser Jaime, I heard you were in the capital when my father died.”

“Yes, I was.”

“Can you tell me how he died?” Jaime didn’t answer. “Ser Jaime, I know that my father was killed in the capital. I want to know who did this.”

“I can’t tell you,” Jaime said after a long moment.

Brienne looked at him for a long moment, then she nodded. He believed that she understood. “Very well. I thank you for your hospitality, Ser Jaime, but I must continue my journey.”

“Wait. Where are you going?” Something was telling him that she wouldn’t go to Tarth, and she proved him right.

“Toward King’s Landing. My father’s bones might still be there. And I want to discover what happened to him,” she added. “I wish you well, ser.”

“Cersei killed him.” Brienne stopped as she was about to leave the tent, and turned to look at him. “When the Great Sept was destroyed, and that the city burned, Cersei used the situation to take back the control of the Red Keep. Your father tried to stop her. I was outside the city walls. He was executed in the Great Hall at the very moment I arrived.”

The words spilled out of his mouth. For the first time in his life, he didn’t try to defend Cersei. He remembered the look of satisfaction and delight that she displayed as Lord Tarth’s throat was slit and life was choked out of him. He had Brienne’s eyes, and Cersei killed him.

He expected Brienne to look at him with revulsion, with disdain, just like she used to before Harrenhal, but she didn’t.

“I believe you.” She seemed to pity him. “What is this army for?”

“Cersei ordered me to raise men to help with the defense of King’s Landing. As if they’re going to
make any difference."

He would have kept the latter sentence for him before, but he was tired of hiding his thoughts. With Brienne, he felt he could be himself like he never was with anyone, except Tyrion, but his brother was far away while Brienne was here, with him. He thought about asking her about Tyrion, but she spoke before he could.

“I don’t want us to be enemies, Ser Jaime.”

“Me neither.”

“Then I will go.”

“What are you going to do?” He already knew, but he asked all the same.

“My father was killed, Ser Jaime. I’m going to avenge him. I wish you good luck, and I hope our paths never meet again.”

She bowed and left. She didn’t show him any anger or hostility. Jaime remained alone, and he decided he couldn’t let her go.

He found Brienne as she was preparing her horse.

“Brienne, you can’t go.”

“I have to.”

“You won’t get inside the Red Keep. They will never open the gates for you. And even if they do, you would have the empty streets of the city to get through before. They are filled with bandits, assassins and killers, even more than before. And the men inside will never let you get close to Cersei.”

“I thank you for your concern, Ser Jaime, but I can defend myself.”

“Of course, you can, but you will never get to Cersei before someone kills you.”

She looked at him, dropping the reins of her horse. “If your own father was murdered, wouldn’t you do everything to avenge him?”

Yes, Jaime knew he would make the same thing, and he knew that no matter how people would try to dissuade him, he wouldn’t listen. If their positions were reversed, he would have told Brienne exactly the same thing.

“I don’t believe your father would want his only daughter to die.”

“My father is dead, Ser Jaime.”

She turned to her horse and was about to mount it. “You could follow me.”

She stopped in her movement. “I beg your pardon.”

“You could follow me, with the army.”

“Why would I? You’re bringing this army to defend your sister and her throne.”

“That’s what Cersei ordered me to do.” He looked straight at Brienne, to her blue eyes he always
found kinder than Cersei’s. Jaime felt he had never been more certain about anything in his life. “But I don’t have to follow her orders.”

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter : Daenerys
Daenerys finally arrives in King’s Landing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The column spread from one horizon to the other. Dornishmen, knights of the Reach, Dothrakis, Unsullied, soldiers of the Stormlands, all united in one army, marching on the city of King’s Landing. They needed time to cross the Blackwater, but after Daenerys came back with her dragons, it wasn’t long before the forces still loyal to Cersei Lannister ran away with their tail between their legs. She only made one attack with Drogon over their main encampment, and the whole army disbanded. They needed time to build a bridge just strong enough to allow their armies to cross on the other bank of the river, but they did it, and now they were progressing towards King’s Landing.

The Lannister forces didn’t dare to attack them as they built the bridge. With boats, they brought forces strong enough to hold a position on the northern shore, and her dragons inspired enough fear to make their enemies think twice before attacking them. Now their whole army was in the Crownlands. According to her advisors, they would reach King’s Landing before nightfall.

It hadn’t been easy. There were tensions among everyone in her army. Daenerys spent a lot of time arbitrating discontents among her men. Dome and the Reach had a long history of shared hatred. The storm lords hated the Tyrells after they fought each other in the previous wars. The Dothrakis were despised by everybody. The Unsullied were barely seen as better. The only people to actually respect Grey Worm and his men were the Dothrakis. Essos and Westeros marched together, but not in harmony. And among the Westerosi, harmony was far from being gained either. Daenerys wondered how her father managed to rule all these kingdoms who were so different.

Another group who was despised were the Red Priests. Daenerys welcomed two of them on her war councils. Kinvara had been an unconditional ally ever since Meereen, and Revan was a very capable advisor and military commander. She witnessed his prowess in battle in Oldtown. However, the lords of Westeros didn’t like to see foreign priests advising her. Hostility was plain towards them, and the arrival of another one, Melisandre of Asshai, didn’t make things better. Daenerys didn’t allow her on her council. She once advised Stannis Baratheon, and the consequences of welcoming this woman on her councils would have been disastrous for her relations with her allies. She talked to this woman in private, however. She knew Jon Snow, and Daenerys needed as much information as she could gather on him.

Melisandre told her that she felt a power in Jon Snow, a power similar to the one she felt in Stannis Baratheon, and she said that she felt this power in Daenerys as well. The power was greater with Daenerys than with anyone else, but she claimed that Jon Snow’s was stronger than Stannis’s. She believed that Jon Snow could actually be a Targaryen, and that if he wasn’t, then he had dragon blood somewhere else among his ancestors. Daenerys didn’t know what to think of it. Did she really have a relative still alive in this world? She believed everyone was gone. At the same time, this meant that Jon Snow was an even more dangerous threat to her rule. She spoke about this with Trystane Martell one evening, and she asked him who was the true heir to the Iron Throne in his
opinion.

Daenerys had asked him the question as some sort of test. If he answered that she was the only true heir to the Iron Throne, if he denied any evidence that Jon Snow could be a Targaryen and have a real claim, then she would know he was only licking her boots. But it wasn’t what happened. The prince of Dorne gave her a very relative answer. He said that legitimate children always prevailed in the succession, and that even if Jon Snow was the son of Rhaegar Targaryen and Lyanna Stark, he was only a bastard, and thus the throne belonged to Daenerys. However, there had also been a rule among the Targaryens that the heir was the closest male relative. When a king died without sons or grandsons, the crown went to his brothers, or his nephews, or his cousins, but never to his daughters if he had any. Trystane also said that in Dorne, it was always the closest relative, independent of the sex, who inherited. However, he couldn’t tell with certainty who the lords would support if Jon Snow really was who he pretended to be. He only told her that he didn’t believe his father would turn on her.

The prince had always been honest with her, and he did his best ever since he arrived in Meereen, although his decisions might not always be the best. Daenerys trusted him more than the Tyrells or the storm lords or the other lords of the Reach, or even the Dothraki commanders, who began to question her after she forbade them from raping and plundering. Daenerys also had to admit that he was handsome in his own way. He was far from being ugly, and truth be told, she thought he would make a better husband than Hizdahr zo Loraq.

She followed the column on its right. Ser Jorah and Grey Worm were accompanying her. It was the first time Grey Worm rode a horse, but he did it well enough. The Unsullied learned quickly. Daenerys spotted the small troop of men loyal to the Red Priests, the men they called the Fiery Hand. The priest with the mask led them, while Kinvara and Melisandre rode outside the column. In battle, it was obvious who was the real leader among the Red Priests.

Around Daenerys were empty fields. The wheat and corn were reaped a long time ago. Lord Tyrell told her the Reach had collected its last harvest before winter. She was wrapped in heavy dark robes. Ser Jorah told her it would only get colder as they progressed north. Winter is here. He could do nothing but quote the words of House Stark. On their way, her army had crossed the path of several thousands of people, refugees who were fleeing King’s Landing. Some asked for her help, others begged her to let them live. They believed she had come to kill them. Some even insulted her, and a few went as far as to curse her.

Against the opinion of her advisors, Daenerys welcomed them and ordered them to be dressed and fed. Even Ser Jorah opposed her decision, saying they would be a burden. The only one to support her was Kinvara. She would never forget the priestess’ outburst when Mace Tyrell said these people were useless mouths.

“If it were your children who came to us, starving and freezing, would you say they are useless mouths? No, because your children are from the nobility. That’s how you think. Because someone has a title before his name, because he’s a ser or a lord, then he’s worth something, but the other people are nothing to you. Have you ever considered what you would be without the smallfolk, Mace Tyrell? Have you ever wondered what you would eat, what you would wear, where you would live, if there weren’t people working to satisfy your every need, day and night? You won’t die of starvation or from the cold during the winter, but these people will. And yet they’re the ones who fill your granaries, build your castles and mend your roads. They are the ones who make this country what it is. So before you start saying these people are useless, you should lose a few pounds, because if there’s a useless mouth here, it’s yours.”

The Lord of Highgarden had been speechless, and furious, but Daenerys brought them all back to
order. She wouldn’t abandon the people who came to her. If Mace Tyrell didn’t agree with her, he was free to ride back to Highgarden, and she would deal with him as soon as she was done with Cersei. She would only have to choose another Warden of the South. She told him so, and it was enough to shut him up.

Daenerys still made a compromise. The people who came to her had to help her. Revan suggested that each family who asked them for protection would have to give one man in age to fight in their ranks. The Red Priest said these people had to contribute to the war effort if they wanted her as their queen. Daenerys adopted Revan’s idea, but when the lords suggested they turn down the family who had no man capable of fighting, she refused. Families would provide one soldier when they could, or they would be left alone, but if they had no man of age to fight, then she would take them under her protection all the same. She wouldn’t ask from her people things that they couldn’t give her.

They had left early at dawn, and before the morning was over, they could see the city slowly appearing at the horizon. When they were close enough, Daenerys rode to a nearby hillock and looked at the city. She didn’t know what she expected. Maybe she expected a shining city, with walls made of gold, the Red Keep blazing in the morning sun, but the vision she discovered was entirely different. It looked like ruins. Entire pans of the walls were gone, and the buildings she could see were all black when they still stood. Even from afar, the scene before her was one of desolation, destruction, and abandon. She couldn’t imagine that someone was living there. The Red Keep stood tall, but it looked more like a prison than a castle. On one of the hills, there was a great structure, also in ruins.

“The Dragonpit?” she asked.


“Did you ever come here before?”

“Aye. A few times.”

“How did it look like, back then?”

“It was better. I never found King’s Landing quite attractive, or beautiful, but now it makes me think of Astapor. It wasn’t in ruins the last time I came.”

It was true. King’s Landing looked like Astapor after Daenerys killed the Good Masters.

“Fire.” Daenerys looked at her left to see Melisandre looking straight ahead, her look petrified and her mouth half-opened as she gazed at the city.

“Fire brings life, but he can also destroy it,” Kinvara said. She was standing next to Melisandre. She didn’t look surprised like the other Red Priestess. Melisandre bowed her head a little.

“That’s Cersei’s doing?” Daenerys asked.

“Yes. She was ready to be queen of the ashes. She wanted a crown at all cost, even if it meant having nothing left to rule.”

Daenerys looked again. There was an army camped before the walls. The camp was quite small. There were also other tents spread everywhere around the city. They were other refugees. Cersei would pay for that.

“How many men are there in front of us, Ser Jorah?” she asked.
“Three thousand, at best. They won’t hold against us. A simple charge should make them disband. The city could be ours within the hour.”

She thought about it. The Iron Throne was there, within easy reach. She only had to place her troops into formation, and to send her dragons after the army before them. The battle would be won within a few minutes. However, the enemy soldiers were not the only people she could see before her. There were other people outside the city, women, children and old men. And there were other people inside the city, surely. People hadn’t all left Astapor after she sacked it. Some remained behind, and certainly it was the same here. They would defeat Cersei’s army easily, but then, after…

A conversation came back to her mind, one that she had with Ser Barristan and Ser Jorah in Astapor. There was something her bear asked to Barristan. Have you ever seen a war where innocents don’t die by the thousands? The other knight had reluctantly answered by the negative. I was in King’s Landing after the sack, khaleesi. You know what I saw? Butchery. Babies, children, old men. More women raped than you can count. There’s a beast in every man and it stirs when you put a sword in his hand. She looked at the northern knight. She would never forget his words. If she gave the order to attack, King’s Landing would know the same fate again. She wanted the Iron Throne, but not at the cost of her people suffering.

“Send an envoy to the Red Keep. Tell Cersei that I want to talk with her. And that I will meet her outside the city walls,” she declared.

“Cersei Lannister will not accept, your Grace,” Jorah said.

“Send the envoy all the same.” She had to try. “Have him tell Cersei that I order her to meet me now, with the most important citizens of the city, and that it will be her only chance to negotiate. And convoke the lords for a war council. Tell the army to stop and to take position for battle.”

Daenerys stayed a few more seconds to look at the city in ruins, and then she rode back to her army. Her pavilion was in place in no time, and all the commanders in her army and her advisors were here as soon as it was ready. For the Reach, Lord Mace Tyrell was there, with Dickon Tarly, the Lord of Horn Hill, and Ser Baelor Hightower. Trystane Martell and Anders Yronwood represented Dorne. There were two lords for the Stormlands, three commanders of her Dothraki hordes, Malcolm Branfield, Grey Worm, Ser Jorah, the High Priestess Kinvara and Revan. Yara Greyjoy and Rodrik Harlaw were not present. They had gone to free the Shield Islands with the Redwynes after the Battle of Oldtown, and now they were probably heading for the Iron Islands. The latest reports said that Euron Greyjoy was on Pyke, gathering his remaining forces. Yara would have to crush them once and for all. She wouldn’t have the crown Daenerys promised her if she couldn’t deal with her uncle.

Daenerys opened the council. “My lords, I gave Cersei Lannister a chance to parley.”

She didn’t have to wait for reactions. “What is to discuss with that woman?” Lord Yronwood asked with scorn.

“She killed my father, your Grace,” Lord Tarly said.

“And my son,” Mace Tyrell added.

“She murdered tens of thousand people, if not more,” Revan summarized. His face turned towards her, though she couldn’t see it. “I don’t believe you’re going to offer her a way to escape, your Grace. Or else, I don’t know you as well as I thought.”

She looked at all her advisors. They were waiting for an answer from her. “I’m not going to spare
Cersei, if you want to know. My father was called the Mad King, but I believe that now Cersei Lannister is the Mad Queen. The people of King’s Landing we met call her this way. My father had dozens, maybe hundreds of people burned alive, and he laughed as they died, but Cersei did the same for thousands of people. She destroyed an entire city. And while the city burned, she was playing the harp, drinking wine, and fucking her own brother.” The tales had been brought by the people of King’s Landing they met on their way. “I’m not going to spare her. The only choice I’m going to give her is to have a trial, and the chance for a painless death, but that is all. She’s going to die. You have my word. I never gave you any reason to doubt it before.”

“She will refuse, your Grace,” Dickon Tarly said.

“Probably, and if she does, then we will take the city by force.”

Everyone around her nodded in approval. What they didn’t know was that she wouldn’t only make an offer to Cersei. She expected her to refuse, but the people who had to support her rule may be more cooperative.

“The Unsullied will lead the attack on the city,” she resumed. “A detachment from the Reach, the Stormlands and Dorne will attack them directly while the Unsullied will get around to penetrate the city and take the Red Keep. The Dothraki will remain behind and chase the enemy if they flee.”

“The Unsullied may meet heavy resistance inside the city,” Kinvara warned. “Two priests are inside these walls. They say the streets have been abandoned by Cersei. She gathered all her men into the Red Keep. The alleys and avenues of the capital are controlled by bands of criminals who kill and loot everyone they see. They could pose some problems, and the Unsullied are not at their best when they are fighting in streets.”

“The Unsullied fight well wherever they go,” Grey Worm opposed, placid.

“With all respect, Torgo Nudho, you didn’t fight as well in the streets of Meereen as in the field. The Seconds Sons and the Fiery Hand fought better. They are better trained for this kind of fight.”

“You’re not going to let these foreign priests go first inside the city?” Lord Tyrell asked, clearly opposed to the idea, as were all the people from Westeros in this room.

“Westerosi don’t know how to fight,” one of the Dothraki said. “Let us take these houses of stone for you, Great Khaleesi.” It was a chance that the lords of Westeros didn’t understand Dothraki, but their expressions were nonetheless hostile towards the horselord.

Daenerys wanted the Unsullied to enter the city because she knew that if anyone else did, no matter if they were from Essos or Westeros, the city would know another butchery like when her father fell. Unsullied wouldn’t rape and wouldn’t kill innocents, they wouldn’t set fire to what was left of these ruins if she gave them the order, but the Dothrakis and the armies of Westeros would, no matter what orders she gave.

“This is my decision. The Unsullied will take King’s Landing,” she declared.

“Your Grace.” Revan spoke this time. “If I may, we should send the refugees who came to us in the vanguard.”

“You want to use them as arrow fodder?” Ser Jorah asked.

“These people don’t know how to fight. If we send them in the first lines, they will all die,” Kinvara argued.
“Not necessarily,” the other priest declared. “And anyway, the common soldiers seldom know how to fight in Westeros. They are mostly peasants, or drunkards found in taverns. But these men hate Cersei. She destroyed everything they held dear. Many lost people they loved because of her. They want revenge on her as much as most of the people in this tent. They will fight to the death, like savage beasts, to kill her. And there are people from King’s Landing in the army facing us. They only fight for Cersei because they are afraid of her. If they see their fellow townsman charging against them, they will hesitate to fight. They might even turn against Cersei and her other men. We could win this battle with very limited losses. And they know the streets of the city better than anyone. They will know how to face the criminals in the alleys. Some of them were members of such bands before they came to us. They are the ones with the best odds of taking the Red Keep in one swift attack. They might even kill Cersei for us.”

Daenerys thought about Revan’s plan. It was a bold one, but one that could succeed. Perhaps the citizens of King’s Landing would be so enraged at Cersei that they would only think about killing her and wouldn’t take time to plunder or rape. However, their rage could also lead them to commit atrocities against their own people. A man would never put fire to his own city, or kill the people he lived with for years. That didn’t stop the Sons of the Harpy in Meereen. Before Daenerys could take a decision, a man walked inside.

“Your Grace, Cersei Lannister has sent three emissaries to talk with you.”

She turned her attention to him. “And Cersei? I asked her to come as well.”

“She didn’t, your Grace. She wouldn’t come.”

“That settles the matter,” Lord Tarly stated. “She doesn’t want to parley. She refused your terms, your Grace. We should send the emissaries away and launch our assault on the city immediately.”

“We won’t,” Daenerys decided. “I’m going to listen to what these men have to say first.”

“You grace, this is useless,” Lord Yronwood argued.

“I disagree,” Revan declared. “These men could be useful to us. It’s always possible to turn an emissary who’s in a desperate situation against the person who sent him.”

“I agree with Revan.” Daenerys spoke to the man who brought her the news. “Tell them to wait for me before our army. The discussion will take place right in front of my men.” She then looked at all her advisors. “You follow me. You will all be present.”

She walked away from the tent, followed by a retinue of lords, knights, priests and military commanders. They took their horses and walked between lines of Dornish soldiers. As they emerged from the army, Kinvara quietly touched her arm.

“Stay far from these men, your Grace. Don’t get too close to them,” she said.

She didn’t plan to do so either. During parleys, she always remained at respectable distance from her interlocutors. As the messenger said, three men were waiting for her. They had come with horses as well, and they were still mounting them. One of them wore a red armor, while the two others, who stood in retreat, were dressed in doublets and with silks. They were no soldiers.

“Where is Cersei?” Daenerys asked. “I doubt we didn’t communicate well. I ordered her to meet me, but I don’t see her. Who are you?”

The man who led them stepped forward. “I am Ser Adam Whiterspoon. The men behind me are Tandos and Orac. They are prominent citizens of King’s Landing and their wealthiest merchants.
Queen Cersei sent us to discuss terms with you.”

“Queen Cersei?”

“Your only true queen is standing right in front of you, Lannister,” Lord Yronwood roared. “You should kneel before her.”

The man in armor was obviously uneasy, and the two behind him as well. None of them answered. So it was Daenerys who spoke.

“Cersei Lannister certainly told you that I am a foreign queen, who brought barbarians to kill your sons and rape your daughters. She certainly told you that I was as mad as my father. But I ask you to look behind you. Look at King’s Landing. My ancestors built this city. Look at what’s left of it. Look at what Cersei did.” She closed her eyes and raised her arm. “Now look over your head.”

After a few seconds, Drogon’s screech was heard. A few more seconds and the ground shook when he landed not far from them. When she opened her eyes, she saw the three men, terrified as they looked at her dragon.

“I have three like this one, and they all obey me. I could have ordered them to burn Storm’s End, Highgarden, Oldtown, and even King’s Landing again. But I didn’t. Look behind me. The lords and the knights of the Stormlands, of the Reach, of Dorne, and their people, the people of your city, they all stand with me. I am not a stranger. I was born on Dragonstone, and forced into exile because Tywin Lannister wanted me dead the very moment I was born. I was wailing in my cradle that he was already conspiring to murder me. I have Westeros behind me. Look at what you have behind you. It was Cersei who destroyed your city. It was Cersei who watched your homes and your people burn, and who started all this. And it’s not only Cersei who did this. Cersei is only a spoke on a wheel. This wheel spins, one spoke getting at the top, and another one replacing it after a time. And while the wheel keeps spinning, it crushes people on the ground, and the only ones who get something out of it are the Cersei Lannister of this world. Do you really want to fight for this woman? What has she ever brought to you? Death? Destruction? Why are you fighting for her?”

She waited for an answer again. The knight finally sighed after a long moment. “I swore an oath to House Lannister a long time ago. I pledged my life to them, promised to follow their orders.” His helmet was removed, and Daenerys saw tears coming to his eyes. “My wife was in Lannisport when the Ironborn attacked it. And instead of being there, the Imp had gone North, because his little wife wanted her home back. And Cersei… she did nothing for us either. I’m tired of serving them. All I ever gained from that is pain and sufferings.” He got off his horse. “I don’t know who you are, but I’m ready to serve you. I have nothing left tying me to the Lannisters.”

He knelt and looked to the ground. Daenerys was a little surprised of the effect her speech had. She didn’t expect that a knight would turn against her enemies so quickly. She looked at the merchants still sitting on their horses nonetheless.

“What do you have to say? I can free you from Cersei, but if you stay with her, you will share her fate.”

The two men looked at each other, and after an initial hesitation, they got off their horses as well, and came to kneel next to the knight. Daenerys decided to come on her feet too, and she was followed by a few other people behind her. She walked toward these men.

“Will you help me to free King’s Landing and to bring justice to Cersei?” she asked.

“Yes.” They all said it.
“Good. In this case, follow us. You’re going to help us to take King’s Landing.”

She turned away and proceeded to walk back to her command tent, but Kinvara raised the voice right at this moment. “Wait. You, remove your armor.” Daenerys turned her head and saw that she was speaking to the knight. “Unless you have something to hide beneath it.”

Her gaze wandered from the High Priestess to Ser Whinterspoon. He was back on his feet, just like the two others, but none of them dared to move. They remained still for a time, and then they moved. Everything was over within seconds. The knight produced a dagger from his armor, and so did the two merchants. They rushed towards her, their knives in the air. Ser Jorah appeared on her left, and Revan from her right, unsheathing his flaming sword. Jorah took care of the knight. In fewer time than was needed to say it, his sword was piercing his heart and coming out from his back. The Red Priest cut clean through one of the merchants, separating his chest from his legs. The other merchant looked at the sword burning with fire in utter fear. He had stopped in his attack, and before he could react, Revan punched him in the face, sending him on the ground, his hand releasing the blade he held. It bounced on the grass until it stopped, laying a few feet away from him.

In no time, Revan seized the man by the clothes and brought him back to her feet, the face ending first in the muddy grass. When the man managed to straighten his head and look up, she saw that he was bleeding from his broken nose. Fire was soon on his throat, and he flinched. Revan spoke to him in a very threatening tone.

“If you don’t want to die very painfully, I suggest that you tell us who sent you and why. Tell us everything, or else you’ll discover that slowly burning is the worst death someone can experience.”

The man was wailing on the ground. “Please, I beg you. Don’t kill me. I had no choice.”

“We always have a choice.” Ser Jorah stepped forward the merchant. “You tried to murder someone at a parley. You came with a banner of peace, and yet you tried to murder a queen you just acknowledged.”

“Please, don’t kill me. Please, don’t kill me. I beg you.”

Daenerys stood right in front of this man, her feet only a few inches from her. She looked at him, his ruined face covered with blood, his eyes begging for her. Daenerys was merciful, but only towards those who deserved it.

“If I remember well the rules of my country, an attempt of murder on your queen is punishable of death, and so is the murder during a parley under the protection of sacred laws.” She looked away from this man and spoke to Revan. “Kill him the way you want.”

The Red Priest nodded and raised his sword, the point directed towards the man’s chest. Daenerys looked at the man at her feet.

“Please, I had no choice,” he shouted. “She had my daughter.”

“Wait.” She raised her voice, ordering Revan to stop. He kept his sword in position, ready to kill the man any time. “Who has your daughter?” she asked the man.

“My Tansy. They have her. The que… Cersei took her prisoner. She said that if we didn’t kill you…” His words were lost as he gulped. “She has a man, Quiburn, he does… horrible things. She showed us what he did to the people who betrayed her. She told me that if we refused to kill you… She would do the same to my Tansy.”
He burst into tears, his face buried into the grass. Daenerys looked at him for a long time. Finally, she looked at Jorah. “Put him in chains. I’ll decide his fate later.”

The knight of Bear Island did as he was told.

“It was a trap,” Mace Tyrell said. He was still on his horse.

“Of course, it was a trap.” She looked at all her advisors. “I gave Cersei a chance to surrender peacefully, and she chose violence. We’re going to give it back to her. Join your men. We begin our attack now. Follow the plan I gave you. Grey Worm, find Cersei and keep her alive. I will have her executed myself.” She looked at the city, and to the Red Keep looming over it. “Before the end of the day, King’s Landing will be ours,” she said loudly.

Men behind her cheered. She turned and saw that the whole army were raising their arms. She walked between their ranks. They were hitting their shields as she walked by them, eager to fight. She didn’t care to take back her horse. Cersei just tried to kill her. She would pay for that. Daenerys reached an elevated position. Cersei’s army was so small. Her few thousands were nothing next to her tens of thousands. Her men would reduce hers to nothing within minutes.

“And now it begins.” Kinvara had joined her.

“No. Now it ends,” Daenerys replied. She wouldn’t use her dragons this time. She wouldn’t take the risk of burning King’s Landing again. She looked at Kinvara who stood next to her. “You knew something like that was coming. You knew they would try to kill me. That’s why you warned me to stay far from them, and that’s why you asked the knight to remove his armor.”

“I only suspected.”

“You had another vision in your fires?” Daenerys asked, expecting the High Priestess to say yes.

“No. Melisandre had a vision, but she made mistakes before when she interpreted them. She said that she saw daggers waiting for you, hidden behind a white clothe. I only took precautions.”

Daenerys returned her attention to the battle that was about to begin in front of her. Her army began to move forward. “I’ll need a discussion with Melisandre once this is all over.”

Her army engaged the enemy. The cavalry of Dorne, the Reach and the Stormlands rode around her main forces and attacked Cersei’s forces from behind. The Unsullied, who remained in reserve before, chose the moment to join the action and ran towards the city. King’s Landing was defenceless, except for the Red Keep. Grey Worm and his men would have to take it. It was at this moment that a scout came to tell her that a new Lannister army just arrived.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter : Brienne
Brienne III

Chapter Notes

I’m sorry to have delayed the release of this chapter for so long. I’ve been very busy lately, and I try my best to keep up with two chapters every week. I also just received confirmation that my master in Economics is completed. 😊

So, the last chapter, we saw the beginning of the Battle of King's Landing. It continues here. Daenerys just defeated the army Cersei had assembled, and escaped an attempt of murder, but another army is entering the battlefield.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

BRIENNE III

They were slowly progressing on the Kingsroad. She rode next to Ser Jaime ever since they met a few days ago. And ever since their discussion the day they were reunited, he remained silent. He didn’t say a word to her since that day.

She looked at him. The grim and hollow expression on his face gave him an appearance quite similar to the one he had after Locke cut his right hand. She used to despise him before that. For her, he was the Kingslayer at this moment, and nothing more. Her entire opinion of him was solely based on the fact that he killed the king he swore to serve. But then he saved her life, lied to Locke and his men about the supposed riches of Tarth, and when she saw how their captors mocked him and mutilated him, she could only pity him. That didn’t stop her from despising him. He remained the Kingslayer in her eyes. It was only after he told her the truth about the reasons that led him to murder the Mad King that her opinion completely changed about him. There was so much more about this man than she believed at first.

Ser Jaime had been a broken man after he lost his hand, and right now he looked like that again, a broken man. He was about to betray his own sister. Brienne was aware of the stories that were told about the Kingslayer. She was there when he confessed to Lady Stark that he had never been with another woman than his sister, but she didn’t care about it. No matter what were his feelings for Cersei Lannister, she knew it had to be hard for him to turn against someone of his own blood. He turned against his own king before, but now it was about fighting someone of his own blood. She couldn’t begin to imagine how he was tortured in his mind.

“You don’t have to do this, Ser Jaime, you know. Nothing forces you to help me. She is your sister, no matter the crimes she committed.”

He didn’t look back at her, but he granted her an answer all the same. “It’s all right.”

“It’s not. You’re not fooling me.”

“I’m just going to have the drawbridge lowered and the portcullis opened for you. After that, you’re on your own.” He spoke with exasperation. “I may be a kingslayer, but I’m not a kinslayer. Or at least not too much. If there’s someone who can claim that she is capable of killing someone of her own blood in my family, it’s Cersei. The queen sends her regards.”
He said the last sentence with venom. She didn’t push the matter further. She understood that he had very good reasons to not want to talk about it. The struggle he faced when he had to decide what to do about the Mad King had been horrible, and the one he faced right now was certainly not easier.

“I just want to tell you, Ser Jaime, that when all this is over, I would understand if you hated me.”

That didn’t mean that she wouldn’t kill Cersei. She ordered the death of her father. Lord Selwyn Tarth had come to King’s Landing to serve the king, Cersei’s own son, on the request of Lord Randyll Tarly, the Hand of the King, and for that he was murdered. She was ready to live with Ser Jaime’s hatred for the rest of her life. It wouldn’t be easy, but she would manage.

“How could I hate someone who would kill my sister, when she already succeeded to make me wish she was dead?” She turned her head towards him, and she met his gaze. “I couldn’t hate you for that, Brienne. I couldn’t hate you, no matter what you do.”

She didn’t really know how to reply to this, so she only nodded in acknowledgement. They continued to ride without talking to each other. The entire army said no word. When Brienne rode with Renly, there were animated discussions at all times, day and night, while they were moving or resting. The knights were riding for a king they loved, and they believed in him and in his victory. When she rode with Lord Tyrion and Lady Sansa to Riverrun and then to Winterfell, the atmosphere hadn’t been merry, but men were mostly in good spirits between themselves. In this army, the silence was complete, heavy, thick. You could cut it with a knife.

The men who marched with Ser Jaime didn’t believe in their cause, or in the queen they were tasked to save. They were freezing, following the path to King’s Landing not because they wanted to, but because they were ordered to. Nor their mind nor their heart were on the task at hand. They wouldn’t stand a chance against the armies of the southern kingdoms. Brienne knew the knights of the Reach well enough from her time with Renly’s army to be conscious that Jaime’s men would stand no chance against them. They would die, and they would die for a queen that they didn’t want to serve, and a queen who didn’t deserve to be served.

It had been difficult for Brienne to leave Lady Sansa. She respected her immensely, and she had come to be proud to serve her, as much if not more than to serve her lady mother. They had the same strength, and she had come to respect Lord Tyrion as well. The fact that he was Ser Jaime’s brother helped her to have a better opinion of the Lord of Casterly Rock. She didn’t want to leave her lady’s service, but she had to. She had been heartbroken at the news of her father’s death. It didn’t take long for her to guess who was the cause of his death. She understood at this moment how Ser Jaime must have been conflicted in the days when he served the Mad King. Her loyalties had never been conflicted before, but now she had to choose between her loyalty to her father’s memory, or her loyalty to Lady Sansa. That’s why she asked her lady to relieve her from her service. She didn’t want her two loyalties to conflict, and she didn’t want the daughter of Lady Catelyn to have a sworn shield who couldn’t completely dedicate herself to her. In the end, Lady Sansa refused to allow her to leave her service, but she allowed Brienne to leave in order to bury her father’s bones. Brienne wished that Lady Sansa just released her from her oath. Instead she had to lie to her lady. She couldn’t tell her the real reason why she was going south. She was leaving to kill the woman who murdered her father, and she couldn’t tell that to Lady Sansa, or she would have denied her request. She had lied to her lady, to the person she swore to protect. If she was to die after she killed Cersei, she wouldn’t oppose it. At least she could see her father again.

“How is she?” Ser Jaime’s voice got her out of her reverie.

“I beg your pardon.” It was the first time that he actually started the conversation since they were reunited.
“How is she? My niece. Tyrion’s daughter, or Sansa’s daughter, whoever you prefer. We’ll be in
King’s Landing within hours, so it might be the last chance I’ll have to hear about her.”

She was surprised he didn’t ask about his niece before, and even more surprised that she didn’t think
about telling him about the little Lady Joanna. Brienne wished that Lady Stark was alive to see her
first grandchild.

“She has blond hair, and green eyes, like you.” She didn’t know what else to say. Brienne had no
experience with children. She was too young to remember her two younger sisters when they died in
the cradle, her father never had other children after her mother died, and Brienne never married.

Jaime released a very short laugh. “A true Lannister. I hope Catelyn Stark will not want to kill
Tyrion more than she already did.” He looked straight ahead of him, and it took him a moment
before he spoke again. “Do you think I’ll have other nephews and nieces?”

“I hope so. The Lady Sansa hoped as well.”

“She’s Lady Stark’s daughter, for sure. Too bad I’ll never get to see them.”

Brienne frowned at this. “What do you mean?”

“What do you mean, Ser Jaime? You’re not dying?” For a moment, she feared the worse. Had his
injury not been treated well?

“You’re really dumb, sometimes.” She felt insulted at this. “The Mad King’s daughter is conquering
all the Seven Kingdoms. It’s only a matter of time before she rules them all. No one can stop her. She
has dragons, the Tyrells, the Martells. Even Tyrion’s wits won’t defeat her. And when she gets her
hands on me, what fate do you expect for the man who murdered her father?”

“You did the right thing. Aerys wanted to destroy an entire city full of people. If you tell her…”

“Even if I did, she will not believe me. And that is if she allows me to speak, which I doubt. I will
probably be fed to dragon flames the moment she learns who I am.”

“You should tell her all the same. Everyone should know why you did what you did.”

“What will it change? I’ll die all the same. Let everyone believe that I am the Kingslayer. It’s simpler.
People like to keep things simple.”

“What if I tell them?”

He looked at her. “Go on, and see if someone believes you. Perhaps you’ll have more luck than with
the shadow who killed Renly.”

After that, they resumed their shared silence. There were a lot of things that Brienne wanted to tell
him, but she was never good with words. She didn’t know how to tell them, nor what to tell first.
The words remained stuck in her throat. The few miles before them went on, the surroundings
looking the same everywhere around them. Finally, they started to distinguish a city far before them.
First, they saw the Red Keep, the tallest structure in the capital. It grew as they kept moving
forward, and after some time Brienne couldn’t discern the city walls. She noticed that the Great Sept
of Baelor was nowhere to be seen. After a time, she realized there were gaps in the walls. Entire
sections were missing. It was as if King’s Landing endured the same fate than Harrenhal. Only it
wasn’t a castle this time, but an entire city, with five hundred thousand people living inside. How
many of them survived? Brienne was so stunned by the scene before her that she didn’t hear the great roar or Ser Jaime’s voice.

“Brienne! Wake up, you fucking wench!” He got her attention. “Look! There!”

He pointed towards a spot in the sky, and when Brienne followed the index of his left hand, she was paralyzed beyond comparison. A gigantic beast was flying in the air, all black.

“DRAGONS!”

A man behind her shouted what she thought. She saw images of the beasts in the books she had to read at Tarth in her childhood, but to actually see one was a completely different experience.

“Brienne, ride forward! Full speed!” Before she could react, a slap on her horse’s bottom caused it to run like a demon. Ser Jaime appeared next to her not long after, crouched on his mount. “We run straight to the Red Keep. With some luck, we’ll get there before the Targaryens can.”

Another powerful screech thundered over their heads. She looked up to see the black dragon heading toward them.

“Keep riding! Go to the Red Keep!” Ser Jaime shouted to her before he changed his course… which brought him straight towards the dragon who was heading for them.

“Jaime!”

Under shock, before she could turn her horse towards him, a burst of fire emerged from the beast’s mouth and engulfed Jaime and his mount. Brienne forced her own horse to stop and turned to look at the scene of devastation before her. Where Ser Jaime Lannister rode a moment ago, there was only fire. No, that wasn’t possible. He couldn’t be dead. She had to see. She ordered her horse forward, and rounded the fire.

“Jaime! Ser Jaime!” She shouted with all the power of her lungs. When she was about a half-turn, she noticed something crawling on the ground. She recognized the armor. “Jaime!”

He raised his head, his face covered with mud. “Still in one piece. Well, almost.” He raised his right hand. “I’m the most unlucky of all men.”

She approached him and extended her hand. He took it, and with a strong effort, she pulled him onto her horse behind her. It was then that Brienne realized that the dragon had unleashed hell on the army Ser Jaime brought with him. They were running in all directions, trying to evade the rain of fire that fell upon them.

She felt Jaime squeeze her arm. “They’re lost. There’s nothing we can do for them.”

She watched as the dragon, ridden by a woman with blond hair, kept slaughtering the thousand men who reluctantly followed the knight behind her to the capital. She couldn’t escape in this direction, go north, so there was only another to take. She turned south and rode for King’s Landing. Jaime seized her by the hips to steady himself behind her. His arms around her caused a strange yet pleasant feeling into her belly. She rode into the city through one of the breaches and, looking up for a moment, she headed towards the Red Keep.

The silence that reigned into the city after the battle, if it could be called a battle, was unsettling. Brienne had to lower the pace of her mount several times because of the debris on the ground.

“Cersei didn’t care to make some cleaning while I was gone. That doesn’t surprise me,” Ser Jaime
said behind her as they had to slow down once again.

Brienne took in view everything around her. She was surprised by the state of the city from the outside, but from the inside, it was a scene of horror. There were no people in the streets, except for a few they came upon who hid their faces and ran away as soon as they saw them. It looked like an abandoned city, all the opposite to what it was the last time she was there.

“You see what Cersei did,” resumed the knight. “That’s what Aerys wanted to do. Finally, it was very useful to kill him. Someone else did his job.” He stayed silent for a moment. “You shouldn’t kill Cersei.”

“You saw what she did, Ser Jaime. Someone must stop her.”

“I agree, but this someone isn’t you. I know what it is, to be an assassin. If you kill Cersei, you’ll never be the same again.”

“If I don’t do it, then who will?”

“You saw that dragon. Cersei is doomed. Daenerys will execute her. Your father will be avenged. Let her do the dirty work. The result will be the same in the end. I don’t want you to be haunted for the rest of your days like I was after I killed Aerys. I don’t want you to be called the *Queenslayer.*”

His words touched her more than he thought. “What do you suggest we do?”

“We go to the Red Keep. I’ll have a discussion with Cersei, and I’ll do what’s necessary, but stay away from that. I may be able to convince her to surrender. This way a few more men won’t have to die.”

They continued their path. She didn’t have the impression that Cersei Lannister would surrender. She had a bad feeling about all this.

After a long time alternating between quicker and slower paces, they finally arrived before a junction. The pathway leading to the Red Keep was perpendicular to the street they rode in. They were about to turn left and ride to the Red Keep’s gates, when she heard heavy sounds in front of her. Half a dozen men with spears, shields, helmets, armors and pads all in black were coming from the other side of the street. They were at the same distance from the pathway. Brienne rushed forward, and when they reached the path, she climbed down and unsheathed her sword.

The fight was quick but deadly. These men, whoever they were, fought well, but they only had spears, and as soon as Brienne got too close to them, she had the advantage. A few moments later, they were all lying dead on the ground, and she didn’t have a single scar. She had a few scrapes on her armor, but no injury, small or big. She turned to look at Ser Jaime.

“We must head for the Red Keep before more comes,” she told him as she walked to mount her horse once more.

“You will do no such thing.”

The voice behind her back stopped her. She turned to it and saw a man wearing the usual set of armor from Westeros walking in their direction, his sword unsheathed. Brienne walked to block him the way and they stopped several feet from each other. It was then that more men in black plate and with spears came from behind him and stopped in perfect combat formation, their spears pointed at her, their shields protecting their stomach. Brienne raised her sword, ready to fight. There were about twenty of them this time, and more were coming. The only man with a sword, who seemed to be the only one coming from Westeros, looked at Ser Jaime.
“The Kingslayer,” he said.

“A bear sigil,” Ser Jaime replied after a time. Brienne realized it was true. The man had a sigil on his armor, and she knew what sigil it was. She saw the same on Lady Lyanna Mormont’s men. “How are you doing, Ser Jorah? You look older than in my memories.”

Jorah Mormont. He was the cousin of Lady Lyanna, the former Lord of Bear Island, who was sentenced to death by Lord Stark for practicing slavery, and who fled to Essos to escape justice.

“And I heard you lost a hand, Ser Jaime. Now, surrender peacefully. You don’t have to die.”

“Really? Let me doubt it, Mormont. You’re serving the woman we just saw on the dragon, don’t you?”

“Daenerys Targaryen, aye. She’s my queen. And I demand that you surrender to her.”

“And if I don’t?”

“You will die,” Jorah Mormont said very seriously.

“I will die if I surrender as well. She will kill me for murdering her father.”

“And with good reasons, but at least you will get a fair trial. Maybe she will even allow you to take the black.”

Ser Jaime looked straight at the knight of Bear Island. “Did you take the black when Ned Stark sentenced you to death? Do you really think then that I’ll take it, when you didn’t?”

Ser Jorah made one more step. “Get off your horse, Ser Jaime. Drop your sword, kneel, and the queen may let you live. You only have one hand. You cannot defeat me.”

Brienne made her own step forward and pointed her sword towards the northern knight’s face. “You won’t fight him. You’ll fight me,” she said.

Jorah Mormont considered her for a moment. “Who are you?”

“My name is Brienne of Tarth.”

“You are the daughter of Selwyn Tarth? I met your father a few times. He was a good man. I’m sorry for what Cersei did to him. He didn’t deserve to die.”

“Oh, come on, Mormont,” Ser Jaime mocked. “You’re glad that Cersei killed her father. That made the Stormlands much more sympathetic to your cause. Don’t tell me you mourned the fact that they wouldn’t fight for Cersei.”

“Unlike you, Kingslayer, I take no joy in the death of the others.”

“No, but you don’t mind selling criminals into slavery to fill your pockets.”

“I also didn’t kill my king.”

“You don’t know the whole story, Ser Jorah,” Brienne intervened. “You don’t know why Ser Jaime killed Aerys. The king wanted…”

“Don’t tell him, Brienne,” Jaime interrupted. “He’s not going to believe you. He would rather believe the story that best fits his interest. He wouldn’t want to believe what his queen’s father truly
was. Tell me, Ser Jorah, did you fuck your queen like I did.” The knight of Bear Island didn’t answer, but he was obviously angry. “Oh, fuck, he’s in love with her. I thought that what I saw when he said her name was an illusion.”

“That’s enough,” Ser Jorah cut short. “Lady Brienne, we have nothing against you. Your family didn’t fight us when we arrived. Step aside and let us arrest Ser Jaime. Queen Daenerys will acknowledge you as Lady of Tarth and allow you to go back to your home.”

Tarth. It had been so long since she last saw it. How would it be after all this time. Her father was gone. She would never see him again in the halls and the corridors of Evenfall. It wouldn’t be the same. It wouldn’t feel like home anymore.

“And I suppose I will have to bend the knee before your queen?”

“Of course. Your father once served her father, and it was Cersei who killed him. I don’t understand why you would protect her brother.”

“I can’t bend the knee before Daenerys,” Brienne declared.

“Why not? What’s stopping you? The Baratheons are gone. You have no other lord to obey.”

“I swore an oath, and I cannot serve your queen without breaking it.”

“What oath?”

“I swore to serve and protect Sansa Stark, and as long as Daenerys Targaryen is at war with her brother, I’ll have to fight your queen.” Ser Jorah looked surprised by what she just said. “You are a Mormont, Ser Jorah. Your family was loyal to House Stark for centuries. Your father was Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch. I know you broke the laws of Westeros and sullied the honor of your house, that you were forced into exile because of your actions, but you are still a Mormont. You are still a knight, and I know there must be some honor left in you. Your cousin is Lady of Bear Island, and she supports Jon Snow. You know that you will have to fight her, sooner or later. The time will come when you’ll have to face your own kin. Do you really want this?”

The knight had a pained expression. “I wish things were different, but now I have a queen and my family cast me aside, and they won’t accept me back.”

Ser Jaime scoffed behind. “He’s really in love with her.”

“Ser Jaime, get off your horse and surrender. This is your last chance.”

Brienne looked at Jaime. His face was still all covered with sweat and mud. He truly looked very much like the first time they met, in the Riverlands. Back then, she hated him. Now she loved him.

“Jaime,” she began. It was difficult for her to say the words. “Ride to your sister. Do what needs to be done.”

The time seemed to hold still. He looked at her, and said her name. “Brienne.” No one ever said her name like this. She didn’t know for how long they remained like this, just looking at each other, but it wasn’t long enough for her. Too soon, he broke their eye contact and rode towards the Red Keep. She turned to Ser Jorah and his men. They had to be at least fifty now, but none of them moved. The knight of Bear Island was looking at her with a strange expression.

“You know he will die for sure. The queen will not spare him,” he said.
“I know.” Admitting it was very difficult for her. She didn’t want Jaime to die. She saw Renly die. He died in her arms. She couldn’t suffer to see the same fate happen to Jaime.

“You cannot save him.”

“I know.” But I will try all the same. She positioned herself in a waiting stance, her sword risen, waiting for any attack, before the entrance to the pathway leading to the Red Keep.

“I don’t want to kill you, Lady Brienne. Your father was a good man. I don’t want to kill his daughter.”

“I’m not a lady Ser Jorah, and you will not kill me.”

“I’ll have to.”

“You can try to kill me, but you will not succeed.”

He nodded, a sad expression on his face. “I will do my duty.”

He took position and slowly advanced on her. She allowed him to come, letting him believe he had the advantage. Her master-at-arms, Goodwin, always told her to use the fact that men believed she was weak as a weapon against them.

Ser Jorah launched the first attack. After three swings she easily blocked, he went back into position. Then he made a series of four hits, which she all blocked as well. He wasn’t using his full force against her. He wasn’t trying to kill her. She could use that. Brienne was taller than him. At his third series of attacks, she launched a counter-attack, which he barely managed to parry. She managed to push him back, though he didn’t fall on the ground.

After that, it was a series of swings, feints, blocks, and anything they could use. Ser Jorah was struggling to keep up against her. His age was wearing down on him. She was younger, stronger and taller. Finally, she pushed him on the ground with all the force of her body. She remained at good distance and allowed him to stand back.

He rushed towards her, almost taking her unaware. Her stance was unbalanced for a time, and the northern knights took advantage of it. She backed away, but he kept throwing his sword against her, until she felt a wall behind her. He swung his sword with all his force against her, and she just managed to block it. Her own sword approached her face for a short time under the force of the attack. However, she recovered her minds and pushed back her opponent once again.

She saw a few of the men in black running to the pathway. She made a run to intercept them and thrusted her sword into the belly of one of them, then pushed another against a wall. He tried to keep her at bay with his shield, but when she backed away, she turned to swing at another soldier who ended without a head. She turned again to the soldier she just left alone as his spear was coming to her head. She deflected it with her sword and cut his arm.

A great pain got through her leg. She yelled and turned on herself, swinging her sword in the process. When she looked at the result, a part of the man’s head was gone. The sword that pierced her leg laid on the ground. She looked at her left to see the contingent of men in black plates advancing on her in tight formation, their long spears forming a deadly wall before them. Despite the pain in her leg, she prepared herself for the shock. She failed to protect Renly. She wouldn’t fail to protect Jaime.

They shall not pass.
I came up with this idea of Brienne vs Jorah quite lately. I thought it would be interesting to see a verbal face-to-face between him and Jaime as well, since the two men were dishonored by their actions, but they also did everything to atone for what they did. Now Jaime is heading for the Red Keep... alone.

Please review

Next chapter : Cersei
Cersei IX

Chapter Notes

See how the battle of King’s Landing ends.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

CERSEI IX

“Where is Littlefinger?”

She was sitting on the Iron Throne, her hands digging into the sharp steel, as she looked at Qyburn who stood below her, impassive.

“He’s nowhere to be found, your Grace, I’m afraid,” the maester calmly answered.

“How is that possible. Where is he?” she shouted.

“We may have to consider the possibility that he escaped, your Grace.”

“That’s impossible. He had two guards watching him at every time. They even followed him to the privy.”

“I made a few inquiries, your Grace. It seems that two of your men are missing, and they guarded Lord Baelish together for eight hours yesterday. No one has seen the Master of Coin since that time.”

Cersei began to realize what it meant. “How could he leave the Red Keep? All the gates are closed.”

“There are other ways to leave the keep, your Grace.”

“I thought you controlled these passages.”

“I do, for most of them, your Grace, but despite my best efforts, I’m afraid some of Varys’s little birds escaped my attention. There are some places beneath us that I don’t even know.”

“Who were the men guarding him?”

“Two red cloaks, your Grace.”

“How could he convince two red cloaks loyal to House Lannister to let him go?”

“He may have bribed them, your Grace.”

“The red cloaks are loyal to House Lannister.”

“These two men were recruited recently. I looked at their records and asked questions among the other red cloaks. It seems they were sellswords only two years ago.”

“Littlefinger had no money to give them. We spoiled him of all his riches.”

“He may have hidden a few from us, your Grace. Lord Baelish had so many ventures all over
Westeros that it is impossible to be sure of his real fortune. And anyway, as Master of Coin, he had access to all the resources of the Crown, and although our coffers are not full, there is more than enough to bribe two mercenaries.”

“He had no right to use this money. This gold belonged to me.”

“It is yours, your Grace, indeed. But there are thieves everywhere in this world.”

Cersei gripped the steel until she bled from her hands. “The Knight of the Vale? Where are they? WHERE ARE THEY?”

“There is no sign of them, your Grace. An army with the Lannister banner arrived not long ago from the north, but there’s no way to tell if this is Ser Jaime or the remnants of Ser Daven’s army. Anyway, there are barely one thousand men, and I’ve just been told that Daenerys unleashed her dragons on them…”

“Then why tell me at all? This is not a thousand men taken in the sewers of Lannisport that we need. We need the Knights of the Vale.”

“Against dragons, I’m afraid even the Knights of the Vale…”

“SHUT UP!” She stood up. “Only talk when your queen gives you the right to do so.” She wanted nothing more than to cut Qyburn’s head right now, with her own fingers if necessary.

“Of course, your Grace. Forgive me.”

Her anger abated. Qyburn was one of the few who still obeyed her and didn’t look at her like an object of contempt. She could only rely on him. Littlefinger’s latest treason was only another proof that her Hand was the only trustful person in this city.

“How is the battle going?” she asked, sitting back into the throne.

“Not well, I’m afraid. All our forces are disbanding. Daenerys Targaryen has more men, and she has dragons. I don’t believe our men on the battlements will keep their positions when she attacks. Even if the scorpions we placed were all used, killing one dragon wouldn’t be enough.”

Cersei remained silent. What Qyburn said didn’t surprise her. She didn’t expect her men to stay loyal to her. She didn’t trust them. They would run, trying to save their own skin, rather than fight for their queen.

“Young Grace, I could arrange an escape for you. I know tunnels that could lead us far away from the city before the enemy could realize that you’re gone.”

“And where would I go, Qyburn?” She looked at him. For the first time, he said nothing. “My kin turned on me. The doors of Casterly Rock are closed to me, and if I find refuge anywhere, I will be nothing more than a prisoner. Varys will find me, and my captors will surrender me to this eastern whore the moment her dragons are seen. Who would protect me? Jaime? He can’t even defend himself.”

Her twin betrayed her. He should have saved her, fight for her, and he didn’t. He abandoned her. He was probably in the North, looking at the little monster some people called their niece, finding her beautiful. The thought that the Imp gave to his daughter the name of her lady mother enraged Cersei like no one could imagine. And now she couldn’t rely on the Vale. After they defeated the army Tyrion sent south at the Crossroads, she believed she could count on the Knights of the Vale, but she was wrong. They betrayed her, just like everyone else.
“Well, your Grace, if you don’t want to leave, then you have two options. You can surrender, or you can fight, but both options are quite hopeless.”

“I know that I will die, Qyburn, and that there is no way out of this. But if I have the choice to surrender and die, or to fight and die, then I know very well what choice I’ll make.”

She let her words sink into the empty Great Hall. It was deserted safe for her and Qyburn. She might be alone, she may be a queen that no more than a few hundred people acknowledged, but she was the queen nonetheless, and she would remain queen until the moment she died.

“However, I don’t have two choices. I have three.” Qyburn’s face showed that he understood what she meant. He was always quick to understand what she intended to do before she voiced it, sometimes before she even thought about it. “You know what to do, Qyburn.”

“Yes, your Grace.”

He bowed and left. There was no hesitation in his departure, nor any hurry. He obeyed without question. He was the last one to do so, and he would be the last until the end.

She was alone. She had been alone almost all the time lately. She didn’t regret the company of many people, but she regretted Jaime’s company. It was a foolish notion, she knew it, but she couldn’t help but miss him. She didn’t understand how she could love such a man. She believed he was her other half, a part of her, but now she knew that had never been the case. Cersei had always been alone, even when she was with someone else. She could rely on herself and only on herself in every circumstance since her birth. She never formed ties with someone else. Everyone was a tool to reach her objectives. Even her children. She had loved them, but they were tools all the same. She loved them because she had no choice but to love them. How could a mother not love her children? It was possible for her to have doubts about the bond that linked her to Jaime, but it was impossible to ignore that her sons and her daughter were a part of her. When they died, a part of her died as well. She had been slowly dying ever since the day Joffrey died.

It was in this room, in the Great Hall, that Joffrey was crowned king. She stood next to him when Ned Stark tried to take away what was hers, and she was there to witness the slaughtering of the Northerners, and Littlefinger holding a dagger at the fool’s throat.

She was there when Sansa so sweetly pleaded for her father’s life. She did look so sweet back then. Cersei never thought a single moment that the Stark girl could be her downfall one day, or that she could take for herself what rightfully belonged to Cersei. Even now, she was having doubts. Could Sansa really have done all these things? She had tried to advise the girl, to help her to survive in this nest of vipers, and nothing in Sansa ever told her that she could be a problem one day. The problem had always been Tyrion, and then Margaery. They were her downfall. To think that the smiling whore survived the destruction of the Great Sept of Baelor made Cersei wish she could explode of anger just like the sept.

There were so many memories attached to this place, and so few of them were happy. The births of her children ad the time when she took care of them were the only moments she truly enjoyed since she arrived in the capital at the age of nineteen. Even the moments when she crushed her enemies didn’t look like happy when compared to this. Without her children, she would have thrown herself from the highest tower a long time ago. They were her only joy in life. But then they grew up, they got far from her, and they died. She lost them. They were taken away from her, her only true reason to live.

She thought of the daughter Sansa just had. She told her to only love her children and no one else. Strangely, she hoped the girl heeded her advice. If she somehow came to love Tyrion, she would
suffer from it. Cersei hoped that Sansa would suffer. At the same time, she thought about the baby who was in a cradle, somewhere. Did she look like Myrcella when she was born? Was Sansa’s labor as painful as the one she had for Joffrey? She hoped it was. Cersei had placed a bounty on Sansa’s daughter. Perhaps the news of her death would need time to spread and someone would kill the Imp’s bastard before he knew there was no one left to give him his reward. The image of a baby in a cradle appeared before her eyes. It wasn’t Joffrey. It wasn’t Myrcella. It wasn’t Tommen. She didn’t know who it was, but she felt that it was her niece. Somehow, she looked entirely normal, sweet, innocent, even pretty. Could Tyrion’s child really look like that? There had to be something hidden under the sheets, something horrible she couldn’t see. And yet the little girl seemed so innocent, so vulnerable. Love no one but your children.

“Forgive me.” She whispered the words without realizing it. The image disappeared, and she realized that she had cried. She kept inside the other tears that threatened to break, and wiped the ones on her cheeks with her sleeve. She would be strong until the end. She was Cersei Lannister, Queen of Westeros, and anyone who wanted to take the throne she was sitting on would have to get through her first.

The great doors opened. From them, a brown man came in. He had mud and soil all over his body. The noise of his boots on the floor revealed he wore an armor. He had a sword in one hand, and something round in the other. As he approached, Cersei realized that blood was dripping from the sword, leaving fresh red droplets that lined as he walked toward her. Cersei was about to shout for help when she realized he looked very much the same when he came back at the end of the war.

“Jaime.” Her brother was back. She thought he abandoned her, but he was back. Had she been wrong? For once, Cersei felt that she could happy that she was wrong. She stood up and descended the steps of the dais. “Jaime, have you brought the men I asked you?”

As she arrived on the floor, her brother threw the rounded thing before her. It rolled at her feet and when it stopped spinning, Cersei saw the face of Qyburn looking in her direction.

“I killed Rossart when he tried to do the same. Did you really think I would let Qyburn do it again?” The voice of Jaime sounded distant as she looked in horror at the head of her Hand. Qyburn was standing before her only a few minutes ago, and now his head was looking without life past her.

She looked at her brother. His gaze showed an anger she never saw in him. She looked at his sword, and then to the head at her feet again. Blood covered the first, and blood was coming out from the other.

“Did you kill him?” she asked, her voice vibrating with rage.

“Why don’t you answer yourself, sister, since you believe you are as clever as our father?”

She felt rage boiling inside of her. “How did you dare to do this?”

“How I dared? And how dared you?”

“You just destroyed my only chance to…”

“To do what? To destroy the city? I think one time is already more than enough.”

“To kill my enemies!”

Qyburn had positioned the stocks of wildfire they had left at key positions. He was to make them explode, destroying the armies of Daenerys Targaryen as they entered the city, just like she did with Randyll Tarly’s men. Now it would be impossible. Qyburn was the only one to know where the pots
were. She didn’t know their positions.

“At what cost?” Jaime asked. “By killing the few thousands innocent people who didn’t die the first time?”

“ Innocent people? These people laughed at me, mocked me, threw mud and shit at me…”

“Just like they did with Joffrey. Do you remember how he reacted? He almost got you killed. Tyrion told me.”

“DON’T MENTION HIS NAME! DON’T EVER MENTION HIS NAME, OR I’LL HAVE YOUR TONGUE CUT FROM YOUR MOUTH, KINGSAYER!”

He stood silent. He just looked at her. Cersei couldn’t repress a smile. As always, her brother proved that she was their father’s true daughter. He slowly walked to her until he stood only one feet from her. She kept smiling smugly at him. There was nothing he could do against her.

She didn’t see it coming. A fist hit her hard on the face, and the next moment she laid on the ground. She brought her hand to her face, and realized she was bleeding. The blood was red, so red. She saw many people bleed and die as their body emptied itself from this liquid, but she never saw blood on her face.

“You…” She stared at her brother, at her twin, at the man who came into this world with her, who gave her her three children. He had a nonchalant expression on his face as he looked down on her. He often looked down on her, especially when they made love, but with a completely different expression. “You hit me.”

“You always were quick to grasp a situation, sister.”

“You hit your own sister. Your hit your queen!”

“And so? Did my hand fall from my wrist?” He looked at his left arm. “Oh no, it’s true. It’s already gone. It will be difficult to chop my hand for striking a queen. Anyway, I don’t think there is someone left to do it. Now, I have a few questions for you, sister.”

“A few questions?”

“Yes, while we still have time for that. The Targaryen forces will arrive very soon.”

“You are a fool.” She tried to stand, and received another strike, this time in the form of a slap. Cersei was back on the floor.

“I may be a fool, but I have the upper hand for now. So you’re going to answer. Did you kill Father?”

Cersei barely managed to straighten her head to look at him. “What?”

“Did you kill Father? Did you kill Kevan?”

“What are you talking about?” She truly had no idea why he asked her these things. These were the stupidest questions she ever heard.

“I needed time to consider this, but now that I think about it,” her brother resumed, “of everyone in the capital, you were the person with the best reasons to kill them. As soon as Father died, you accused Tyrion. Our lord father’s body was barely cold that you were already plotting against our
brother. Once our father and Tyrion were gone, there was no one standing between you and Casterly Rock, and you could control the small council again. And when Kevan died, we found a message near him. *The queen sends her regards*. The queen. And as you just said, you are the queen."

A moment passed as she tried to understand Jaime’s words. Then she burst into laughs. “You really are an utter fool.”

“I’ve got to give it to you, you’re not wrong. I was a fool to love you from the beginning.”

She couldn’t stop laughing. “I had no reason to kill Father, or to kill Kevan.”

“You had all the reasons. You lost all your power when Father arrived, and you would have been Lady of the Rock if Tyrion had died like you wanted. And Kevan wanted to send you away. His death delayed your departure.”

“Margaery killed Kevan.”

“She had no reason to do so. Kevan was her ally. They were working together, against you. So I’m going to ask you one last time. Did you kill them?”

She managed to stand on her feet and to stop her laughter. “I didn’t.” She couldn’t stop smiling as she told him.

“I don’t believe you. I don’t trust you anymore.” He walked a few steps away from her before turning to face her again. “You tried to kill our brother.”

“He’s not our brother. He’s not my brother.”

“He is, whether you like it or not. We don’t get to choose who our family is.”

“Too bad.”

“Yes, too bad,” he agreed. “And you killed our children.”

“I didn’t kill them!”

“You killed them! You killed Joffrey! You had him poisoned!”

“I didn’t. It was…”

“We have proof. You may have wanted to kill Margaery instead, but it changes nothing. You had him killed. And you killed Myrcella, and Tommen!”

“I didn’t kill Myrcella. It was Tyrion…”

He slapped her again. She almost saw it coming this time, so she could prepare. She didn’t fall on the floor. “Don’t ever accuse my brother again. You killed Myrcella.”

“It was Tyrion who sent her to Dorne. He was the one to sentence her when he sent her away.”

“And if you managed to stop Joffrey from beheading Ned Stark, Tyrion would never have become Hand, and Myrcella would never have gone to Sunspear.”

“It wasn’t my fault…”

“It was! You never wanted me to play any role in Joffrey’s life, or any of our children’s. You wanted
them for you alone. You raised them alone. You turned Joffrey into a monster. Perhaps if I had played a role in his life, he wouldn’t have been the monster he became. And if he wasn’t a monster, he wouldn’t have executed Ned Stark, and Myrcella would be alive.”

“If you had been a father for our children, they would have been killed.”

“Then perhaps we should never have had children. Perhaps you were not meant to have children. Because you killed them. You killed Tommen. You knew he was going to kill himself when you destroyed the Great Sept with his wife inside.”

“I couldn’t…”

“You were supposed to be there with him, to console him, but instead you watched men being butchered and the city burning with a glass of wine in your hand. There are even people who claim that you had a bard playing the Rains of Castamere as you watched the city burn, only you had him change the words for the Fires of King’ Landing.”

“I didn’t kill Tommen!” she said. She didn’t kill him. No, she didn’t kill him.

“You killed him. You killed your son. You killed our son. He died because of you, because of your actions. He died because you weren’t there when he needed you.”

“No. No, I didn’t kill him.” She shook her head. She wasn’t responsible for Tommen’s head.

“You did, and you know it. Just like I know that I killed my cousin. You murdered your own son.”

Jaime stared at her, not leaving her face a single moment. She was shaking now. She didn’t kill him. She didn’t kill him. It was Margaery’s fault, and Tyron’s, and Sansa’s. It was her father’s fault, and Jaime’s. They were not here to protect her. It was the fault of Tarly, of Selwyn Tarth, of Kevan, of Varys. It wasn’t her fault. She didn’t kill him.

She realized that she had difficulty to breathe, and that tears were running on her cheeks. And then she couldn’t hold. She burst into sobs. She had tried to keep them away, but she couldn’t. She tried to remain in the present, to think about he future, to make sure their house would survive, but she couldn’t. Her life was in the past. It was in her children, her children who were now dead. Her legs collapsed and she fell on the floor. The king will have twenty children and you will have three. Gold will be their crowns. Gold their shrouds. She lost them. She lost them all. Her children were all gone, and she was gone as well. She died with them. She was dying ever since the day Joffrey died, another part of her left with Myrcella, and the last part died when Tommen jumped from that tower. All that remained was a shell. She was no longer the woman she used to be. Perhaps that was why no one wanted to follow her. It wasn’t because she was a woman. It was because she wasn’t alive anymore.

She looked at the floor, Qyburn’s head within her sight. He was her last hope. Her last hope of revenge against her enemies. And now even that was gone. She would die alone, without even the satisfaction of bringing her enemies under ground with her.

She felt arms wrapping around her from behind. She was surprised to find that they were Jaime’s. She rested her head against his elbow. Her eyes were closed, and tears kept streaming. For the first time in months, she felt comfort coming from someone else. It was a good sensation. She had almost forgotten how it felt, to have someone there for you. Someone who just wanted you to be happy, or well. She remembered times when she was a little girl, when Genna would take her into her arms as she cried, to console her. Genna wasn’t her mother, but she was all they had, she and Jaime.
They remained there for a very long time. Her body relaxed. She felt the blood still pouring from her nose, and the mud from his face and his clothes sticking to her, but she didn’t care. She felt better than she had been since her last son died, more alive than ever. Jaime was part of her, and he was still alive. That meant she was still alive too. Not everything was lost. There was still someone for her in this world.

“I’m sorry, Jaime.” She didn’t know why she apologized to him, but she did. Somehow, it made her feel better. She hadn’t realized how she craved for it, how she was hungry for this.

“I love you, Cersei.”

The words sounded so beautiful at her ears. He moved his hands up along her arms. It was good to hear someone say that he loved you. A weight was lifted from her shoulders. She breathed deeply and slowly. Jaime’s golden hand ran on her gown. She wished her clothes were gone for a moment. The feeling of his hand on her skin would feel wonderful, she was sure of it, even if it was only the hand made of gold. It was cold, but she could warm it with her own hands. Gold was part of House Lannister, anyway. The gold arrived at her neck.

All air left her throat when something else cold went through it. Blood came to her mouth as she felt another hand, cold as well, join the golden one, surrounding her throat.

“I’m sorry, Cersei.”

Her head spun backward, and she saw her brother, a regretful expression on his face, over her. She looked on her left and saw the dagger that pierced her throat. Blood filled her mouth. She tried to ask why he did this, but she couldn’t.

A thunderous noise broke over them and she saw a part of the Red Keep’s roof collapse. At the same time, another horrible noise, one she heard before, pierced the air. Jaime kept holding her. She forced herself to raise her head a little, despite the effort she needed to do so, and she saw it. The black dragon, the biggest of them all. She watched him fly over the city long ago. He landed on the floor, debris falling all around him. He faced her, a dragon looking down on a lioness, and lowered his head. On his back was a young woman with silver air, her clothes all black, but not as black as those Cersei wore. Even in her state, Cersei saw that she was beautiful. Very beautiful.

You’ll be queen. For a time. Then comes another, younger, more beautiful, to cast you down and take all you hold dear. She knew immediately it was her. Cersei was about to die. It was the last chance for the prophecy to come true. She looked back to her brother, who hadn’t moved and kept looking at her with a sorry expression.

She didn’t understand. And when your tears have drowned you, the valonqar shall wrap his hands about your pale white throat and choke the life from you. She couldn’t die now. Tyrion was her valonqar, her little brother, the one who was supposed to kill her. It was never supposed to be Jaime. He never was her valonqar. They were born together, only a few minutes separating their coming into this world. Genna told her she came first, and that Jaime followed only two minutes later.

Such were the last thoughts of Cersei Lannister before darkness surrounded her.

Chapter End Notes

I think that many people had guessed how things would end for Cersei. I hate Cersei,
personally, but like every other character of Game of Thrones, she has some good sides and I tried to highlight them here, going as far as to make her feel regrets. This was the last opportunity to shed some light on Cersei. I tried to give her an end that was as close as to what Maggy the Frog told her, but at the same time that was completely different from the end Cersei expected for herself. Daenerys storming through the roof of the Red Keep may seem "cliché", but we will see in the next chapter that there was a good reason for Daenerys to force her way to the throne room this way.

Please review

Next chapter : Daenerys
A part was missing. A section going from the center of the forehead to the left ear was gone. Red blood covered what was left of the face that became so familiar since her wedding. The head was completely ruined, savagely hacked by some monster. The rest of the body was intact, still fresh, quiet as if he was sleeping. The hand he offered her when he helped her to escape the Sons of the Harpy in Daznak’s Pit, the same that threw the spear that saved her life that same day, who held the sword who fought for her for years, was resting on his stomach, clasped with the other hand. Se never gave much attention to his hands before, but now she did. His armor was almost intact, his sword placed over his stomach. His two hands were gripping it, but they would never raise it again. She had been in a similar position back in Meereen, when Ser Barristan died, but she didn’t think that she would have to live the same thing here in King’s Landing, with the other man who served her from the beginning.

Ser Jorah Mormont was dead. He didn’t travel the world to serve her like Ser Barristan. He spied on her, gave information to her enemies, made her believe that he was her loyal servant when in fact he was conspiring with the people who wanted her dead. He lied to her, and betrayed the trust she placed in him. She exiled him. And yet he came back, he saved her, and he died serving her, far from his home. He fought to make her climb the steps leading to the Iron Throne, but he wouldn’t get to see her sitting on it.

“Who killed him?” she asked.

“A woman.”

She slowly turned to look at Grey Worm. He was the last to remain. Mossador was gone. Ser Barristan was gone. Missandei was gone. Hizdahr zo Loraq was gone. She left Daario in Meereen. Now that Ser Jorah left this world too, Grey Worm was the last advisor from her first council in Meereen who was still alive.

“What kind of woman could do something like that?” She indicated the ruin that was left of Ser Jorah’s face with her hand.

“A tall woman. Wearing armor of steel, wielding a sword. The Unsullied said they never saw such a tall and big woman.”

“What became of her?” Daenerys would gladly execute the person who killed her strong bear, man or woman.

“She died. The Unsullied killed her. She managed to kill twenty of them before the Unsullied could end her.”
There was no revenge to take or justice to make. The taking of King’s Landing didn’t go like Daenerys hoped, although her losses were small and the battle didn’t last long. Cersei’s army was defeated easily before the walls. The Unsullied penetrated the city without meeting any resistance. As for the second army that came from the north, the men composing it either burned or flew away before Drogon. She mounted her dragon as soon as she was informed of the position of the second Lannister army. They didn’t manage to recruit many men. Daenerys didn’t estimate this second army to be more than a few hundred. Ser Jaime Lannister’s soldiers disbanded at the mere sight of her dragon.

The Kingslayer was now in the dungeons of the Red Keep. After she made sure that no Lannister forces were left to oppose her outside the city, she returned to the reserves of her army. As soon as she landed, Melisandre came to her, saying that she should call back all her men from the city. She said that she saw green flames, lit by a man without heart who served a woman laughing like a demon. Daenerys hadn’t been sure of what to make of it, until a little boy who presented himself as one of Varys’s little birds told her that Cersei had new stocks of wildfire hidden under the city, and that she was about to blow it all a second time. There were the green flames.

She couldn’t allow this to happen again. King’s Landing was built by her ancestors. There were still people living in there. She couldn’t stand by while Cersei was slaughtering thousands of people. She went back to Drogon and flew to the Red Keep. Danning the work of her ancestors, she broke through the ceiling of the Red Keep and arrived into the Throne Room on Drogon’s back… only to find the Kingslayer with his sister in his arms, a dagger planted in her throat. Daenerys had met Cersei’s eyes before she died. It had been a strange expression that she displayed as they looked at each other. The daughter of Tywin Lannister almost looked as if she recognized Daenerys. They had never met before. It was the first time, and the last time as well, that Daenerys laid her eyes on Cersei Lannister, who received from the people a name very similar to the one they gave to her father.

What surprised Daenerys the most was the fact that Jaime Lannister was the one to kill Cersei. That was the last thing she expected. When she dismounted her dragon, the Kingslayer stood away from his sister after closing her eyes. He laid her lifeless body gently on the floor, then threw his sword and his dagger at Daenerys’s feet and raised his hands.

“I am the man who killed your father,” he said. “If you want to kill me, then do it. I’m ready to die.”

She expected to find Cersei, to put her in chains, and to make her plan of destroying the city fail, but not this. The first Unsullied entered the Throne Room not long later. It was at this moment that she recalled why she was there. She ordered two of them to keep an eye on the Kingslayer, and to kill him without hesitation if he tried anything, and she sent all the other men after anyone Cersei might have sent to destroy the city.

“Qyburn is dead,” Ser Jaime Lannister had said when he heard her orders. “He’s the one who was supposed to light the pots of wildfire. His head is there.” There was effectively the head of a man between two ages on the floor. “He met the same fate than Rossart, your father’s last Hand. It’s fitting. I killed the Mad King and his Hand when they tried to burn the whole city twenty years ago, and today I just killed the Mad Queen and her Hand who tried to do the same. Queenslayer. Do you think it sounds better than Kingslayer?”

She had sent him away, ordering his guards to keep him locked somewhere until she decided of his fate. The research that followed allowed them to find caches of wildfire, but none were lit. They were left untouched. When Varys arrived, he confirmed that Qyburn died before he could execute Cersei’s last order. The city was saved.

The battle cost Daenerys dearly all the same. The casualties were low, she only lost two hundred
men, but Jorah died. Also, it wasn’t a city that she took. It was a city in ruins. They said that King’s Landing was inhabited by half a million souls before the war. Now there were fifty-thousand men living inside its walls, at best. She would have to rebuild King’s Landing, almost from scratch.

She reported her attention on Ser Jorah’s body. She couldn’t lament on him for too long. She was the queen, and her duty was to all her people, not only to one single man. As much as she was saddened by her knight’s death, she had too many matters to take care of to allow his death to distract her longer than she could permit.

“I will light a pyre for him tonight. Grey Worm, summon the Red Priests to the Tower of the Hand.”

“Yes, my queen.”

“Grey Worm, what about these people you found in the dungeons?”

Grey Worm’s stoic expression failed for a second. “We are still finding bodies, and gathering them.”

“What about those who were alive?”

“Most of them didn’t survive.”

Daenerys looked away at the wall. “Thank you, Grey Worm.”

She walked away to the Tower of the Hand. It was the only place where no one was installed inside the Red Keep. She kept it for her own use for the time being, until she found someone to serve as Hand of the Queen. Daenerys wasn’t even sure if she would name a Hand. She never had one before, only a council to assist and advise her, but never someone who could actually replace her if she was ill, or if something happened to her.

As she waited in a room where small councils were assembled when Tywin Lannister was Hand of the King, she thought about he horrors they found under the Red Keep, in the dungeons and the black cells of the castle. The experiences of Cersei’s Hand, a man named Qyburn who studied at the Citadel, were spread everywhere under her feet. They found people alive and dead, but mostly dead. Many dismembered bodies, others that were eaten by worms, or by acid, or by other substances she didn’t know. The people seemed to have died a slow and painful death. Some were still alive, desperately clinging to life. They had found the daughter of Tandos, the emissary who survived, with one arm left. She had died in her father’s arms two hours after she was found, in unspeakable pain. Daenerys had not given her sentence yet, but she wouldn’t condemn this man to death. He acted out of despair, was forced to break sacred laws because of Cersei’s cruelty. It was Cersei who was guilty, and if she were alive, Daenerys would have her executed in the most painful and slow way possible, so she would suffer for all the crimes she committed. Perhaps she would transfer this punishment to her brother, the man who killed her father.

“The burden of power.” A voice behind almost caused her to jump. It was Varys. How did he come in here? She didn’t hear the door open. Perhaps she was too distracted by her thoughts. He continued to speak. “I served many kings through my life, your Grace, and each tried to deal with it in a different manner. I wonder how you will, and I hope you will deal with it better than your predecessors.”

“What do you have to tell me, Lord Varys?” she asked.

“Only that you should be careful with the Red Priests.”

“The Red Priests helped me in Meereen, and they helped me here as well.”
“They do not serve you or the Realm, your Grace. They serve another purpose, and they will turn on you the day they believe you no are no longer of use to them.”

“Just like you will.”

“Your Grace?”

She looked straight at him. “You served my father, didn’t you, Lord Varys?”

“I did.”

“And then you served the man who overthrew him.”

“I had a choice, your Grace, serve Robert Baratheon or face the headman’s axe. Your actual allies from Dorne and the Reach did the same.”

“But the Tyrells remained loyal to Robert. You, on the other hand, didn’t serve him long. You turned against him.”

“As did the Martells, your Grace.”

“We’re not talking about the Martells, but about you. I know why the Martells conspired against Robert, but I wonder why you did the same?”

Varys’s face contorted. “Robert was an improvement on your father, to be sure. There have been few rulers in history as cruel as the Mad King.” As hard as it was to hear the truth, Daenerys knew that what Varys said was true. Jorah helped her to see the truth in Viserys, and Ser Barristan helped her to know the truth about her father. “Robert was neither mad nor cruel. He simply had no interest in being king.”

“So you took it upon yourself to find a better one. Before I came to power, you favored my brother. All your spies, your little birds, did they tell you that Viserys was cruel, stupid and weak? Would those qualities have made for a good king in your learned opinion?”

Lord Varys dropped his head to the floor for a moment when she mentioned Viserys. “Until your marriage to Khal Drogo, your Grace, I knew nothing about you, save your existence and that you were said to be beautiful.”

“So you and your friends traded me like a prized horse to the Dothrakis.” It was because of him that she was sold like a horse to the first man who promised to help her brother to take the Seven Kingdoms.

“Which you turned to your advantage,” the eunuch remarked.

“Who gave the order to kill me?”

A long silence followed before Varys answered. “King Robert.”

“Who hired the assassins? Who sent word to Essos to murder Daenerys Targaryen?”

“Your Grace, I did what had to be done to…” She didn’t let him finish.

“To keep yourself alive. If you dislike one monarch, you conspire to crown the next one. What kind of a servant are you?”

“The kind the Realm needs.” The man’s expression turned serious. “Incompetence should not be
rewarded with blind loyalty. As long as I have my eyes, I’ll use them. I wasn’t born into a great house. I came from nothing. I was sold as a slave and carved up as an offering. When I was a child, I lived in alleys, gutters, abandoned houses. You wish to know where my true loyalties lie? Not with any king or queen, but with the people. The people who suffer under despots and prosper under just rule. The people whose hearts you aim to win. If you demand blind allegiance, I respect your wishes. One of your Unsullied can behead me or your dragons can devour me. But if you let me live, I will serve you well. I will dedicate myself to seeing you on the Iron Throne because I choose you. Because I know the people have no better chance than you.”

She looked at the man for a very long time. He seemed deadly serious. She couldn’t trust him entirely, and yet she had the impression that he was sincere right now. “Very well. Swear this to me, Varys. If you ever think I’m failing the people, you won’t conspire behind my back. You’ll look me in the eye as you have done today, and you’ll tell me how I’m failing them.”

“I swear it, my queen.”

She came closer to him. “And I swear this. If you ever betray me, I’ll burn you alive.”

He smiled. “I would expect nothing less from the Mother of Dragons.”

“Then start by telling me the truth. This Jon Snow, this King in the North, is he my nephew?”

This question plagued her every day. “I have found a woman, your Grace. A servant named Wylla. Robert Baratheon believed that she was Jon Snow’s mother. She was a servant for Lady Ashara Dayne at Starfall, the sister of Ser Arthur Dayne. She was also Jon Snow’s wetnurse. She came back with Lord Stark to Winterfell after the war, and with Jon Snow.”

“You believe that she could be the mother?” If that was the case, then Jon Snow was no kin of her.

“She may be. But my discoveries concerning this woman were very interesting. It seems that she was at the Tower of Joy when Lyanna Stark died. I couldn’t get more information about the events that happened there, however. I suggest that I make her come to King’s Landing so you may interrogate her yourself when the time is right.”

“Is that all? That is all you could find?”

“It’s difficult to make such an investigation from far away, your Grace, when you cannot ask questions to the people yourself. I cannot confirm that Jon Snow is your nephew, but I cannot confirm the opposite either. The identity of his mother is still uncertain, though for the good of the Realm, I hope this is not Lyanna Stark. There is one thing I know about Tyrion Lannister. If he concocted this lie, then he probably made sure that there was some truth in this lie. A half-truth is much easier to believe than an outright lie. But I’m afraid there are more important matters to study, your Grace. I explored the rookery, and I found this.” He produced a small piece of paper from his sleeves. “It is from Castle Black.”

Daenerys read it. “The dead attacked the Wall?”

“I have little birds at the Wall, mostly at Castle Black, but also at the Shadow Tower and Eastwatch-by-the-Sea. I haven’t heard from those of the Shadow Tower for a while, but those at Eastwatch and Castle Black all swore that the White Walkers launched several attacks against them. One at Castle Black even claimed that a White Walker managed to get through the Wall, but he was killed by Jon Snow before he could go further.”

“If that’s the case, then we must fear the worst.” A voice coming from behind Varys’s back startled
them both. Daenerys looked behind the eunuch to see Kinvara standing there, and Varys discovered the woman’s presence as soon as he turned. She raised an eyebrow before Varys’s expression. “You’re not the only one who can sneak behind people’s back, Varys. Knowledge has made you powerful. But there’s still so much you don’t know.”

“Leave us, Varys.” Daenerys intervened before it went further. She didn’t want to keep these two together for too long. The air was always tensed wherever it happened. Varys bowed and left.

She approached Kinvara and handed her the message from the Wall as soon as Varys was gone. The High Priestess read it. Her expression was grave. “They’re here.”

“It seems so.” Varys’s spies, all these messages from the Wall, the apprentice in Oldtown, the visions in the flames of the Red Priests… Even Ser Jorah believed the threat was real.

The other Red Priests came in approximately at this moment. There were six of them including Kinvara. Revan was there, and the Red Priest with silver hair following the High Priestess everywhere. He looked more like a warrior or a bodyguard than a real priest. The two other priests were a woman with dark hair and violet eyes, and an old man with grey hair who looked more like a warrior as well, but older than Kinvara’s personal guard. Melisandre completed the group. One of her visions saved Daenerys’s life. A scent of lilac and gooseberry came to her nose.

“Let’s begin,” Daenerys said.

She informed them quickly of the recent events at the Wall. She gathered them to speak about this threat north of the Wall, but the message she just came to know made it a matter more important to discuss than ever. The expressions on all their faces were grave, but Melisandre seemed to be affected by it more than everyone else.

“If the servants of the Great Other are here, then we must fight them, and now,” one of the warrior-styled priest declared.

“There are still four kingdoms who refuse to acknowledge me as their queen. I cannot let them behind me, still fighting my armies” Daenerys declared.

“She’s right. These kingdoms could rise in rebellion if we all march north. Bringing all our armies would be suicidal. These kingdoms could try to use the absence of occupation forces to take the Crownlands, or even the Reach,” Revan analyzed.

“The true war lies in the North,” Melisandre almost whispered.

“She is right. This is where the true enemy is,” the other priestess approved.

Daenerys looked at Kinvara, waiting for her opinion. When she voiced it, she looked very tired. “If you go immediately in the North and leave your new subjects behind you without anyone to protect them, they will suffer.”

Daenerys agreed. “Winter is here. There are hundreds of thousand people without shelter around the capital, and maybe more in the Riverlands thanks to the wars that ravaged this country. My country. I will not abandon the people I just freed from Cersei’s tyranny.”

“The servants of the Great Other are here, your Grace. Your destiny is to fight and to destroy them,” the oldest priest said.

“Jon Snow doesn’t have the means to fight the dead. He will need your help in order to stop them,” Melisandre added.
“I don’t even know who this Jon Snow is,” Daenerys almost snapped. She stared at Melisandre. “You are the only one in this room who ever met him. What can you tell me about him?”

The priestess who once served Stannis Baratheon was very pale. “Jon Snow is a man of duty, and of honor according to some. He follows certain rules, and is ready to put at risk his own life, and sometimes the lives of all his people, to keep following them. He is a good man, but he is also conscious of the threat that the Night King represents. He saw him at Hardhome, and he saw his army. It’s no longer a matter of years or months, or even weeks now. It’s a matter of days before the dead get past the Wall.”

“You saw it in the fire?”

“No, but I can feel it. The war is no longer to come. It is here, and your destiny is to make an alliance with Jon Snow to defeat the dead. You both have a role to play in this war.”

“Jon Snow wants the Iron Throne just like me. How could we be allies?”

“I doubt that Jon Snow wants the Iron Throne. He was chosen by his sworn brothers to be Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch, when he didn’t ask or wish it. I wouldn’t be surprised if people forced the title of King in the North upon him. But he is also capable of making compromises. He managed to unite the Free Folk who lived north of the Wall with the lords of the North and four kingdoms who were at each other’s throat not long ago. He understands what is coming for us better than most men, and he is ready to face those things. He fights for the people in the North. He took a knife in the heart for them, and gave his life for them.”

All eyes were on her in an instant. “What did you say?” It was Revan who asked the question.

“Jon Snow died. There was a rebellion in the Night’s Watch after he allowed the wildlings south of the Wall. His sworn brothers killed him. He was dead. I saw him, lying cold on a table, scars still fresh left by a dozen knives.”

“How can he still be alive, then?” Daenerys asked, beginning to be suspicious about Melisandre.

“The Lord brought him back?” Revan asked. “You asked the Lord to bring him back?”

Melisandre nodded, then looked at her. “I don’t know why the Lord brought Jon Snow back to life. Perhaps he is the Prince that was promised, perhaps you are, your Grace, perhaps neither of you are. But the Lord brought him back for a reason, and he brought you to Westeros at this precise moment for a reason as well. You share the same blood. I could feel it. No matter if he’s your nephew or not, he has dragon blood, the old blood of Valyria. You both have a role to play in this war, and Jon Snow cannot win on his own. He doesn’t have the men, or the means, or the power for that. But you have.”

Daenerys remained staring at Melisandre for a moment. Jon Snow was dead, and then came back to life? She saw many things, and discovered stranger things recently, but a man coming back from the dead?

“Leave, all of you. Except for your High Priestess.”

They slowly all did like she told them. She noticed that Revan seized Melisandre’s arm on their way out. When Daenerys was all alone with the High Priestess, she asked.

“Is it possible to bring people back from the dead?”

“There are some who claim to have this power. Actually, in Volantis, no living priest ever
succeeded. Some tried, but they failed.”

“Do you believe that Melisandre is telling the truth?”

The High Priestess squeezed her hands. “I saw no lies on her face or in her eyes when she told me. It might be possible. There are other orders of Red Priests in this world, and everything is possible to our Lord. Maybe Jon Snow really has a role to play. No matter what this role is, you will have to compose with him, and very soon.”

Daenerys nodded. It was true, she couldn’t ignore Jon Snow. She may not be able to wait for the results of Varys’s investigations. She had four kingdoms left to conquer. The Westerlands and the Riverlands were almost empty, devoid of troops. An army from the Vale of Arryn recently destroyed the Lannisters who marched south at the Crossroads, which meant that there were dissensions among Jon Snow’s bannermen. She could take the Westerlands with a small army. She would have to cross the Riverlands to reach the North with the bulk of her army. She would submit Riverrun on the way. Then she would head north, and probably send another army to take care of the Vale while she dealt with these White Walkers if necessary, and with Jon Snow as well. Varys warned her about Petyr Baelish, the widower of the late Lady of the Vale, and to not trust him. Kinvara was of an opinion to not trust him either. He cooperated with Cersei Lannister, but managed to escape not long before Daenerys took King’s Landing. She wasn’t sure about this man. She never met him. However, considering that he changed his allegiance several times, and considering the accusations that Lord Varys made against him about his role in the beginning of many wars, Daenerys would be careful with that man, whoever he was. She wouldn’t stay in King’s Landing for long. Someone would have to rule it in her absence, and she knew precisely who would make it.

“If it wouldn’t bother you, Queen Daenerys, I would like to see something in this tower,” Kinvara told her.

“Of course.”

The High Priestess made a light bow with her head and headed towards another section. They were in the Hand’s personal rooms. Daenerys decided to follow her. She didn’t explore much of the Red Keep in the two days she spent in. She followed Kinvara to a place that looked like the personal chamber of the Hand of the King, judging by the large bed in the middle of it. It was this bed that Kinvara looked at.

“For three hundred years, men who ruled the Seven Kingdoms slept here,” the High Priestess said. “People could be starving or freezing or dying outside, but they remained here, warm and safe, high over everyone else.”

Daenerys listened to her. Kinvara turned around the bed, never touching it except for her heavy red robe that sometimes brushed it. Her eyes never left the bed, however.

“I wonder how many women slept in this bed. None were Hands. They were wives, mistresses, whores. Mostly whores,” the eastern woman said.

“Indeed.” Daenerys had noticed Kinvara’s hatred for slavery, but also for brothels and the men keeping them. As for herself, Daenerys had sympathy for the women who were forced to work into brothels. Just like her, they were sold to men like cattle, like trophies.

“Good riddance.”

On these two words, the High Priestess Kinvara walked away and left the chamber. Daenerys lingered behind for some time. She hadn’t thought much about who would be her Hand. If Ser
Barristan was alive, she would probably have chosen him. Perhaps she could have chosen Ser Jorah, though she doubted he would have liked the position, or been fit for it. She knew that there were certainly several men among the lords who followed her for now who hoped that they would be her first Hand, but to be honest none of them satisfied her for the position. She didn’t know them enough. She would probably report the choice until she was sure to name a person she could entirely trust and who would make a good job. Anyway, many lords would already be happy with the nominations she foresaw for her small council. Lord Mace Tyrell would be Master of Coin, Lord Paxter Redwyne would be Master of Ships, and Lord Yronwood would be Master of Laws. Her most powerful allies in Westeros would then all have places on the small council. The Reach would have one more seat than Dorne, but she doubted that Dorne would complain for long after they would learn of the great honor she was about to grant them. Varys would be Master of Whisperers, of course. She contemplated the idea of naming Kinvara to the office, but she would rather not turn Varys into an enemy, and both Trystane and Malcom advised her against this choice. They judged that giving seats on the small council to priests of a foreign religion was too dangerous for the relations with their allies. A new Grand Maester would have to be chosen by the Citadel.

The small council would have a lot of work to do, if only to rebuild the city. They would be short on time to house everyone, and to build the essential buildings like granaries to feed the people through winter. And this was without considering the Riverlands, all ravaged by the previous wars, that Daenerys would have to take care of after she conquered them. She would leave King’s Landing to the hands of someone she trusted. Someone who wouldn’t be Hand of the Queen, but who would rule the city in her absence, while she completed the unification of Westeros and defeated whatever enemy she found in the North.

Daenerys left the Tower of the Hand and went to see the prince Trystane Martell of Dorne. She had important matters to discuss with him. Like she expected, his astonishment was complete by the end of their discussion.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Jaime
Jaime VIII

Chapter Notes

Jaime meets someone.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

JAIME VIII

Cersei is dead. I killed her. Is Brienne still alive? Did I kill her too?

The questions were tormenting Jaime. He had more than enough torments for the rest of his life, and longer. He didn’t know what tormented him the most, the fact that he murdered his own sister, the woman he loved, or that he left a woman who trusted him, who sacrificed herself for him, a knight unworthy of her help.


He saved the city, twice. And this is where it got him. If the gods were real, and if they were just, why was the world so full of injustice? Because of men like you? The voice of Catelyn Stark echoed in his head. There were no men like him. Only him. No man had done what he did, whether the people knew it or not. He would become a legend, the dishonorable knight who stabbed his king in the back, shared the bed of his sister and queen, and ended up murdering the said sister with a knife in her throat. History would remember him, for sure. He would leave a memory that would last a thousand of years. He fulfilled his father’s wishes. The name of Ser Jaime Lannister, son of Tywin Lannister, would live on.

Jaime hadn’t wanted to admit it on his way to King’s Landing. He hadn’t wanted to consider the possibility. It brushed his mind from time to time, but he refused to truly think about this eventuality. The thought of killing Cersei couldn’t come to his mind and make its nest. Only the idea of abandoning Cersei settled after an ordeal. When he met Brienne, he made another step. He accepted that Cersei wouldn’t survive. His aunt had tried to make him understand that, but he refused to admit it. He finally conceded the truth when he spoke with Brienne, who reminded him of the man with her eyes, his throat sliced while Cersei looked at him with glee. And then he made another step. He decided to let go a person who would try to kill Cersei. He didn’t try to stop her. And then he made a third step. He decided to help Brienne in killing Cersei.

It had been so easy with Brienne around. Within less than an hour, he went from knowing that Cersei was doomed but resigned to die helping her, to conspiring to murder her. Brienne triggered something in him. Perhaps it was his long lost honor resurfacing, or perhaps it was something else. Still, Brienne’s presence forced him to accept his fate. He would play a vital role in Cersei’s demise.

On their way to King’s Landing, he believed that it was likely that Brienne would get caught before she could kill Cersei, and very likely that if she did kill Cersei, then she would die not long after. Strangely, the thought of it saddened Jaime on the road, much more than the thought that Cersei didn’t have long to live. He decided that he would protect Brienne, no matter what happened, and no
matter what the Maid of Tarth thought about it. However, he didn’t expect that Brienne would be the one to protect him in the end.

As he crossed the corridors of the Red Keep, Jaime’s mind had been in a greater turmoil than ever before. It was even worse than in the days of the Mad King, worse than the day when he became the man they would call the Kingslayer. What would he do when he would face Cersei? Try to convince her to surrender? Certainly, that’s what he would have done, like the fool he was, but that was before he crossed Qyburn’s path. The man was disguised, and Jaime knew immediately what he intended to do. Qyburn was dead a moment later, and when Jaime walked into the Great Hall, carrying the dead man’s head, there was no place left for the love he once felt for his sister.

Now that it was done, he wasn’t sure if he felt anything about it. He felt that he lost Cersei a long time ago. She was no longer the woman he used to love. Like his aunt told him, she was gone. Jaime wondered what would happen to Genna now? And Brienne? She was capable of defending herself, but Jaime knew her. And since he knew who Brienne was, he was almost certain of the fate that fell upon the Lady of Tarth. She reminded him of Tyrion during the time they travelled through the Riverlands, after Catelyn Stark released him, but to the opposite of Tyrion, Brienne wasn’t clever. She wasn’t good to get herself out of impossible situations. Perhaps Jaime had more in common with her than he thought. Perhaps he had more in common with Brienne than with Cersei.

What would happen to Tyrion now? Jaime worried about him. He worried about his little brother all the time. It was the third thing that tormented his mind all day long. Tyrion never did anything against the Targaryens. He took no part in the fall of the Mad King, and never took any decision against Viserys and Daenerys while they were in exile. He was only a boy when his big brother killed the Mad King. Would he be killed by their new queen all the same? Jaime didn’t know her. She didn’t execute him on the spot when she found him, but she probably only kept him alive so she could execute him publicly, or make him process through the streets as a war trophy for the people to admire. Maybe they would throw stones at him, the Kingslayer. I saved them. I saved this city. I saved them twice.

Jaime thought about Tyrion’s child. He almost didn’t have time to truly think about her at all. He was always too focused on something else. Now that he had all the time in the world, he could think about the little girl who bore his mother’s name. Had it been Tyrion’s idea? Did he choose himself to call his first daughter after their lady mother? It had to be. Jaime was sure that Sansa would have liked to call her after her own mother, or someone else in her family. Jaime was surprised that Tyrion didn’t grant her this wish. Maybe his brother was capable of refusing something to the woman he loved. In that case, he was stronger than Jaime ever was. He called his first child after their mother, after the mother that Jaime killed.

Motherslayer. That was a title he had forgotten. He could call himself parricide too, but motherslayer sounded better. It fitted well with all his other titles. What title could he earn for killing his cousin? There was no name for the killing of cousins. He supposed that he would have to settle for kinslayer. That wasn’t much, but that was something.

Jaime wished he could see his niece, the last niece he had. Perhaps she looked like his lady mother. Perhaps by seeing her, he could recall how the first Joanna Lannister looked like. Perhaps the memory of the woman who brought him into this shit world would resurface. He could put a face on her name again.

He saw a light through the bars of his cell’s door. He remained into darkness most of the time. It didn’t bother him. He knew worse when he was Robb Stark’s prisoner. At least he had a roof over his head. No rain to wet him, and no sun to burn him. No snow to freeze him either now. Just as Jaime was asking himself if he was in the same cell than Eddard Stark before his execution, the door
opened and a woman walked in, a torch at the hand. The door closed behind her and she approached Jaime, until she was only a few steps away from him.

“Ser Jaime Lannister.”

Her voice was sweet, melodious. Shadows danced on her face because of the fire near it. Her gown was a deep red, of a good tissue from what Jaime could judge, but without any jewel or ornament of any sort. Her hair was wavy, of a dark color.

“Who do I have the pleasure to speak to?” he asked.

She smiled. It wasn’t one of these cruel and wicked smiles Cersei had, but it wasn’t one of joy or comfort either. “There is so much you don’t know, Ser Jaime.”

_I know better than before, at least. “What do you want from me?”_

She made two more steps, now towering him. The smile was gone. “And what do you want?” He blinked. The light of the torch blinded him. “Escape? Live? Drink? Eat? Die? Do you want all this to stop?”

Jaime sighed. “I think I know who you are. You’re one of those foreign priests who follow the dragon queen. I spent some time with Thoros of Myr. You’re much prettier.”

Her expression turned to stone, and a cold anger appeared. Jaime surprised himself by being afraid. “That’s what you see when you look at me, don’t you? A whore. A woman whose only worth is her physical beauty and the pleasure she can give to men. I suppose that’s how you see all women, Kingslayer.”

She reminded him of Cersei this way. “You have no idea what I think of you.”

“I believe that I know enough about you. Your crimes are without end.”

Jaime scoffed. “Yes. I killed my king, I killed my sister and my queen. I killed her Hand. I killed another Hand before. I killed so many people.”

“And more. Varys says you murdered your own cousin while he was a prisoner with you. You also murdered people here, in King’s Landing, without provocation. And this is only the smaller part of all your crimes. Have you ever wondered how many people suffered because of you?”

“At least, these people are alive.”

“Truly? They are alive? Is that what you’re telling yourself at night, to make you feel better? That you are a man of honor because you make people suffer, rob them, beat them, rape them, but you let them live as long as they do everything you want.”

“I saved them.”

“You never saved anybody.” This statement triggered something in him.

“I DID! I saved them! Cersei wanted to burn the city. She sent her man, Qyburn, to light pots of wildfire and destroy King’s Landing. And in case you didn’t know, your queen’s father wanted to do the same. I was there. I heard him talk about it, plan it for weeks. When the rebels marched on the capital, he wanted to burn it all. I saved this city twice. I killed the man who was supposed to burn it, and I killed the person who gave the order, each time. If here’s still something left of this city today for Daenerys Targaryen to rule, and if she still has the Red Keep, it’s thanks to me.”
She looked at him with a placid expression. Unlike Brienne, she showed no reaction to his words. “Do you think yourself an honorable man because of this? Because twice in your life, you murdered monsters who wanted to kill thousands of innocent people?”

Jaime dropped his head on his chest. “That’s the two best things I’ve done in my life.”

“You’re right, and these two decisions you took only prove further who you are,” the Red Priestess said.

“And who am I?” He straightened his head to look into her eyes. They were green, and the flames were reflected in them. “A kingslayer? A kinslayer? A murderer? An oathbreaker? A man without honor?”

“A monster, and a traitor.”

That wasn’t something Jaime was expecting. No one ever told him that he was a monster, despite all the things he’s done, and he never saw himself as a traitor either. “I’m a monster, maybe, but I don’t see how I could be a traitor,” he said.

“I hear the knights swear a vow to protect the weak and defend the innocents. You took the same vow, I suppose.”

“Of course,” he almost spat. He was tired of hearing about the many vows he took.

“Then that makes you a traitor to the people. You said you saved them, but how long did it take for you to kill Aerys and Cersei? You waited for the last minute, when you had no other choice. If you had killed them sooner, thousands of men, women and children might still be alive. You served mass murderers when it was safe to serve them, and killed them when it was dangerous to serve them.”

He didn’t deny it, but that gave her no right to judge him. “I don’t have to justify myself to people who burn people alive.”

A quick smile appeared on her face. “You believe everything you hear about the red priests and our queen. You’re full of prejudice.”

“And you think you’re not?”

“Much less than you.”

Jaime turned his head, and a silence settled in the cell, only disturbed by the soft sound of fire. Would he die this way? Burning? Roasted alive by a dragon?

“We heard that your brother is still alive in the North.”

The mention of Tyrion caught his attention and he looked at the red woman again. “He’s still alive?”

“As far as we know, yes. According to our spies, he is at Castle Black, fighting the servants of the Great Other.”

“I suppose… your queen wants him dead.”

She said nothing for a time. “It depends. If he bends the knee, she might let him live. Queen Daenerys doesn’t consider children responsible for the crimes of their parents, or their brothers, or their sisters. And unlike you, he played no role in the destruction of House Targaryen.”

Tyrion couldn’t die. He was all that Jaime had left, all the family that was left to him. “He doesn’t
“You’re probably right.” The woman sat on a nearby bench. “I looked at what he did while he ruled King’s Landing. The city was starving and he was the only one to care about the suffering of the people. Your sister was ordering defenses to be built upon the battlements and organizing feasts, while your son shot on people begging for bread and ordered his men to murder people starving in the streets. Your brother was the only one who tried to feed them. And unlike your sister, he used wildfire to defend this city, to protect it, instead of destroying it. Your father was named Savior of the City, but if someone deserved this title it was certainly your brother.” Jaime agreed with that, but he didn’t voice it. “And right now he’s fighting the real threat. Our queen might want him among her advisors, though not immediately. She won’t forget all the crimes that the Lannisters committed any time soon.”

Jaime looked straight at her. “You should tell your queen that if she kills me, then Tyrion will be the greatest enemy she will ever have. He will never forgive her if she kills me.”

“Then that’s too bad for him. He will die if he fights her. No one can defeat her armies, and her dragons.” Jaime hoped it wasn’t be true. He didn’t want his last sibling to die. “I wonder why he is so loyal to you. You conspired with your own sister, a woman who tried to have him killed several times.”

“I never conspired with Cersei.” He never did anything to harm Tyrion killed.

“And yet you kept serving and obeying her, even while she sent men to murder your brother and put a bounty on his head. She went as far as to offer a great sum for his daughter. A baby.”

Jaime perceived the anger in her voice as she talked. “Cersei is dead now. No one will try to kill them for the reward. There’s no one left to pay them.”

“And I suppose that makes you feel better.”

“It makes me feel better to know that my brother, his wife and their child are going to live, yes,” he spat. “Now, get out! Leave me alone!”

“Or what? You’ll kill me? Order me to kneel before you because I am lowborn while you are highborn? Because I am bound to obey you? You are nothing, Jaime Lannister. You have nothing, and you are nothing. When the war is over, you will stand for trial to answer all your crimes. These crimes include an attempt of murder on a boy of ten, back in the North, in a place called Winterfell. Everyone will see you for who you really are.”

How did she know about the Stark boy? “You don’t know who I am. You know nothing about me.”

“I know more than enough. I know you are a coward, a traitor, a man who believes himself over the others because he is born with a name, and a hypocrite. You claim something, but your actions say all the opposite. You hide behind vows and codes of honor to give you a good appearance, but inside, you are a monster, just like your sister.”

“You have no idea, what it is to be told to obey the king, to obey our father and to protect the people all at the same time. One way or another, we break a sacred vow.”

“Then you should have chosen better what vows to respect.” She stood up. “You won’t live for long, coward.”

Jaime straightened himself the best he could. He would have strangled her right now if he could. “I may be an oathbreaker, but I am no coward. I may not be an honorable knight, but you are no better.
You pretend that you are defending the people, but you are fooling them, lying to them, so you can have power. I know the people of your kind. You are impostors. I made more for the people of this city with my two murders than you with all your prayers and pretty words.”

She didn’t flinch a single moment. Instead, she replied very calmly. “Like always, you show that you know nothing, Ser Jaime. You believe what you want to believe. You try to place yourself on a pedestal by lowering the others. I made mistakes in my life, just like you, and I made horrible things, things that I will regret until the moment I die. But to the opposite of you, I don’t try to justify myself. Instead, I try to make the good around me, to help those in the need, unlike you who try to justify a life of killing by attaching yourself to a few times when you saved people.”

“So, that’s your way to atone for your sins? Make amends?” he mocked her. “Is that what you’re telling yourself at night, to make you feel better?” He repeated her own words. She didn’t seem moved by them.

“No. I’m not looking for redemption. I only try to do what is right. Because this is what the Lord asks from us.”

Jaime laughed. “You’re lying to yourself. Your god doesn’t exist, nor does any god. Gods are only there to give some hope in this life to those who have none.”

She remained silent for quite some time. Her facial expression didn’t change. She was like a stone that nothing could move. “You don’t believe in gods.”

“If the gods were real, they wouldn’t let our world be full of injustice.”

“There is no justice without injustice,” she replied. “Have you ever read the Seven-Pointed Star, Jaime?”

“My nursemaid used to read it to me, but I don’t really care about books, and neither about the gods, so books about the gods? I’m not sure it interests me. You should ask my brother.”

“There is a passage in one of these holy texts that says: For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. You are blind. You believe what you want to believe.”

“Isn’t that the case for you too?” Jaime was really getting unnerved by this conversation, but he didn’t see how he could get rid of this fanatic, or how he could spend time differently.

“It was, some time ago. But now I see. Perhaps it is time for you to see the truth as well.”

Slowly, she brought her hand to her neck. There was a red necklace with an hexagonal ruby or something like that. He had missed this jewel before, but now he realized that it was glowing. She unclasped it and removed it, and the glow slowly died. Jaime stared at the red stone. He had never seen anything like it before. No gem could shine like this. It was unnatural. When he looked back at the face of the woman, he saw someone totally different. Another woman was standing right in front of him, wearing exactly the same clothes, but her appearance was totally different. The hair, the face, even the eyes were different.

“Sooner or later, the truth comes out,” she said. She stared back at him, and at the same time, she hugged her gown around her tightly, as if she felt cold.

Jaime’s eyes widened, and his mouth opened in terror. He couldn’t believe what he was seeing. She smiled at him in a very cruel way.
“Now you see the truth, Jaime Lannister.”

Chapter End Notes

Perhaps this chapter seems odd to some people. Many probably hoped or expected for a first face-to-face between Jaime and Daenerys, but instead it was Kinvara who he met. I didn't choose her by throwing dice. This discussion will greatly influence Jaime's future choices from now on.

Please review

Next chapter : Yara
Yara II

Chapter Notes

Yara is back, to fight her uncle once again.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

YARA II

The small boats were already charged. Ladders, rams, crossbows, arrows, bows, swords, axes filled them. They had enough to seize by themselves the thirty-one islands that House Greyjoy ruled for three hundred years. The whole power of Yara’s fleet was there. They were ready to take Pyke back.

Euron’s power was dwindling. He had lost a large part of his fleet at Oldtown. Yara had met his remaining forces at the Shield Islands and crushed them, sinking some and seizing the others. After the victory at Oldtown, Yara sailed for the Shield Islands with the Redwynes. She hated it, but Lord Redwyne put as a condition of helping her to take back the Iron Islands that she had to help them free the Shield Islands. And Daenerys ordered her to help to free the Reach of all the Ironmen who occupied its territory. Yara had sent a part of her fleet to take Great Wyk by the west, while the rest headed for the islands of the Reach.

Euron’s men gave them a lot of difficulty. While Rodrik Harlaw took the islands of her people one by one, Euron had fortified the Shield Islands like impregnable fortresses, and positioned almost all his remaining ships to defend them. They needed three battles against his fleet to destroy it, and even then, their losses were high. Yara lost more ships and men in the battles of the Shield Islands than Euron did. The Redwynes and their allies lost many men too. They won only because they had more men and more ships than Euron. She didn’t expect that her uncle would have left most of his ships at the Shield Islands. They occupied a strategic position, the door giving on the Reach, but Yara wouldn’t have left all her fleet there when it was clear that her enemies would attack the Iron Islands. Her uncle Rodrik said that Euron lost so many men in his war and because of the desertions to Yara’s cause, and that he used so many resources from the Iron Islands, that he would never be able to build enough ships to reconstitute his great armada. Euron couldn’t hope to slow them down at the Shield Islands in order to have time to rebuild his fleet. He didn’t have the men or the wood to rebuild it.

Still, the men he left behind at the Shield Islands gave them one hell of a fight. They held their positions like desperate men, as if their lives depended on it. Yara offered them generous terms for their surrender, but they refused. And so Ironborn fought Ironborn.

Once the fight was over, Yara could only realize the magnitude of her uncle’s crimes on the territories he conquered. Almost all the families who ruled the Shield Islands had been savagely killed. At Oakenshield, they found the bodies of Lord Hewlett, his wife, his daughters and his granddaughters in the cave of their castle. They were all killed with knives by the men of Nute the Barber, to who Euron gave Oakenshield when he took the island. Most servants had died before they freed the castle, killed by Ironborn too, but the survivors told them Lord Hewletts’s wife and daughters were repeatedly raped before they were murdered. Yara would have executed Nute if he didn’t die in the fight.

Bodies were hanging in all villages, mass graves were dug on every island. The only survivors of the
great families who once ruled these places were those who managed to escape before the Ironmen attacked, or who had the luck to be outside the islands when the invasion took place. Several cottages and villages were completely burned by her countrymen. Yara had led her men into battle several times, killed many people, but the actions of Euron’s men in the Reach were not reaving. They were butchery, slaughter. The soldiers of the Reach who helped them in their fight were close to turning on her more than once, at the sight of her uncle’s horrors.

It had been difficult for Yara, and for all the men following her. They fought against their own countrymen. Some once drank with men who fought in Euron’s army before the war. She also knew that some of her men grumbled against her when they were among themselves. The Ironborn didn’t sow, they took what was theirs. Yara grew up with these words, same as everyone else in the Iron Islands. However, Daenerys didn’t hear it that way. Yara had to admit that she agreed with her uncle. Her people needed a future different from what they lived for the past centuries. The kings of the Iron Islands once ruled large territories all over Westeros, threatening places as far as the Stormlands. They were feared everywhere. That was no longer the case. The dragons had changed things. They couldn’t terrorize the greenlanders like they used to. They stood no chance against dragons. Rebellions were useless. Their way of life was doomed to disappear. Either they changed their ways and lived, or they kept disillusioning themselves and continued to reave, and they disappeared along with their ways. Yara knew what her choice was. She wasn’t her father. The Iron Islands and their people were more important than their ways of life. They had an alliance with the new queen now, which would give them more opportunities than they ever had since the death of Harren the Black.

Still, Yara knew that her leadership was being questioned. Her people were attached to their ways. Stopping that would be hard. There was also the question of thralldom. Daenerys forbade the practice and made it a primary condition for their alliance. Yara had tried to convince the other queen that it wasn’t wise to banish thralldom from the Iron Islands, since the institution was well established and forbidding it would cause troubles that may be impossible to deal with. Daenerys had replied that slavery was unacceptable and that she wouldn’t tolerate it anywhere in Westeros. Yara explained to her that thralldom was not slavery. A thrall could only be obtained by paying the iron price. Once they were captured, they belonged to the person who caught them for the rest of their lives. Thralls couldn’t be sold or bought, and if their children were drowned to the Drowned God, then they were free. With the help of her uncle Rodrik, Yara managed to relent Daenerys in her determination of banishing thralldom. She didn’t declare all thralls to be free. However, she forbid Yara to reduce any more people into thralls, and declared that all people taken as thralls since the War of the Five Kings began would be set free and be given the right to return to their homes. For the other thralls, Daenerys reluctantly agreed to let them remain in their condition, but decreed that their children would be free men, no matter if they were drowned or not. These were harsh conditions, but better than the initial idea to completely ban thralldom. In two or three generations, there would be no thralls left in the Iron Islands.

Her men weren’t happy either to be forbidden from sacking and plundering the territories of the Reach. Qarl told her that some said she was selling the Iron Islands to the greenlanders. And although Ironmen were always eager to fight, they preferred to fight against strangers. Now they were fighting alongside strangers against their own countrymen, the very people they fought side by side against the Northerners not long ago. There were no talks of open rebellion yet, but Yara knew she would have to be careful. Her uncle was giving precious advice as to how to make sure that the transition would go smoothly and without too much complaint among their people and the captains.

“We’re ready, your Grace.” Qarl had come to her side.

“Call me Yara, Qarl.” For him, it would always be Yara.
“Very well, Yara. We’re ready.”

“I know.” She sighed.

“Euron has no chance. He is surrounded. This might be our last battle.”

“Orkmont and Blacktyde still escape us,” Yara pointed. She hoped as well that this would be their last battle, but she didn’t keep her hopes too high.

“They won’t keep fighting us once Euron is dead.”

“Euron was named at a Kingsmoot. According to our traditions, he is the rightful king. There will always be men to fight for him. And there will always be men to think that a woman’s place is not on the Seastone Chair.”

She thought about her uncle Aeron, the Damphair. She would have to deal with him once Pyke had fallen. He would certainly accuse her of betraying her own kind on religious grounds because of her alliance with Daenerys. After all, it was now widely known that the other queen was being advised by foreign priests. Qarl put an arm around her shoulders. She didn’t lean against him, but she didn’t push him back either.

“Don’t listen to them. You’re our queen. All those who chose Euron against you are fools.”

She took some comfort in that. “What do you think of freeing thralls? Daenerys Targaryen still wants that, I know it. Do you think I should do what she says?”

He looked at her, his expression indecipherable. “I don’t know. My grandfather was a thrall, but I don’t regret it. I wouldn’t have met you if he wasn’t captured, and from what my father told me, his owner wasn’t evil. He didn’t mistreat him. I don’t see the point in banning it.”

“The Targaryen queen will not see it that way. If she orders thralldom to be banished, she will expect me to accept.” Or obey. I may be queen, but to Daenerys, even the other queens were to obey her.

“But you are our queen, Yara. It’s your decision. She doesn’t have to give you orders.”

“Say that when you have her three dragons looking at you, ready to roast you alive.”

He removed his arm from her shoulders. “I suppose it’s a compelling argument.” He laughed nervously, and Yara barely echoed him.

She looked at the castle of Pyke, her home, not far away. They arrived in the thick of the night to avoid being spotted, but she could recognize the outline of her home even in this darkness. There was no moon in the sky. It was the perfect cover for their attack. No one would see them coming.

“Let’s hope this will be the last battle,” she said. “I’m tired of fighting. Fighting against our own people and friends, fighting against the Northerners, fighting against whoever else lives in Westeros. We’ve been fighting for years, and what did it get us? Rocks, pebbles, pinecones, and turnips? Was it worth losing our brothers, our sons? My brother? My father? What did we get from this? Nothing. We took fortresses, and we lost them, and we lost good men with them. And we lost more men in a fratricide war. What’s left to fight for? We have our kingdom. This is more than what my father and his ancestors ever got with their failed rebellions.”

“What about the Starks, Yara? You said you wanted to avenge Theon.”

“Hopefully, this dragon queen will take care of them. No need to kill them ourselves when she can
do it for us.”

Yara wasn’t even sure if she wanted to avenge Theon. Theon had been lost to her long before. She saw that her brother was gone when she tried to rescue him. She now knew the tales of what Ramsay had done to him. He was the one who destroyed Theon. The Starks and the Lannisters only executed a shell, or at least she tried to tell herself that. She knew that an attempt to avenge Theon was doomed to fail. One evening, she talked about it with Rodrik, and with rational and logical arguments, he showed her that it was an impossible enterprise. They didn’t have the men to take the North or the Westerlands, and even if they limited themselves to killing the Starks and the Lannisters who played a role in Theon’s execution, then went back home, their family members would swear revenge against them forever, and they had more than enough resources to make the Iron Islands kneel. Killing the Lannisters and the Starks who were left was an almost impossible task, and the war that would follow may be one that Yara’s people may never be able to recover from.

One of her men arrived to her. “We’re ready.”

Yara nodded, and with Qarl, she climbed down from the Black Wind and went into one of the many boats. A man at the helm raised a torch and moved it in a very specific way, so the other ships would recognize the signal. Then they detached from her ship and rowed.

The progress was slow. They had torches with them, but they didn’t light them. They weren’t to be seen coming into the harbor of Lordsport, at least not before it was too late for the defenders. The lights of the harbor would betray them when they would close on the docks, but they wouldn’t be seen before they were close enough. The oarsmen rowed quietly and silently, making sure to not draw any attention.

The sound of oars slowly cutting across the water of the sea and the breathing of the men pulling and drawing were the only sounds around her. Yara remained at the prow of her boat, watching the buildings of Lordsport getting closer and closer. Within a few minutes, she would be home again. She hadn’t come there since she left for the Kingsmoot.

Yara used a Myrish glass she managed to get during her journey to Meereen and used it to look closely at what was going on in the docks. There weren’t many ships. Most were lost at Oldtown or the Shield Islands. Euron hadn’t only built all the ships he could. He also converted all the merchant ships he could find into warships. As a result, Yara could only distinguish half a dozen ships in the docks, when they could welcome dozens.

Sharp as a swordthrust, the sound of a horn split the air. AaaaaaaaRRREEEEEEeeeee. Yara shouted in pain and covered her ears as soon as the sound came. The terrible sound pierced them. It stopped, and she was about to release her ears when a second blow resonated over the sea, as strong as the first, and she protected her ears again. AaaaaaaaRRREEEEEEeeeee. She had the impression that her head was about to explode. She braced for another blow, and it came, this time worse than the two previous sounds. AAAAAAAAARRREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE! The boat was shaking, but all she could do was roll over herself as the third blow lasted, lasted, lasted, and lasted. How could someone blow a horn for so long.

Finally, all stopped. Yara slowly got back on her feet and looked around her. All the oarsmen in her boat had fallen. She watched the other boats and found that the people in them weren’t much better. She heard splashes of water. Men had fallen to the sea and were calling for help. A strident sound lingered in Yara’s ears that made it hard to focus on anything. She looked at the harbor ahead of them. Were there so many lanterns the last time she looked? She perceived yelling coming from the ships anchored nearby.

Yara knew what she had to do, and she didn’t hesitate. She unsheathed her sword. “Row forward!
Now! Everyone, row forward!”

Her own crew hurried to take back their positions. She shouted the same order to the nearby boats, and soon all the men were shouting at each other to press the movement. The time for secrecy was gone. The battle had begun.

To Yara’s taste, they needed too much time to reach the closest dock, and yet their boat was the first to berth. As soon as they were close enough, she jumped from the boat and helped all her men to get out of it. Two remained behind to attach the boat, according to the orders she gave prior to the battle, while the others followed her as she charged into the city.

The first enemy she met had to be one of the men who guarded the harbor, and she killed him easily. The advance through the city was quick and deadly. Many people died around her, friends and enemies all alike. The defence of the city didn’t seem very well organized.

Men began to discharge the ladders and rams they brought with them as soon as Lordsport had fallen. Yara gave up on fighting to supervise the discharging of all the material, hurrying the men to bring the siege engines forward as quickly as they could. They requisitioned every horse and cart they could find and progressed along the path leading to the castle of Pyke. Yara seized a shield as they approached the castle, something she seldom did. She would need it.

She sent detachments to take control of the path leading to Pyke ahead of them, and she was glad to see that they succeeded when she neared the castle’s gates. She raised her shield just in time to block an arrow that would have gotten through her head. The defenders shot arrows and threw rocks at them from the battlements, and the attackers shot arrows back to them, using shields as protection. The first ladders arrived and men began to climb them as soon as they were in position, giving another distraction to the enemy. Yara wanted to join her men assaulting the battlements, but she had to stay behind to supervise them and to lead the assault through the gate.

The ram reached their position not long after the ladders. Yara joined the men bringing it, and they began to shove the ram to the gate, protected by lines of shields over theirs heads. Her muscles burned from the effort, sweat covered her forehead. Her forces were multiplied, just like every time when she was in the heat of battle. She threw with all her forces the ram against the gate. Once. Twice. Thrice. Again, and again, and again. Splinters of wood flew away from the gate. Loud cracks were heard each time the ram crushed against the gate. The man right in front of her received an arrow through the throat, and fell over Yara, covering her with his blood, but she threw his body aside and kept hammering against the gate.

The gate gave way. It opened. Yara had never been denied entrance into her father’s castle, and this night proved that no one could stop her from entering whenever she wanted. Not even Euron. She rushed into the opening, releasing a cry of rage.

The fights inside the castle of Pyke were savage. Euron’s men fought fiercely, and so did Yara’s men. Some enemies she fought were mutes, others were not. Every time she killed one, she ran forward, searching for the one man she wanted to kill at all cost.

She reached the heavy doors of the Great Hall with a dozen men, and killed the two guards before them without problem. Then they burst into the Hall. All was dark, the only source of light being the torches her men were carrying. Yara seized one and walked to the Seastone Chair, where her father Balon sat for as far as she could remember. It was empty. Euron wasn’t there. She raised the torch and looked all around herself.

“Euron! Get out of your hiding! I’m here!”
No answer. She looked back at the Chair, then between the columns, and she saw nothing.

“Euron, show yourself!” she shouted again. A sound attracted her attention on her left.

They all rushed on them at the same time. Yara and her men were surrounded in no time by a huge wave of men who attacked them with swords, spears and axes without a word. She swung her sword at the first enemy who charged her and blocked the axe that was coming for her head. Her opponent didn’t last long since her sword was inside his chest a second later, but she didn’t have time to breathe. Another one came on her, this time with a long sword. He didn’t last much longer, nor did the third. The fourth however, gave her a real challenge. She needed to hit his leg with her sword first before she thrust her sword through his face. She heard cries all around her.

When Yara looked behind her, she realized that more of her men had arrived in reinforcements. From being outnumbered, they now outnumbered the enemy. She spotted Qarl fighting against a man wielding a long lance. Yara took an axe on the floor and threw it with all her force at Qarl’s opponent, who ended lying on his chest with steel planted into his heart. All of Euron’s men were lying on the floor, injured or dead, a few seconds later. Yara tried to get answers from those still alive, but they were all mute. She ordered them all to be killed on the spot.

“Search for Euron. No rest for anyone before he’s found.”

On these words, she sped through the rooms and the corridors nearby, finding nothing. Her men had already cleaned some of the places she went through. And then she knew where Euron was. She went to the place where her father was murdered.

And there she found him. He stood in the middle of the bridge of ropes, between the two towers. His back was turned on her. Yara had her sword already unsheathed. If she was careful enough, she could kill him from behind without him noticing her. Some may say this was a cowardly way to kill someone, but Euron murdered her father. The way he would die didn’t matter. Only the fact he would die did matter.

She put a first foot on the bridge, and instantly the wood under it creaked. Euron laughed. “You really thought you could kill me this way, Yara?” She should have known. It was impossible to arrive in silence behind someone on a bridge like this one. Euron turned to face her, a devilish grin on his face. “That doesn’t look like you, Yara. Stabbing someone in the back.”

“Would you prefer it if I stabbed you in the belly?” she asked.

Euron burst into laughs. “You may try, but no matter how you try to kill me, you will fail. You cannot kill the kraken.”

“No, but you can kill the kinslayer.” No one is more cursed than the kinslayer.

He opened his arms, as if to accept her into a hug. “I am not a kinslayer, Yara. A kingslayer, maybe, but a kinslayer, no. It wasn’t my brother that I killed on that bridge. It was a king, a king that no one wanted. Everyone wanted to get rid of him. I just did what no one dared to do. Don’t pretend that you loved Balon. The man who had two of your brothers die in a useless war, and who abandoned the third.”

She ignored what he just said. “It’s over, Euron. I got your ship. Your crew is dead. All your men will be dead or in chains by the end of the night. Pyke is mine. You lost.”

“Oh. I lost?” He grinned. “Do you truly believe that I’m done, Yara? I can build myself another ship, you know. I can get more men to crew it. And I have something you will never have.” He showed
her something he held in his right hand. It was a black horn with golden symbols on it. “This horn can awake the kraken. And I just blew it three times. Why did you think I attacked Oldtown? I admit you surprised me there, but my main objective wasn’t to take the city. It was to find this. The man who blows this horn can control the kraken. And now that I blew it, the kraken has woken up, and when he comes, he will put your fleet into pieces. I don’t need a fleet. With that kraken obeying me, I will need nothing.”

Yara looked at the horn, unimpressed. “I always thought you were mad, but now you go far off the limits. It’s over, Euron. You’re going to die.”

He laughed. “All right. If you insist, I’m going to kill you now, for treason.” He unsheathed his sword and pointed it towards her. “And also because I will enjoy it. Come, Yara. Come and embrace you nuncle one last time.”

Yara slowly approached. If she ran to him, it would cause the bridge to sway. One step at a time, she got closer to Euron, watching him closely to find any weakness in his positioning. When she wasn’t far from him, Euron grabbed one of the ropes and gave a quick draw on it.

The bridge shook, and Yara almost lost her stance. Euron used the opportunity to run on her. She ducked his attack, stepping aside from his charge, and tried to hit him on the side, but he stopped her attack. They exchanged blows, Euron roaring wildly while Yara did the same with more restraint. Euron looked like a beast attacking its prey. His blows were powerful, and Yara realized that Euron was way stronger than her. She tried to compensate with her agility, but Euron was just as agile as she was, if not more. The swaying bridge didn’t help either. Euron didn’t seem to bother with it, charging and launching attacks without holding back, but Yara tried all the time to maintain her own balance and often had to grip a rope.

Euron finally struck her hard, then pushed her on the wood of the bridge. Yara’s head was spinning. Her shoulder was grabbed, and the next moment she had a dagger on her throat. She lost her sword in the fight. She felt her uncle’s hot breath on her face.

“Let her go!”

The dagger was digging into her flesh when the shout came from behind her.

“Well, if it’s not my niece’s bedmate?” Euron turned her around, and she saw Qarl standing not far away, sword in hand, a look of horror on his face. Her uncle was still holding her from behind. “You’ll have the pleasure to see the woman you love to fuck die right in front of you.”

The air was filled with Euron’s laughter, and Qarl seemed about to try to save her when her uncle’s laugh was cut short. She heard a gargle and immediately the pression of the dagger on her throat reduced. She got free of her uncle’s hold, and the moment after he was falling. She staggered to prevent him from falling over her.

“Yara, are you all right?” Qarl was kneeling next to her immediately, his sword still in hand.

“Aye, I’m fine.” She massaged her neck and looked at Euron. He lied on the wooden bridge, a bolt in the back of his head. Yara looked up and saw a man with a crossbow in his hands.

“I only shot him in the leg in Oldtown. This time, I thought it would be better if I shot him in the head,” he said.

Yara realized this wasn’t a man. He had black skin. “Wait a minute. I saw you in Oldtown.”

“Yes, you did.”
“How are you here?”

“I would have expected some thanks. I just saved your life, after all.”

“You could have killed her,” Qarl opposed.

Sarella Sand shrugged. “I didn’t.” She looked again at Yara. “So, about some thanks?”

“Thank you,” Yara reluctantly said after a moment. “But what are you doing here?”

“I failed to kill your uncle the last time. He was only wounded. I thought it was my chance to complete the work.”

“And how did you get here?”

“On one of your ships,” she replied.

“Impossible. None of my men would accept a Dornish woman in their crew. Let alone someone with black skin.”

“I hid in the hold. It wasn’t easy, the food wasn’t very good, but it was amusing. And I joined on one of the boats in the attack. It wasn’t difficult. All cats are black in the night.” She approached Euron’s body and took the horn that fell not far from him. “I’ll bring it back to Sam. He found it when he was in the North. He’ll want it back.”

And she walked away. Sarella Sand left without another word. Yara looked at her disappearing in the opposite tower. She stood alone with Qarl on the bridge. She stared at her uncle’s body. She didn’t kill him, but he was dead, and that was all that mattered. The war may not be over yet, but the two remaining islands wouldn’t resist for long now that Euron was gone. She looked in disdain at the dead. He was near the border of the bridge. She knelt and pushed it into the long fall. She watched as Euron Greyjoy fell into the sea, probably in a very similar way to how her father died. She watched his body hit the rocks from the distance, before it disappeared into the salted water. May the Drowned God drown him for good.

Yara stood up. It was over. It was finally over. Euron was dead, she was Queen of the Iron Islands, and the war amongst her people was almost done. When she looked at the horizon, she saw the first glimpse of dawn. The night was coming to an end, and the battle was over. Still, despite this, she had a strange feeling in her stomach that this was far from being over. She didn’t know where this feeling was coming from, or why it was there at all, but she felt it. The war wasn’t over.

Chapter End Notes

I admit that having someone come from nowhere like that to solve the problem seems a little too easy, but we’re talking about Sarella Sand, and hiding in plain sight of someone is in her style, and she is the daughter of Oberyn, so killing with style is probably in her nature as well.

Euron also appears quite desillusional and mad. In the show and the books, he was described as a mad man, but an intelligent man as well. But someone once said that there was a thin limit between folly and genius. Euron would be quite capable of believing that he has won when he's about to be defeated, because he probably can’t
consider the possibility that he's not invincible. And in a situation like this one, he could go as far as to imagine that he can bring back a kraken that would allow him to kill all his enemies. The quicker is the ascension to power, the harder is the downfall.

Keep in mind Yara's last words.

Please review

Next chapter : Asher
Chapter Notes

Part 1 of an important event taking place at the Wall.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

ASHER IV

“You can’t do that.”

“My decision is final. I will not reconsider it.”

The King in the North showed very clearly that he wouldn’t change his mind. Jon Snow, Asher Forrester and Tyrion Lannister were together in the office of the king, and Asher tried, just like every northern lord these past few days, to convince their king to not bend the knee before Daenerys Targaryen.

News arrived two weeks ago about the fall of King’s Landing. Cersei Lannister was dead, and Ser Jaime Lannister, the Kingslayer, was made prisoner. The new queen ordered every lord in the Westerlands, the Riverlands, the Vale and the North to pledge themselves to her. She promised that all those who would acknowledge her as their queen would keep their lands and titles, and that no one in their families would be taken as hostage or die.

Asher wasn’t entirely sure himself of what he should do. Daenerys had helped them to free Ironrath, allowed him to go back to Westeros with an army. There was also the fact that his uncle Malcolm was advising her now. Before he left Meereen, he and his uncle had a discussion, and Malcolm told him that if Daenerys succeeded in conquering the Seven Kingdoms, House Forrester would need no other ally. However, that was when the North was being held by the Boltons. Asher didn’t have any problem with the idea of eventually swearing fealty to Daenerys Targaryen if she could remove the Boltons from the North, but now that the Starks were back and that Jon Snow was hailed King in the North, Asher was divided between two sides. He didn’t want to fight against Malcolm, but he didn’t want to give up on Jon Snow either. If Ironrath was no longer in the hands of the Whitehills, it was in large part thanks to the Starks and the Lannisters, as strange as the latter may seem.

Jon Snow announced almost immediately after they received the news that he wouldn’t remain king. Daenerys Targaryen announced in her letter that she would be heading north to receive the fealty of every lord, and also to help them in the war against the dead. This surprised Asher. Did Daenerys believe in the White Walkers? She swore that she would protect the North against the invaders from beyond the Wall. To Jon Snow, it seemed to be enough. He declared that he would continue to fight against the dead, and remain king as long as necessary to defend the Wall, but once Daenerys would come into the North, he would bend the knee and acknowledge her as the only true queen in Westeros. He also said that he would take the black again once the war was over, to prevent any attempt to start a civil war between Targaryens.

Asher didn’t approve the idea. Jon Snow deserved to be king. He gave up everything for the North. He even died for it. He fought against the real threat, helped Asher and his family to get back their home, and more than everything, he didn’t choose himself to be king. The lords of the North chose him, and if Asher had been there when he was declared king, he would probably have approved the
choice and raised his sword as well.

Asher looked at Lord Tyrion. He didn’t hate the dwarf, he even appreciated him in some way, but the Lannisters were still behind his father’s death at the Twins. The North remembered, and Asher would never forget who killed his father. Mira could consider the Lord of Casterly Rock and his wife as friends, Asher would never go that far.

“Was this your idea?” Asher asked to the dwarf.

“No, it’s mine,” Jon said. “Lord Tyrion’s idea was to marry me with Daenerys Targaryen.”

Asher looked at the small man in complete surprise. Tyrion Lannister shrugged. “I didn’t see a better way to unite the North and the south. Daenerys has dragons. It’s not as if we could resist her. Sadly, she seems to have chosen another man to sit by her side. Her hand is no longer available.”

The message from King’s Landing also said that Daenerys Targaryen was now betrothed with Trystane Martell, son and heir to Doran Martell, the Prince of Dorne and the Lord of Sunspear. Asher wished the guy good luck.

“You should reconsider all this, your Grace,” Asher told Jon Snow. “I have an uncle who serves as an advisor for Daenerys Targaryen, and I met her in Meereen. I could ask him to intercede in your favor before her.”

“No. I took my decision. Daenerys will never accept another king in Westeros,” the King in the North replied.

“She accepted a queen in the Iron Islands.”

Tyrion Lannister intervened. “That’s different. The Iron Islands are a small group of unruly islands, without much to offer. The North is half the territory of Westeros. A Targaryen will never let someone be king of half the Seven Kingdoms. And even for the Iron Islands, my spies tell me that Daenerys put severe conditions for their independence. The new Queen of the Iron Islands must ban piracy and thralldom, and she must also grant freedom of religion in the islands. Since Daenerys has Red Priests among her advisors, I expect Yara Greyjoy to face several rebellions during her reign. It will be difficult for her to maintain her authority over the Iron Islands.”

“We could try, at least. Attempt to make a compromise,” Asher insisted.

“No. There will be no compromise,” Jon stated. “I will take the black again, and Daenerys will be queen. Her armies and her dragons will be able to defeat the army of the dead, something we can’t do by ourselves. I will bend the knee. I will not sacrifice the North to the dead because I’m too proud to kneel before another queen.”

Asher was about to retort to this when the Lord of Casterly Rock spoke up. “Listen, you are both Northerners and are among the most stubborn lads I’ve ever met. None of you will succeed in convincing the other to change his mind. So instead of wasting precious time to argue about things you cannot change, I suggest we go back to the important matters at hand, that is, making sure that the Wall is well defended against the dead and that we can feed and warm the men defending it. And since a part of the Knights of the Vale deserted, I believe it is more than ever of the utmost importance.”

Asher looked at the dwarf, then at the king. Jon Snow wouldn’t relent, it was true. Asher had some of his men keeping the watch on the top of the Wall as they spoke. He should be with them.

“Your Grace.” He bowed before Jon Snow and walked out.
“I’m coming with you,” the Lannister said.

The two of them walked to the winch cage, getting through the men and women drilling in the courtyard. The two women who were the most visible were Sylvi, the wildling girl that Gared brought with him from the North, and Arya Stark, Jon Snow’s sister. They were putting back into place their weapons, probably being done with practice for today. Asher had taken a liking to the two girls. Sylvi was almost a new sister for Gared. Asher was glad for his friend. Gared needed someone he could take care of, worry about, after his father and his sister were butchered by Ludd’s men, and even more after he learned of his uncle’s betrayal.

“I hope your wife is doing well,” Lord Tyrion told him as the cage began to ascend.

“She is at Highpoint, trying to rebuild it,” he replied shortly. He didn’t really want to talk about it. Since her father died, Gwyn had to struggle with many conflicting feelings. She kept writing to him, but Asher sometimes had the impression that she was slipping away from him. “You really suggested Jon Snow to marry Daenerys?” he asked the dwarf.

“I wish he didn’t talk about it, but yes. Anyway, he would have none of it. He refused to marry his own aunt.”

“What a surprise,” Asher commented with sarcasm.

“Among the Targaryens, this is acceptable.”

“Jon Snow is a Stark, not a Targaryen. I met Daenerys in Essos, and believe me, she and Jon Snow have nothing in common.”

“What can you tell me of her? Should we worry about her?”

“It depends. I advise you to never provoke or hurt her, or her dragons. If you want something from her, then give her something first, and then she will help you. You keep her promises to her, and she will her promises to you as well. She is a good friend to have, and an even worse enemy to have.”

“And what about someone who killed her father?”

Asher looked at the dwarf. He seemed worried. “I don’t give much time to live to your brother.”

“I feared so.” The small man looked far away.

“Jon Snow should remain king. He deserves it.”

“My sister once told me that if we ever began to sort out what everyone deserved, we would end weeping for each and every person in the world.”

“My condolences for your sister.”

“It’s more Jaime who occupies my thoughts for now. I don’t really care about Cersei’s death. She tried to kill me more often than I can remember. We’re talking about a woman who placed a price on my head, on the head of my wife, and even on my daughter.”

“I’m glad your sister is dead,” Asher said in all honesty.

“Me too,” replied the Lord of Casterly Rock. After a moment, he asked something to Asher. “Is there no one in your family that you hate, or that you have some trouble with?”

“No. I always got along with all of them. I loved my parents and all my brothers and sisters, but
perhaps I was closer to Mira than to all the others.” There was his half-brother, but Asher didn’t truly consider him as part of the family. The thought that his father might have had children with another woman was… perturbing.

“A clever girl. I like her. I’ll always remember the day when Cersei engaged a duel of wits with her. She tried to get your sister to declare her loyalty to Joffrey, or to trap her in one way or another. And she failed. You should have seen Cersei’s face. Now she’s dead, and your sister is alive, and married.”

Asher smiled at this anecdote. The last message from Mira had come with the last load of ironwood. She said that Ironrath would be ready for winter. She didn’t talk of her husband, or her pregnancy. Asher regretted he didn’t write to her, Talia and Ryon as often as she did.

“I’m sorry for your brother,” Asher told the man standing next to him.

“Are you?” Tyrion Lannister seemed skeptical.

“I don’t like him, but I lost two brothers in this war, so I know how you must feel.” Asher shook his head. “Rodrik was supposed to be Lord of Ironrath, not me. I was never supposed to succeed my father.”

“And neither was I. At least, your father was a good man, and he loved you like his son. But here we are, two second sons, both leaders of their house, and fighting against the common enemy.”

Asher nodded. The cage was arriving to its destination. “Thank you for helping my sister in King’s Landing.”

“That was a pleasure. Sometimes, she makes me think about Sansa.”

The cage stopped. They opened the door and walked out, taking different directions. Asher went to the east, the Lord of Casterly Rock to the west. Their men were positioned in different places. They used to have more Lannister men at Castle Black before, but after Jon Snow made his intention to surrender to Daenerys known, some lords from the Vale left and rode south. As a result, Lannister soldiers were sent in the castles where the desertions took place. Asher never felt right with too many Lannisters around him, so he didn’t complain too much.

Asher spoke with each of his men. They were all exhausted, with all the attacks they faced, the lack of food and the cold. There was also the solitude. Many missed their wife and their children, and those who had none simply missed the time when they could spend the night with a woman, whoever she was. Asher’s father taught him that it was important to stay close to your men, while reminding them that you were their commander at the same time. Asher had seen how this was important in Essos too, when he served as a sellsword, though there he also had to be careful to not get stabbed in the back. The risks of treason were fewer in the North. It was a wave of clean air for him, after all these years spent in the east.

Asher spotted a man he knew only too well. Gared Tuttle. Duncan’s son stayed with a spear in his hand near a fire, and stared at the land that laid before him very carefully. He and Asher had never been very close back at Ironrath. Gared was his father’s squire, and since Rodrik was the one destined to succeed as Lord of Ironrath, he had more interaction with Gared than Asher did. Asher was also older than Gared. He wielded the sword like a soldier when Gared just began to learn how to use it. Talia was the one who was the closest to Gared, and their lady mother as well, who almost treated him as if he was her own son. There was also another one of Asher’s siblings that Gared would have wanted to be very close to, but this was also the reason why the said sibling kept some distance from Gared. However, since Gared spent years north of the Wall just like Asher spent years
in Essos, their common status of exiles got them closer since he came back.

“Nothing to notice?” Asher asked him.

“Nothing, but they’re out there, somewhere. I know it,” Gared replied.

“What was it, to fight them in the North Grove?”

“It was hell every day. That’s why we abandoned the North Grove. We couldn’t continue to defend it. Elsera didn’t make it.”

Asher grumbled and nodded before looking at the horizon. The sky was relatively clear today, which meant the White Walkers were probably not about to attack. Still, the sun seldom showed up. That didn’t make for a happy atmosphere.

“Was there any news from Ironrath, lately?” Gared asked.

“Mira only says that the reconstruction is going well.”

“And her baby?”

“She didn’t talk about him,” Asher replied. He noticed that Gared tightened his fist. “Don’t worry. Mira is capable of looking after herself. She’ll be fine. My mother was pregnant six times, and nothing ever went wrong.”

“It’s not that.”

“Or is it that she is married?”

Gared looked back at him and answered too quickly. “Not at all.” Asher had put him on the defensive. He grinned.

“Gared, almost everyone at Ironrath knew about it, even before I left. I saw how you looked at her. I look at Gwyn the same way.” Gared’s expression melted instantly. He seemed unsure about what he should say. Asher laughed shortly. “Don’t worry, I know nothing happened between you.”

That would be unlike Mira to engage into a relationship outside the bounds of marriage. She had disapproved of Asher’s meetings with Gwyn as soon as she discovered it, though she also felt sorry for them both and empathized with him. Still, she disapproved. Mira’s shy nature was the reason why Asher was so surprised when he surprised her with his husband. If he had known that the guy would abandon her later, he would have broken his nose on the spot. However, Asher didn’t feel like he could hate his brother-in-law, not after all the time they spent together during the siege of Highpoint. Nothing could tell him back then that Gerold would leave Mira.

“You know, Asher, I went to see her the day before she left. And… I wanted to tell her. But I couldn’t find the courage.”

Asher nodded in understanding. “It was probably better that way, Gared.”

“Would you think the same if I told you that about Gwyn.”

“With Gwyn and me, it was different.”

“How was it different?”

“We are highborn, both of us, but more than that, we loved each other.” Again, Gared’s expression
collapsed. Asher apologized immediately. “I’m sorry, Gared. But no matter what feelings you had for my sister, she didn’t share them.”

Gared looked again at the fields covered by snow hundreds of feet under them. “I just… I find it unfair, what this guy, the one she married, what he did. By the Old Gods, he abandoned her when she was pregnant!”

“I don’t really understand what happened, Gared. I spent time with Mira’s husband, and Gerold seemed decent. Very decent. I can tell you that he was madly in love with her.”

“Perhaps you misjudged him then.”

“Gared, we’re talking about a man who did almost everything my sister told him. She made him promise to stop me from killing Ludd during the siege of Highpoint. She didn’t want me to ruin my marriage with Gwyn. Gerold killed Ludd himself so that I couldn’t do it. I’m telling you that he loves her.”

“Then why leave her?”

“I don’t know, but if we ever meet again, he’ll have to answer a lot of questions to me, that you can be sure of.”

“I’m worried about her.”

“She’ll be fine. Worry about the guy who’s married to her. If he cannot give me a very good reason for his actions, there won’t be much left when I’m done with him.”

“Do you think I could come back to Ironrath once this is all over? I’m a brother of the Night’s Watch, but I wish I could see it one last time.”

Asher placed a hand on his shoulder. “Gared, you will always be welcomed at Ironrath. And this way, you’ll get to see Mira again,” he added with a grin. Asher gave one last pat on his back and resumed his inspection of the Wall. He remained several hours with his men at the top. There was a turnover in the middle, but he stayed with the men taking their posts in order to give them courage.

As he watched the landscape, Asher thought about his time in Essos. He was far away from his family, from all the people he loved. He had to live day by day, taking the work he could find. He didn’t tell everything to his brothers and sisters, or to Gwyn, about all the things he did in Essos. He wasn’t proud of some. He served as a sellsword and fought in several companies, but he also performed private works for masters, even criminals. Some involved torture and murder. What would his parents have thought of their son, if they had known of all the things he did? Only Beskha truly knew him. She was the only one to know about the man he was before he left Ironrath, and who knew who he was in Essos. She had been his only true friend during his exile. Before Malcolm found him, he had no one else to care about, to trust or to confide in. One day, he should tell everyone, Gwyn if not anyone else. He would give her some time to mourn her father first, and when the time would be right, he would reveal her everything. She deserved to know.

AaaaaaaaRRRREEEEEeeeee.

A deafening sound burst into the air. The world seemed to shake all around Asher. He tried to get a hold on the ice wall. The sound stopped, and he breathed.

AaaaaaaaRRRREEEEEeeeee.

It came back, and this time the ground under him shook so violently that he fell on his knees. Asher
could barely move. The sound was so powerful that it prevented him from breathing. When it stopped again, Asher took a deep breathe, and he began to stand up. Before he could get on his two feet, a third blow came.

_AaaaaaaaRRREEEEEeeeee_.

Asher fell on his hands again. The ice under him shook more violently than before. The loud sound continued for a very long time, and when Asher managed to look up, he saw splinters and shards of ice coming up. He felt the snow giving way under his feet.

Then Asher felt himself falling. All he could hear was the loud sound of a horn. He yelled for help, but his voice was drowned by the deafening sounds of the world collapsing. He barely noticed the ground getting closer to him by the second. The last thing he thought about was his wife, Gwyn, before he hit the surface.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter : Arya
Arya VI

Chapter Notes

A battle chapter, very short, action packed.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

ARYA VI

Arya managed to grab Needle and to leave her personal room soon enough to watch everything. She woke up fully alert and ready to defend her life, and despite the horrible sound made by a horn unlike any she ever heard, she was outside in no time. She still wore her armor and leather. She slept with them, ready to fight at any opportunity. Because of that, she was already out when the third blow came, and she saw the greatest structure she ever saw in her life come down. A large section of the Wall crumbled, destroying a part of the buildings of Castle Black with him, burying who knew how many men under the snow. She watched in stupor and terror as the ice fell into long tears, huge blocks and white dust. She covered her face just in time. Small shards flew towards her with a strong gust of wind, followed by snow.

When it was over, Arya removed her arm from her face. Ice had dug into the leather, and half her body was white now. She looked at the large crevice in the Wall. She saw many things since she left Winterfell, but nothing like that. The opening had to be about twenty or thirty yards. It wasn’t that large, but enough to let a column of men walk through it. Arya realized that she wasn’t the only one to look at the breach now. Everyone stood in stupor at the sight of it.

“What happened?”

Arya turned to see her brother looking at where stood the tunnel under the Wall only a few moments ago. It was now a pile of snow and ice, maybe twenty feet high, thirty at most.

“There was a blast, and then… Everything fell,” she said. “There were people on the Wall, no?” she asked her brother, worried

Jon kept looking at the Wall. Arya spent the last months with him at Castle Black, and what she just witnessed was entirely unreal. The Wall had seemed unbreakable when she cast her eyes on it for the first time, but now a part of it was only rubble, and Jon was just as astonished as she was.

Jon walked past her and went to the men close to the opening. He ordered them to start digging into the ice to find the people who were buried under it. Arya was on her way to help them when a strong arm stopped her. She turned to see the Imp’s man, Bronn, holding her.

“Where are you going like this, young lady?” he asked.

“I’m not a lady!”

“Sorry. I forgot.” He always forgot. “Still, where are you going?”

“I’m going to help.”

“And you think you will help? Your brother who’s not your true brother will have more than enough
men to clear the bodies. These men are already dead. If they somehow survived the fall, snow will have filled their mouth and nose, and they’ll already be dead from asphyxia.”

“We can’t let them there!”

“They’re already dead. There’s nothing we can do about them.”

“We should bury them, at least.”

“Burn them, you mean.”

“Yes, burn them, whatever. I’m going to help.” She tried to get free of his hold. “Release me.”

“I don’t think so.”

“Why?”

“Because of this.”

He pointed to the horizon. Arya looked at the place his finger indicated. It was on the other side of the Wall, through the breach. She squinted and saw nothing first, but then she noticed that something was whirling far away.

“I’m not sure how all this ice and snow came down, but I know someone who’s going to try to take advantage of it,” the sellsword said.

“Bronn!” The Imp came. “What the hell happened!”

“Don’t ask me. I don’t know. No one knows. But I have a good idea of what is coming.”

Tyrion Lannister looked through the breach, and the next moment he was ordering two of his officers nearby to prepare for battle. One was sent to the Lannister camp outside Castle Black, and another was to bring all available men in the castle’s compound to form a double line, swords in the first line and archers in the second. He then turned to Bronn.

“Bronn, a wise man once said that under certain circumstances, extreme measures were warranted.”

He gave a very serious look at his man. “It’s time for extreme measures. Prepare the final solution.”

Arya saw Bronn with a worried look on his face. “Final solution on the way.”

He ran away. The Lannister turned towards her. “Come with me. We must get out of here.”

“What? There’re coming. We have to stop them,” she protested.

“And we will. But if we stay here, we will all die.”

“You want to abandon Jon?” Her brother was preparing a defense near the breach with what men he could gather. The dwarf looked at her sharply.

“Listen. I promised to Sansa to keep an eye on you before we left Winterfell. She will never forgive me if you die, and your brother neither. Jon Snow will never forgive himself if you die, and the risks are too high.”

She held his gaze for a time. Then she walked away and headed for the men that were assembled by her brother to form lines of defense. She wouldn’t give up on Jon. She had failed to save Rickon. She wouldn’t let Jon die as well, and she wouldn’t stay behind while everyone else was fighting.
Perhaps this was what the Imp and Sansa did, but she wasn’t a Lannister. She was a Stark, and the Starks faced their enemies.

A disorderly mob was gathering near the place where the tunnel under the Wall stood before. That was where a White Walker walked through. Arya wasn’t at Castle Black back when it happened. She rode with Sansa’s husband as soon as they learned about it. She had never been on the Wall for any attack either. She never saw a wight, let alone a White Walker. All she had to picture them were the tales of the men stationed here, but most of them only saw the dead from afar. Arya had the feeling that this time, she would see their enemy for real.

Torches were distributed and lit among the men, and archers were preparing flaming arrows to be fired on the enemy as soon as he crossed the Wall. Arya had grown and was much taller than when she left Winterfell. She was now fifteen, a flowered woman, but she was still slim and smaller than most men, like a needle. She remembered Syrio’s pleased expression and chuckle when she told him that she was holding a needle. She remained a smaller target, not as small as before, but still small. As a result, Jon didn’t see her as he organized the men. She was only one person in a crowd. The storm was coming.

“Archers ready! Stop everything that gets through the Wall. Make sure to burn the wights. If a White Walker comes through, then just hold him off until I get a chance to finish him.” Jon kept shooting instructions, but soon it was impossible to hear him. The wind covered his voice. Arya tried to find where Sylviawas, the wildling girl, was, but she couldn’t see her through the crowd of men. Soon they were all inside the storm.

It wasn’t the first time it happened. Castle Black was attacked five times since Arya arrived, and each time a strong storm came with it. Sometimes it made it difficult to determine if they truly were under attack. It was winter, and there were snow storms during all the season. Whenever the weather got hard, they believed they were under attack, but sometimes it was only a simple storm, and nothing more. This time, she knew for sure that this was no normal storm. The dead were coming for them.

She stood with the other men, mostly Northerners, for long minutes, ready for anything to come through the breach, but it had become difficult to see through it, or even to make out the breach through the snows. The Northerners held position, waiting for an enemy that most of them would fight face to face for the first time, their helmets, chainmails and armors taking a white shade. They gripped their weapons tightly. Arya kept her grip loose. She had Needle at her belt, and a longer sword into her hand. Most of the people around her held their weapons with their two hands.

Then she saw. Something emerged through the snow. Dark pads and armor, pale figure, free long white hair, no helmet, blue eyes, a long sword in his hand. He stood on the pile of rubble in the breach, as if he was looking at them. Fear cuts deeper than swords. Arya reminded herself these words. She couldn’t let fear get a hold on her, now less than ever.

Flaming arrows flew at the blue man, and others followed. Arya saw the archers not far from her release their arrows when they saw the others do it. The arrows bounced on the White Walker. They didn’t leave a single scratch or scorch on him. He raised his sword and sent an inhuman scream. Fear cuts deeper than swords. Arya repeated the words in her head just when a wave of people ran past the White Walker and headed straight to them. She saw a volley of flaming arrows coming far from her left, and a few others followed there and there. This was no organized defense. There was no general volley of arrows to slow down significantly the swarming army. The wights were on them in no time.

Arya wasn’t in the first line, so she didn’t suffer from the first wave, but as soon as she saw a dead man, she attacked him. Most of his skin was gone, and he held a club in his hands. He tried to crush
Arya with it, but swift as a deer, she avoided him and thrust her sword into his chest, using the methods Syrio taught her. The wight didn’t show any pain, and he didn’t slow down. He brought his hand to her face and clawed at it. Arya could barely avoid it. She felt a scratch on her cheek and could barely remove the sword from his chest as she retreated. The sword was a part of her arm. She couldn’t leave her arm in this. She blocked several assaults and managed to hit her opponent several times, but no matter how often she reached him, it had no effect. For a very short moment, she had forgotten that it was already dead, and that only fire or dragonglass could kill it again. He kept coming at her… until another soldier threw a torch to his head. The wight immediately started to scream, and in no time he was rolling on the ground, unable to do anything. Arya went to another enemy.

She soon realized that the technics of the water dance of Braavos were useless against these things. They had no blood. You couldn’t pierce them and let them leak until they died. She had to hack them, to make sure they could move as little as they could, until someone could finish them by burning them. She found a torch on the ground and used it to kill her enemies for good. It was far easier that way. She fought dead men, but also dead animals. There was a wolf that she managed to burn at the last moment before his claws bit her face, and a bear too, who slaughtered men by dozens before she could make him catch fire. Even then, he struggled for minutes as the flames devoured him, killing more men in the process. She saw Ghost tear a wight to pieces far away. She just neutralized another wight with a black cloak and felt another approach her by behind. She turned and swung her sword heavily at him, and her weapon met his.

For a second time within minutes, her arm was barely enough to stop the shards from getting to her face and into her eyes. Only this time, they weren’t shards of ice, but shards of steel. Her sword shattered. The White Walker stood right before her. He brought his sword up, then down. He struck thin air. Arya had made a roulade to escape his blow. Her other sword being into pieces, she took Needle and struck through the White Walker’s leg. Her sword was stopped by the man’s skin. It looked as hard as the steel he just destroyed. He turned towards her and tried to stab her, but she ducked him once again, and hit him once more. Needle struck right on target a dozen times, but each time with no effect. The White Walker, on the other side, couldn’t find a way to hurt her. He was taller and stronger than her, but she was quicker and more agile. To the opposite of the other men, Arya had listened to her brother. She knew that there were two things that could destroy White Walkers, just like for wights. However, if both could be destroyed by dragonglass, fire had no effect on a White Walker. It was something else that could kill it.

Just like her sword previously, the man with blue eyes exploded in pieces, and right behind where he stood a moment ago, Jon was there, Longclaw right where the heart of the White Walker would have been. They may have no dragonglass at Castle Black, but they had Valyrian steel.

“We have to go!” Her brother took her arm and grabbed her with him.

“But they’re attacking us!” she protested.

“We cannot repel them.”

Indeed, Arya looked behind her, and she realized that they were overwhelmed by the dead. More were always coming through the breach, and several people were being slaughtered all around them. There were men in red armour, Lannister soldiers, who died alongside Jon’s men. Some were under a pile of dead bodies that looked as if they devoured them. The skeletons and bodies with hanging flesh were swarming everywhere. Like in King’s Landing, at the Twins, and at Moat Cailin, Arya couldn’t fight. She only had one option: run.

So she ran. She and Jon put as much distance between them and the Wall as they could, overhearing
screams of men, dead or dying, among the whistles of the wind and the snowflakes whipping their faces.

A strong burst of wind threw her ahead. She felt a burst of heat hit her back at the same time, and she landed in the snow, face first. She looked at her right and saw Jon in a similar position. She looked behind her, and had to cover her eyes before the powerful light. She didn’t feel snow falling over her anymore.

When the intensity of the light lowered, she could have a better look. Men running everywhere, flames on their backs, screaming. An oppressive heat had replaced the cold of winter. However, it was the green flames that struck her the most. A large region around the former tunnel was engulfed in a great fire that didn’t seem about to end. Some of the buildings of Castle Black were afire as well. Then another powerful sound of something crashing loudly was heard. New segments of the Wall collapsed, in part over the breach itself.

“What was that?”

Jon had managed to get up. There were other men who were slowly recovering as well, and all looked at the sight of fire right in front of them. They had never seen such a fire, Arya was sure of that. In comparison, the fire in the Stark camp at the Twins looked like a fireplace, or a candle. They all stood there, watching the green flames consuming everything. Fire could kill wights. Jon had told her so many times. He had done his job very well today. Arya was sure that no wight would escape from this. She wondered how many living men had perished with them.

Chapter End Notes

So, the Wall has fallen. There will be explanations concerning how the Wall fell in a future chapter, but to give you a temporary and partial explanation, the horn that was heard at the Wall was the horn that Euron blew during the Battle of Pyke in Yara’s last chapter. Asher’s and Arya’s chapters were taking place at the same time as Yara’s. People who read the books certainly have a better idea of what this horn might be. In the show, the horn was seen during Season 2 at the Fist of the First Men, when Sam and Dolorous Edd unburied a bag full of dragonglass. There was a black horn with the dragonglass, and this is the horn that Euron stole in Oldtown, like Sarella previously said.

Please review

Next chapter : Sansa
Sansa XXXI

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone, I'm back.

For those who were worried, or who simply wondered why I strangely disappeared for more than a month from the fanfiction world, I am fine. I simply had a blank of inspiration and a lack of motivation to keep writing this story for some time, but now I'm back on track. I want to reassure everyone who's following this fanfiction, I WILL NOT GIVE UP ON IT. I'm going to finish it. I just went through a period when it was harder for me to write it, and the pace is hard to keep when I want to upload two new chapters every week while continuing with "A Rose and a Lion".

Anyway, I'm back now, and I offer you this new chapter right before Christmas. Consider it a present. Here, Sansa receives some news, and she has a good discussion with her brother.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

SANSA XXXI

“Are you sure it came from Casterly Rock?”

She looked at Wolkan, who looked miserable. “It came from there, my lady.”

She stared at Creylen’s writing and Genna’s signature at the bottom. The seal of the castellan of the Rock was broken, but very clear. It didn’t surprise Sansa that Genna would use the seal to send her missives. Damion Lannister was only castellan in name.

Still, she had hoped for better news. Genna went straight to the point in her message, and she didn’t need to explain herself, but the news of the surrender froze Sansa’s blood into her veins. She really was no longer used to the climate of the North, a child of summer. Winter wasn’t for her.

“Thank you, Wolkan. You may dispose.”

The maester bowed and left Sansa alone with Genna’s message. Casterly Rock wouldn’t fight Daenerys Targaryen. King’s Landing had fallen. Cersei was dead. Ser Jaime was a prisoner of House Targaryen just like he used to be a prisoner of House Stark. The Lannisters of Casterly Rock did what Tyrion instructed them to do. They surrendered to Daenerys. The Westerlands were out of the war. When Genna learned of the fall of the capital she wrote immediately to Daenerys and told her that Casterly Rock would bend the knee to her rule.

Sansa didn’t see how they could resist. There was nothing left between them and Daenerys. Her uncle Edmure wouldn’t stand a chance with the few troops he had at Riverrun. Either he would surrender, or he would face the same fate as Harren the Black. Sansa shivered at the idea of her mother’s home meeting the same fate than Harrenhal. They had no news from Ser Daven. The missive they received from King’s Landing that announced Daenerys’s victory said that she defeated a Lannister army during the battle. Tyrion’s cousin was most probably lying dead in the fields of the capital, or rotting in a cell.
Sansa thought about her brother-in-law and her sister-in-law. She had no regrets about Cersei’s passing. She had it coming. This woman got what she deserved. However, she couldn’t help but feel sad for Tyrion’s brother. She knew now that he pushed Bran from the broken tower years ago. Her brother became a cripple because of him, but at the same time, he helped her to save Tyrion when Cersei accused him of murdering Lord Tywin. She also thought about the things Brienne told her about Ser Jaime, about the reasons why he killed the Mad King. Maybe he wasn’t totally an evil man, deep down. Tyrion loved his brother. Sansa was afraid for him because she knew how deeply affected Tyrion had to be right now, and how it would destroy him if his brother ever died.

Now, however, they had dead men assaulting them from the north and dragons coming from the south. They couldn’t stop their enemies on both sides. There were some lords from the Vale who defected recently. Their alliance was falling apart. Harrold Arryn had gone back to the Vale. Who was telling that he wouldn’t turn on them? He was brought to power by Littlefinger, and even if he was dead, Sansa was afraid that his machinations would continue to have their toll on them for quite a long time. *The Westerlands on their knees, the Riverlands defenseless, the Vale about to turn on us, and the North fighting dead men. What can we do?*

Nothing. There was nothing they could do. Tyrion once told her that, sometimes, nothing was the hardest thing to do. He had never been righter about it than now. They could only wait. Sansa thought about her little girl who slept in the adjacent room. House Lannister destroyed House Targaryen during Robert’s Rebellion. What fate was waiting for her and her daughter? This new queen could pretend that she would allow everyone who bent the knee before her to keep their titles and lands, and that no one would die, Sansa wasn’t reassured.

She threw the piece of paper on her desk and walked to the room next to hers. She turned the handle very carefully, slowly opened the door, and cautiously closed it behind her. She made a sign to the wetnurse to leave her alone with her daughter. She left as silently as a shadow.

Joanna had grown up. She gained weigh since her birth and was sleeping in a larger crib. She could now crawl on the floor, and sometimes she tried to hold on her feet by gripping a chair or anything that could serve as a support. Soon she would be able to walk. Sansa hadn’t been present when her child managed to stand for the first time, and she was afraid that she would miss her first steps as well. She was occupied all day by ruling Winterfell and the North. She wondered how her mother found time to bring them up herself, but then, her husband wasn’t far away. Her parents could see their children grow under their eyes. Sansa was beginning to worry that she and Tyrion wouldn’t have this chance. She feared that the next time Tyrion would see their daughter, she may already be a little lady of three or four.

But for now, Joanna was sleeping. Sansa gracially sat next to her daughter and watched her. She always marvelled at her beauty. When Sansa learned that she was promised to Joffrey, she immediately dreamed of giving him beautiful princes and princesses with blond hair. She was stupid, but it seemed the gods granted her wish to have children with blond hair. Joanna’s hair was shining, even in the darkness. Tyrion could regret that she didn’t look more like Sansa, she for herself had no regret about it. Her daughter was beautiful, an angel, and healthy. Wolkan said she would grow up into a beautiful young lady one day. Sansa would make sure that she did. She wouldn’t let someone harm her.

She stayed there for a long time, more than she should have, but not enough to compensate for all the time she didn’t spend with her daughter previously. She hoped that her next child would come into the world in better circumstances. And she hoped that her husband would be there to see him come and grow into the world.

She missed Tyrion. His letters reassured her that he was still alive and well, but a raven’s scroll was
far too short for him to say anything long or deep. Yet he always ended his messages to her by the
same words. I love you. She wished so much he was there, with her. How did his mother feel to be
away from her husband almost all the time? She spent most of her time at Casterly Rock while
Tywin Lannister was in King’s Landing. They said that Lord Tywin had loved his wife. Why did he
keep her away from him then?

Sansa sighed heavily. She realized that she was crying. She wiped the tears from her face and kissed
her little daughter. She slept so well, unlike her father. Sansa hoped that Tyrion didn’t drink too
much at the Wall, and that he continued to sleep like he did with her. She cast one last loving gaze at
Joanna and left.

The garrison of Winterfell was large and could barely be contained inside its walls. Men were
drilling all day in the yards. Women were training too. The only place where you could find some
peace now was the godswood, and even then, it wasn’t always possible. Sansa went to see her
brother Bran there. His stays into the godswood were longer every day. Lord Reed’s daughter,
Meera, was always accompanying him. She seemed to understand Bran in a way Sansa couldn’t.
She couldn’t recognize the boy she left when she rode south for the capital.

Sansa wished that Bran spent less time in the godswood. He said that his visions were better near the
weirwood, but Sansa couldn’t understand how his powers were functioning. Bran himself couldn’t
explain it. Since Bran spent so much time away, she had to assume almost all his duties as Lord of
Winterfell. It was a chance that Tyrion made her participate to the decisions at Casterly Rock. She
was prepared for ruling. Still, she wished that Bran could give her a hand. Her duties were stealing
the rare times she could spend with her daughter. One day, Sansa would wake up, realize that her
daughter was a married woman and that she never took time for her. Bran was Lord of Winterfell,
but he didn’t act like one. However, when she asked him to dine with her alone, he didn’t protest. He
stopped his discussion with Meera. He was saying that a dragon had three heads. They often spoke
of subjects Sansa had difficulty to understand. Meera wheeled him to Sansa’s apartments and she left
them alone.

“How are things going?” he asked.

“Not well,” she replied gloomily. “Half the castles don’t have enough stocks for winter, and the other
half barely have enough. Petitioners are lining up every day, most of them ask for bread, but we have
none to spare. Sometimes they ask for men to remove snow from the roads, or to rebuild a house or
stables. That I can grant them. This gives the garrison something else to do than wait.” She looked up
from the stew before her to stare at her brother. “You should be there, Bran. You’re the Lord of
Winterfell. It’s up to you to receive your people and listen to their requests.”

Bran looked down. “I’m sorry, Sansa.”

She tried to be kinder in her choice of words, though her patience with Bran was beginning to run
short. “I know you’ve been through a lot, Bran, but so do I. I know you were not supposed to be
Lord of Winterfell, but Father was never meant to be lord either. And he did his duty all the same.
We must do just like him. We both must do the same.”

Her brother didn’t look at her. “Don’t you have the impression, sometimes, that you are powerless?
That there’s nothing you can do to change things?”

Yes, she did, but what else could they do? She couldn’t stand there, doing nothing, while her
husband, her sister and her cousin were risking their lives, fighting an enemy more dangerous than
everything they ever faced. “If we start thinking like that, Bran, then we’re truly lost. We must keep
going.”
“I won’t make a difference as Lord of Winterfell, Sansa. Seeing petitioners, organizing feasts, look after the men and the castles, seeing our granaries are full, anyone can do that. But I’m the only one who can see what I see. You remember that horn blow, and what I saw at the same moment?”

Yes, of course she remembered. Everyone was still talking about it all around Winterfell. The sound had been deafening. Sansa was with Joanna when it happened. Her daughter had cried like she never did. They still didn’t know what was the source of this noise, but apparently they also heard it at Castle Cerwyn. The commander of the garrison at the Deadfort, who held the castle for Tyrion and Sansa, reported in his last message a similar event. How could the sound of a horn be heard in three different places, almost at the same time? Not long after, Bran said that he saw a part of the Wall fall, though he couldn’t tell where it happened. Sansa had immediately written to Tyrion and Jon at Castle Black, but after two weeks, they still had no answer. Sansa behaved as if nothing was amiss, but truth be told, she worried about all those she loved who were at the Wall. The lack of answer was troubling. She hoped that Bran’s vision was only a mistake. He said he couldn’t clearly see what happened, hence the reason why he couldn’t situate the breach that appeared in the Wall. Perhaps he only saw an avalanche on a mountain.

“I think that I’m more useful as I keep looking into the past, Sansa. This can truly help us,” he continued.

She took a sip of lemon water. “Bran, I’m not sure about what you can see or not, but what I know for sure is that you can’t spend all your days in the godswood. Our people expect you to rule. You’re the Lord of Winterfell.”

She said it in a way that left no place for discussion, but Bran didn’t seem to care. “I can’t be Lord of Winterfell, Sansa. I shouldn’t be.”

“No, Sansa, you don’t understand,” he cut her sharply. “I saw Maester Wolkan a few days ago. I wanted to talk with him about something. I wasn’t sure before, but now…”

He didn’t continue. “What? What did Wolkan tell you?”

“Maester Luwin… he wasn’t sure back then. I was only a boy, and he thought it might only be temporary, but…” Again, he stopped in the middle of what he wanted to say.

“What is it, Bran? Do you have a problem? Is there something wrong about you?” She was beginning to be worried about her brother.

“Yes.” He looked at her. “Sansa, you know… You had a daughter, so you know what happens when… you try to make a child?”

“Of course, I do,” she said, scandalized. She knew very well how to do it. She was married with Tyrion Lannister, after all.

“Well, I can’t.”

She frowned. “What do you mean? You can’t?” She shook his head. “That’s stupid, Bran. You only lost your legs. That doesn’t mean…”

“When I fell, a part of my spine was crushed. And… there was something inside… it controls… I tried anything to make it work, but there’s no reaction. So I asked Wolkan, and he says it’s gone. For good.”
Sansa stared at him. “Bran, are you telling me that you can’t ejaculate?”

In other circumstances, Sansa would have laughed at Bran’s face. He would never have heard her use that word before, but she was no longer the little girl from Winterfell who wanted to play the perfect lady. She was a married woman now, a mother, the lady of a huge castle and a great kingdom, and the wife of Tyrion Lannister. However, Sansa didn’t laugh. Bran couldn’t mean what she suspected.

Bran seemed to recover after a time, and he shook his head. “I can’t. If I was to marry, I couldn’t… perform. And if I can’t perform, I can’t have children.”

Sansa’s suspicions were true. She wished she had been wrong, but Bran just confirmed them. “How long have you known?”

“Three days. I had suspicions before, I started to think that something was wrong about two weeks before, but Wolkan confirmed it to me three days ago.”

Sansa shook her head in disbelief. “That can’t be. You would have noticed it before, Bran. That can’t be true. Wolkan must have made a mistake.”

“This is no mistake, Sansa. I… I came to realize it weeks ago when… Meera and I were together in my room.”

“Meera Reed?”

“Yes.” He looked down, ashamed. Sansa had considered that there could be something between Bran and Howland Reed’s daughter. They were always together, and Meera was a young woman, and Bran a young man.

“And… it didn’t work?” she asked.

“No. We tried everything, both of us, but nothing would happen. I needed time to ask Wolkan. He examined my spine, and told me I could never have children.”

Sansa looked at her brother. He had started to spend more time in the godswood about two weeks ago, and with Meera. Sansa hadn’t given much attention to the girl, but now she thought that she remembered her looking more sullen than usual.

“Bran, I’m so sorry.”

He was staring at her. “Sansa, I shouldn’t be Lord of Winterfell. I can’t be. I cannot lead men into battle, I cannot father a child, I can’t move around the castle without someone else’s help. I’m a cripple.”

“You’re still our father’s last living son.”

“For how long? When I’m dead, Winterfell will go to you and your children. You’re already ruling the North and managing Winterfell. I think it would be better if I stepped aside now and acknowledged you as Lady of Winterfell.”

“Bran, you can’t do that!”

“Why not? I know you rule well. I saw you. You already have a daughter, and Winterfell will go to you in the end, so why not let you have it now?”
“Tyrion and I already have Casterly Rock, and the Dreadfort. We have no need of Winterfell.”

“Give the Dreadfort to someone you trust, then. You’re already Lady of Winterfell in fact if not in name. It will only be a confirmation. That won’t be a great change for anybody.”

“I can’t have Winterfell, Bran.”

“Of course, you can. You are a Stark.”

“No, I’m not.” He looked at her strangely, as if he never saw her before. Sansa stood up and began to pace. “Bran, I am the Lady of Casterly Rock. My father-in-law murdered Robb and his wife, and our mother. My sister-in-law and my nephew killed our father. When people in the North look at me, they don’t see the daughter of Eddard Stark. They see a Lannister. They see Sansa Lannister, not Sansa Stark. They look at a woman who spent the last years in the south, who hasn’t been in the North for an eternity, who married into the very family who slaughtered the Starks. At best, they see in me a little girl who was forced outside of her family. At worst, they see me like Tyrion’s whore. Half the North preferred the Boltons to me, and the other half was ready to betray me during the Battle of Winterfell. My daughter looks more like Cersei than me. The Northerners and the men of the Riverlands accept that I rule for now, because we have an army of the dead closing on us, and because there are Lannister troops who obey me, but also because I’m ruling in your name, Bran. Because you allowed me to rule in your stead. The moment you step aside and declare me Lady of Winterfell, it’s over. They will never accept me, or Tyrion. They will never accept Lannisters to rule the North. The North remembers. It’s not only words. It’s the truth. People in the North remember, and they will never forgive the Lannisters for everything they did during the war. And I am a Lannister. They will never accept me as their lady.”

She held the back of her seat tightly with her hands at the end of her speech. Bran seemed in shock before her reaction. Did he have any idea how difficult it was for her every day? Expecting the worse news for her, for Tyrion, for their daughter, for Jon, for Arya, for him? Living in uncertainty, and yet working every day to keep the castle running and prepared to face the rest of winter, while he remained hidden in the godswood, lost in visions he couldn’t explain himself.

“I can’t be Lord of Winterfell,” he only stated.

Sansa sighed. She had a great envy to shatter the chair she was gripping. “You have no choice.”

“I can’t, Sansa. I cannot be the three-eyed raven and the Lord of Winterfell at the same time.”

“Very well. Then don’t be the Lord of Winterfell. Keep watching those visions you have. I’ll keep this castle running in the meantime. Just tell no one about it. Officially, you’re still the Lord of Winterfell, and every decision I take is with your consent. Unless you want us to face an uprising, I suggest you do as I say.”

She moved to leave, but Bran spoke before. “Sansa.” She turned to look at him, and he had a sorry expression on his face. “I’m sorry.”

“I’m sorry, me too.” She was.

“Sansa, there’s something I must tell you. About your husband.”

Her heart began to pound quicker than before. “What? Did you see him?”

“No. I mean, yes, in several visions, but that’s not it. Sansa, I think you should be careful with him.”

She frowned. “What do you mean? Why should I be careful with Tyrion?”
“I know that he’s a good man, and that he loves you, but… We mustn’t forget who his father was, and what he did. His father, what he did, was so… horrible. We mustn’t forget that he’s the son of this man. You don’t know what he could be capable of.”

Sansa looked at her brother as if she saw him for the first time, just like he did a few moments ago. How could he say something like that? “Bran, we’re not talking about Cersei and Jaime. They pushed you from the top of a tower to protect their secret. Tyrion is different. His brother and his sister tried to kill you, but he’s not at all like them. He’s the one who gave you a saddle so you could ride again. He’s a good man.”

“I know. I don’t forget that. I’m just telling you to be careful around him. I don’t want you to get hurt.”

“Tyrion would never hurt me.”

“You don’t know that for sure, Sansa. You don’t know him as well as you think.”

“You’re wrong about that. I know Tyrion better than anyone. And I know he would never hurt me, or let someone hurt me.” She stopped for a moment before she added something else. “Unlike you.”

“What do you mean?”

“When I was in King’s Landing, you didn’t try to save me. All that Robb wanted was to kill Joffrey and to carve his own kingdom in the North and the Riverlands. Our mother helped him and supported him. You and Rickon remained hidden here at Winterfell, Arya disguised as a boy in the Riverlands, and Jon hid at the Wall. You never helped me. I was your sister, and you abandoned me to Joffrey. None of you was there to protect me when he had me beaten in public. Tyrion was the only one to stand up for me at this moment, and he didn’t do it because I was his family. He did it because it was unfair, because no one deserves to go through everything I went through. Robb was covering himself with glory in the Westerlands, saying he fought for justice, while I suffered for every man he killed, every farm he burned, every village he sacked. And he did nothing to save me. He was given chances to save me, and he didn’t take them. Instead, he fought for his own kingdom, and when he heard that I was married, he gave up on me for good, considered me as dead. You all gave up on me, and you all judged my husband without knowing who he truly was. You didn’t even try to see beyond the fact that he was a Lannister. So don’t come and tell me that I don’t know who Tyrion is. I know who he is, and I know that he was there to protect me when my family abandoned me and left me for dead.”

And on that, she stormed out of her own apartments.

Several minutes later, she was sitting on the cold floor of the broken tower. She had a heavy cloak around her shoulders to keep her warm, yet she felt the coldness of the walls against her. She shouldn’t have snapped at Bran. He just discovered that he could never have children. She was unfair with him, and she knew that. Bran was only a boy when she was a prisoner. He could barely understand what was going on, let alone do anything to help her, even less after Theon took Winterfell. Truth be told, Sansa was only angry after her mother and after Robb. After her mother for arresting Tyrion on Littlefinger’s accusations, after Robb for privileging a war over the lives of his very family, and after both of them for considering her dead after they learned that she was wed to Tyrion. But she couldn’t blame Bran or Rickon for that, or Arya. She was exhausted, and she had decided to release all the tension she accumulated on her little brother. She would apologize to him, and she would assure him that he had no reason to fear Tyrion. He would never do anything to her. He wasn’t his father.

“My lady.” Maester Wolkan was in the embrasure of the door. He had a raven scroll in his hand. The
Sansa stood up. She felt some pain in her legs. She must have remained on the floor longer than she thought. She realized more than ever of how cold she felt. She took the parchment the maester offered her and put it in her pocket.

“You should read it now, my lady,” he said.

“I’ll read it when I’m inside.” She spoke a little too harshly, but she was cold, and angry at herself for getting angry with Bran.

She walked past Wolkan and left the broken tower, returning to her apartments. Bran was no longer there. He probably returned to the godswood. She wished he was still there, so she could apologize to him now. She thought about going to see him right away, but she needed to warm herself first. She approached the fireplace and placed her hands over it. The warmth of the fire felt good on her palms. When she felt warm enough, she took the message from Queensgate. She remembered the castle was next to Castle Black, west to it.

She noticed immediately that something was wrong. The message was bearing the seal of Casterly Rock. It was Tyrion’s seal. Queensgate was held by the Knights of the Vale, not by the Lannisters. Perhaps he was only inspecting the castle and sent a raven to her while stopping there, but she wasn’t sure about it. All his other ravens had come from Castle Black.

Sansa opened the message and read the fine writing of her husband. What little warmth the fire brought to her disappeared instantaneously. The Wall was breached. She had to prepare the North for an invasion, not from the south, but from the north.

Chapter End Notes

Sansa’s outburst may sound harsh on Bran, but we must remember that Bran is not very clear on what being the Three-Eyed Raven is. Add to this that Sansa must rule Winterfell, when normally it should Bran’s duty and he doesn’t assume it, that Sansa is worried sick about her husband, and afraid about the well-being of her daughter as well with White Walkers threatening the North, and finally that Sansa has come to see herself more as a Lannister than a Stark through this story, and we can get a pretty good idea of why Sansa is acting this way with Bran.

Please review

Next chapter : Jon
Reminder: At chapter 164, Arya VI, a breach appeared in the Wall when a part of it fell at Castle Black. A short battle followed between the garrison led by Jon and the wights. Jon Snow’s troops were being defeated and retreating when a great explosion set fire to a large part of Castle Black and its inner yards.

The aftermath of the Fall of the Wall. We get an explanation on some of the events in Arya’s last chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Do you know how many people died because of you?” Jon asked.

“Fewer than if our enemies had managed to get through the Wall. If it wasn’t for my little trick, the North would be overwhelmed with dead men and demons with blue eyes, including those very men who died.”

Tyrion Lannister was holding his gaze without flinching. He showed no doubt about what he did or said.

“Two thousand.” Jon said the number very slowly. “This is the number of men who died because of the trap you set.”

“Most of them were buried under the snows. They were already dead, or they would have died anyway. From the cold, from lack of air, or from the White Walkers, and they would have joined the Night King’s army. They were condemned the very moment the breach appeared.”

“Aye, and without your trick, the breach wouldn’t be as large as it is now. You almost tripled it.”

“There would be no breach to defend if I hadn’t taken that call.”

“It wasn’t your call! Men died!”

“And more will die if we’re not ready to do what’s necessary, Jon Snow. You know it very well. You sent five men to their death during the battle against Mance Rayder. You sent them in the tunnels, knowing they wouldn’t come back.”

“That was different. They knew they wouldn’t come back. They were warned about it. They made a choice.”

“Really? Would you say you gave a choice to Grenn when you sent him into this tunnel? What would you have done if he disobeyed at this moment?”

Jon sighed angrily. “Grenn was a brother of the Night’s Watch, just like me. We knew what we had to do. We knew where our duties lied. We both knew that people had to sacrifice themselves to protect the Wall.”
“That was necessary then, just like what I did.”

“It’s different! They were two thousand this time, and they didn’t choose.”

“No more than your friends who died fighting the wildlings. How many people do you know who actually want to be here? How many of your former sworn brothers actually wanted to join the Night’s Watch?”

“They chose to join the Watch,” Jon replied weakly.

“They chose? You call that a choice? Your friend, Grenn, abandoned at the age of three by his own father? Pyp, being given the choice between losing a hand or going to the Wall, all that because he stole cheese? And this friend you told me about, Samwell Tarly? Would you say that being left to die or joining the Night’s Watch is a choice? Would you say that his father gave him a choice? Do you think that Lady Stark would have given you a choice eventually?” Jon realized, not without consternation, that Tyrion was looking at him like the boy he used to be when he arrived at the Wall. “People don’t get to choose if they go to the Wall or not. They are forced to go there. We hide it with oaths to make it look better, but these oaths are being forced on them, because if they don’t take them, then they die. It’s an oath taken with a sworn on your neck. This is no true oath. Only a few people like you and your uncle Benjen truly chose to go to the Wall. I may have sentenced two thousand people to die, it’s true, but you did the same with your friends while you defended the Wall. And you did it to fight wildlings who only tried to get south to escape the dead. I would say that these two thousand men who died in the fire had a death with more meaning than your sworn brothers who were killed in battles against living beings when they should have been fighting the dead.”

Jon sighed and walked away a little before he turned to stare at the small lord again. “You hid wildfire under the Wall. You should have told me about this.”

“I wasn’t sure you would accept, and your reaction shows me that I was right. You wouldn’t have approved.”

“Of course, I wouldn’t have approved! You hid… You blew up that substance in tunnels under the Wall and under our feet. Hundreds of men were sure to die. When your men started the fire, I was still fighting near the Wall. It wasn’t only my men who were with me. It was also your own men. And Arya was there too. You started the explosion knowing that we were there, that we would die.”

Tyrion looked down. “I knew you could die. I was hoping you would retreat before the explosion. Bronn had brought wildfire from King’s Landing on my order as soon as we left Casterly Rock. Only I, him and very few people who carried the jars knew about it. He and a few of his men lit a rope connected to a barrel of wildfire. The barrel was linked to the other barrels through similar ropes. There were a few minutes between the moment the rope was set afire and the moment it would reach the first barrel, and then I knew the massive explosion would take place. All the dead who were close would be burned and gone instantly. I knew you wouldn’t hold long enough against the dead and that you would order the retreat as soon as you saw this was a lost battle.”

“You knew, or you hoped?” Jon asked.

“I hoped that I knew. And it seems I was right. You and Arya got out of there safe. You’re both still alive and got out of there with only a few scorches.”

“What if it hadn’t been the case? What if we had fought longer? We would be dead by now.”

“I’m glad it didn’t happen.” Perhaps his small friend was trying to look like he was glad that Jon
survived, and probably he felt that way, but Jon couldn’t forgive him all the same.

“You should have told me,” he said in a low voice.

“You said that you wouldn’t have approved.”

“No, I wouldn’t have.”

“Then I did the right choice. Without my trick with the wildfire, the dead would be swarming through all the North as we speak.”

“The breach would also not be as large as it is now if it wasn’t for your trick.”

“We would have no breach to defend without my trick.” Tyrion sighed. They were repeating the same arguments. He looked directly at Jon. “It was a measure to be used only in last resort, if the White Walkers were to get through the Wall and there was no other way to stop them, or slow them down a little. You think I loved to do it? You think I liked to give the order to Bronn, knowing that hundreds of people would die? I knew the destructive power of wildfire. I used it against Stannis at the Battle of Blackwater. The moment the fire destroyed his fleet, when I saw the green flames on the bay, the green mushroom rising over the bay, when I heard the men screaming as they burned alive, do you think I was proud of myself? I don’t enjoy killing people by the thousands or see them burn. I’m not like my father, no more than you are like your grandfather. But if I hadn’t used the wildfire at the Blackwater, Stannis would have sacked a city of a million people, and if I hadn’t used it last week, the dead would be killing everyone in the North as we speak. I had a choice to make, and I made it. I decided that the lives of two thousand men had less value than the lives of the millions of other people living in Westeros.”

A long silence settled between the two. Jon could feel that none of them were proud, one of what he did, the other one of what he didn’t dare to admit, but that he knew was true. So instead of continuing on this subject, he turned to another one, a matter of immediate concern.

“Do you think we can hold our position at Castle Black?”

“With some luck, yes,” he replied.

“When has luck ever been on our side?”

He didn’t reply. They both knew that Tyrion’s trick with wildfire bought them time. The fires that ravaged the entrance to the Wall destroyed a great part of the wights that attacked Castle Black when the breach took form, and the others flew away. They were certainly afraid of fire. Jon had killed the White Walker leading them, and there was nothing indicating that there had been another one nearby. Still, wildfire wouldn’t save them forever. The dead would come back.

They reinforced the breach, positioned strong contingents of men on both sides on the top of the Wall, with catapults, trebuchets, scorpions, and of course barrels of oil and flaming arrows. They had erected an improvised barricade in the breach itself and placed a strong body of men with traps before the barricade to protect the most vulnerable point on the Wall. They did their best, but Jon had the clear impression that it wouldn’t be enough. They spent so much time and energy on organizing the new defenses and warning the other castles along the Wall that they only had time to discuss about Tyrion’s doings a week after the Wall fell.

“I’m sending you back to Winterfell,” Jon finally declared.

Tyrion frowned. “I beg your pardon.”
“You heard me. I’m sending you back to Winterfell.”

“Is that a way to punish me for my actions?”

“You organized the defenses of the North for the case the White Walkers would get past the Wall. You know them better than anyone. I’m more familiar with the defenses of the Wall. If the dead ever get south, you’ll have to stop them.”

“What about you?”

“I’m staying here. I’ll lead the defenses of Castle Black. Ser Davos is back, so it should help.”

Tyrion Lannister leaned over the table as much as he could, considering his height. “You do realize that if you die here, Jon Snow, our alliance might shatter. Lords from four kingdoms acknowledged you as their king. If the dead get through Castle Black and that you die, our hopes to defend the North will be quite reduced.”

“I cannot ride away. How can I expect my men to fight for me if I’m not ready to fight for them? Besides, we both know I will not remain king for long. Let Daenerys arrives in time to save the North.”

“And let’s hope she is merciful with us,” his friend added darkly. His shoulders sank. “I’ll leave most of my men with you. I’ll only bring back a hundred with me to Winterfell. You’ll need them more than I will… for now.”

Jon nodded. “Make sure that nothing happens to Sansa and Bran.”

“You have my word. What about your other sister, Arya?”

Jon sighed. “I already tried to talk her into returning to Winterfell, and she refused.”

Tyron smiled. “She makes me think of Cersei, sometimes. She’s stubborn, and nothing can stop her. But to the opposite of Cersei, she loves all her brothers.” He took a more serious expression. “When do you want me to leave, your Grace?”

“Before the day is over. I want you back at Winterfell as soon as possible.” Jon also wanted him to leave.

“As you wish, your Grace.”

“Tyrion, before you leave, I must ask you a question, and this time I want the truth. Is there any wildfire left at Castle Black, or anywhere else along the Wall?”

The son of Tywin Lannister looked straight at him once more. “There’s nothing left. All that Bronn brought from King’s Landing was under Castle Black. It all burned when we activated the trap. It’s all gone.”

Jon believed him. “Why did you bring wildfire in the first place? Did you really believe you would fight dead men when you left Casterly Rock?”

Tyrion shrugged. “I thought that it could be useful against Ramsay. Finally, we didn’t have to use it against him. I don’t regret bringing it with me. I regret that men died because of it, but I don’t regret using it.”

They stared at each other for some time, then Jon ordered him to leave, and the Lord of Casterly
Rock did as he was told. He left two hours later with a hundred men, like he said, among which there was Ser Bronn of Blackwater, the man who prepared the trap of wildfire and activated it. His squire Podrick, who sometimes reminded Jon of Sam, was riding next to him as well. Lannister men were still garrisoned at Castle Black, and they formed the bulk of their forces now, but there was no one with the Lannister name at Castle Black anymore.

Jon went to see Ser Davos in the afternoon. He had come back a few days ago with reinforcements from several castles east to Castle Black. They had five thousand men to defend the breach now. They had to take many among the garrisons of the nearby castles to replace those who died when the Wall was breached, but many others came from the Lannister camps outside Castle Black, that weren’t touched by the explosion. About two hundred of the victims were on the Wall and fell to their deaths when the horn was blown. Asher Forrester was among them. It had been difficult to Jon to write the letter announcing his death to his family. He sent Gared Tuttle to Queensgate with the message so they could sent it to Ironrath. He had to explain to a boy who wasn’t even ten-years-old that he was Lord of Ironrath. Were all men in northern families condemned to die? However, these victims were nothing compared to those who were buried under the snow or roasted alive by the wildfire. Jon could only hope they could hold their positions, and that no other breach would be created by some mysterious sound. He still couldn’t understand how it was possible that it was heard everywhere along the Wall.

Ser Davos was standing before the barricade. They were working on building towers for archers now. Strangely, the White Walkers didn’t attack since the day the breach appeared. Jon didn’t understand their behaviour. They only had to send their strongest forces, and his men would be overwhelmed in no time. They couldn’t hold the breach. It was about seventy yards, and the fifty feet of unstable rubble on which their new improvised defenses were built wouldn’t be enough to stop the White Walkers or the wights from climbing it. The rubble had a slow curve that any man could climb. The wights would have no difficulty to climb it. They tried to make the curve steeper, to no avail. All they managed by burning wood on the curve was to cause a sinking of the pile of rubble. It ruined their first efforts to build new defenses. They only fortified the fifty feet tall pile since then, trying to make it impenetrable, without much success.

“How are the works advancing?” Jon asked him.

“Slowly. I hoped that they would go better than this, but truth be told I didn’t expect my hopes to come true.” The knight looked back at him. “I heard that Lord Tyrion left.”

“Aye. A part of me is relieved. The other part wonders if I took the right decision.”

Ser Davos pursed his lips. “Although his goals may have been noble, the means to achieve them were unacceptable. You can’t burn thousands of people alive for the sake of saving the North. No more than you can justify burning a child if it can save ten thousand men.”

Jon remembered only too well Melisandre’s exile. Tyrion had advised him to not send her away because they could have need of her. Jon knew that Melisandre may have been helpful against the army of the dead, but he couldn’t allow someone who burned a child alive to go unpunished, no more than he could approve Tyrion’s actions. He could understand them and the reasons that led his friend to act this way, but he couldn’t agree with him. Everything he believed in, everything the man he called “Father” taught him, were against what Melisandre and Tyrion did. Though with Tyrion, you could always argue that these were soldiers who died. His brother had sent two thousand men to their death as well during the last war. Two thousand Northerners were slaughtered at the Battle of the Green Fork, sent as arrow fodder to serve as a distraction for Robb’s real move that consisted to free Riverrun. Robb knew that these men wouldn’t come back alive, that they had no chance against the army of Tywin Lannister. And Robb had done it fighting other men. Tyrion had done it fighting
the dead. Placed in perspective, Tyrion’s actions were less condemnable than his brother’s. However, there was still one thing that Jon didn’t like about it.

Tyrion didn’t tell him about his plan. He decided that people would burn alive to slow down or stop the White Walkers without talking to him. How could Jon trust him after that? He couldn’t keep Tyrion close anymore. He couldn’t allow him to stay as if nothing happened. But he couldn’t get rid of Tyrion either. He didn’t want to execute him, and he couldn’t. He knew very well what Sansa would think if he executed her husband, and anyway, if Jon had had to pass the sentence, he didn’t think he could bring down the sword on Tyrion’s neck like he did with Janos Slynt. He wouldn’t be able to look into his eyes and say without doubt that Tyrion Lannister was guilty. Furthermore, they needed the Lannisters to fight the dead, and killing Tyrion would destroy their alliance for good. Tyrion supported him, and although he didn’t tell Jon everything, Jon knew for a certainty that Tyrion was loyal to him. The same couldn’t be said about the Knights of the Vale, especially after some of them abandoned their positions on the Wall, or some other lords from the Riverlands. The only option was to send Tyrion somewhere else, somewhere he would be useful, but far away from Jon, to make him understand that there were consequences to disobeying the king.

“I was there at the Battle of Blackwater,” Davos continued. “I saw what wildfire could do. And when I came back to Dragonstone, all that Melisandre could tell me was that death by fire is the purest death. And Stannis was listening. I’m glad you’re not listening to her, or to the Imp.”

Jon didn’t reply. Although Tyrion’s actions a week ago and Melisandre’s actions while Stannis marched on Winterfell had similarities, they were also very different. The little man was no fanatic.

“Lord Tyrion only did what he believed to be necessary to protect the Seven Kingdoms. Just like Stannis did.”

Davos grumbled an incomprehensible answer. He looked around him at the buildings in ruined. They had restored Castle Black only to see it in ruins again, buried under the snows or burned by the flames. “Most of our men must sleep in tents now. And those on the Wall must walk from Queensgate or Oakenshield, and carry material for battle all the way from there. The winch cage and the stairs were destroyed when that horn was blown.”

“You’re sure it was a horn?”

“I don’t see what else it could be. I don’t know where it came from, but whoever blew it didn’t like us. I wonder how I could hear it at Deep Lake.”

“All the other castles that contacted us said they heard the horn as well. No one knows where it came from.”

“I’m tired of magic. Smuggling was simpler, easier. We knew what to expect, even if we didn’t know when. Now we don’t even know what the Night King has in store for us.”

“Nothing worse than what we’ve already seen, I hope.”

“Yes, let’s hope.” Davos’s voice showed anything but conviction. He looked at the courtyard. “The Imp made holes and trenches everywhere with his explosion. If he hoped this could stop the White Walkers, it also makes the job of fighting them much more difficult.”

It was true. The ground inside Castle Black was a real sieve. They tried to fill the holes in the ground the best they could with snow and rock, but the men had to be careful of where they put their feet. Several of them had already been injured when they fell into a rift. They also lost granaries under the Wall in the explosion, and since those of Castle Black had more stocks than all the other castles, Jon
didn’t see how they could get through winter now.

“I think the trap was mostly meant to slow down the dead, not to stop them,” Jon said.

“Then it worked better than he thought. His trick only slowed Stannis down at King’s Landing. But Stannis is more stubborn than the Night King, that I can bet on it.”

For the first time today, Jon laughed, very shortly, and it was a short chuckle, but he laughed. Ser Davos did the same. “Do you miss serving Stannis?”

The knight sighed. “I almost gave my life for him, and it got me nothing. I lost my son, Shireen, and I saw thousands of good men die for nothing. Stannis was a good man, but he took the wrong decisions, and he listened to the wrong people.”

“I hope I won’t make the same mistakes.”

“So far, you’re doing quite well, Jon Snow. Most of the men here know it, even the Lannisters.”

Yes, so far, they had succeeded in repelling the enemy, but for how long? How long would the Night King wait before he sent the full force of his army against them? They were vulnerable. The Wall had fallen at Castle Black, and Jon knew for a certainty that the Night King still had tens of thousand people in his army. People who didn’t need to eat, or to rest. People who were never tired, who obeyed without question, who didn’t need encouragements or threats to do what they were told. One great army, blindly following one leader. This was something they couldn’t copy. No matter who led the fight against the dead, there would be dissensions, opposition, questions, hesitations, reserves, and even betrayals. Jon had been betrayed once, and he didn’t have any illusion left. People had betrayed him in the past, and they could betray him again. He didn’t think often about it, for he had little time to think about it. All his mind was focused on protecting the Wall, and nothing else. He didn’t spare much time thinking of how to maintain his position as king. Even when he thought about it, it was to find how this could help in organizing better defenses for the Wall.

Jon knew that he didn’t have what was needed to defend the Wall. There was only one person who had an army powerful enough to face the dead, and who had the weapons that could destroy them massively. And this person was somewhere in the south, playing at a game like the other lords did before, like children. Jon hoped and feared that his aunt would arrive in the North and quickly, for when she would see the true enemy, she would have no choice but to face it, and destroy it. The Wall was breached. Jon couldn’t defeat the dead. But Daenerys Targaryen could defeat them.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter : Kinvara
In this chapter, we get to see someone we haven't seen for a while, and Daenerys discovers something horrible. The dragons are closing on the North.

The older brother patted the shoulder of the younger one. They were sitting on logs near a campfire, with a cup of ale in hand. Although they were very different, you could see the strong bond between them, the one that united a small boy to his big brother. A girl had brothers before. One of them had a beard like the elder there, though he wasn’t as built. The brother of the girl was more similar to the young one, who was smaller and slimmer. Even weeks after he joined Daenerys Targaryen’s army, although he was washed and shaved, Gerold Hightower looked as miserable as when she saw him for the first time.

He arrived with two hundred men who survived his adventures in the North. He had left Oldtown with one thousand to take back the family seat of his wife, a northern lady from a noble house, the niece of Malcolm Branfield. He managed to take the castle, but left the North after he heard that his family swore allegiance to Daenerys Targaryen. From what they heard, he lost more men on his trip to return south than during the battles and during his journey to the North combined.

Now he sat before a fire with his brother, Garlan, and looked with a hollow gaze at his cup.

“She hates ale. She got used to wine when she arrived in the Reach, she told me, but she didn’t drink much. Half the times I would propose some to her, she would refuse. She refused the last time we ate together.”

Kinvara could hear his voice very distinctly, and she could perceive the sadness in it. “You shouldn’t have left her,” his brother told him. Ser Gerold Hightower didn’t answer. He didn’t look like a proud knight in this very moment. He looked more like a broken man. Somehow, it reminded her of Ser Jaime Lannister when she visited him in his cell in King’s Landing.

“What else could I do? Our grandfather ordered me to come back.”

“Our grandfather didn’t know that winter made it almost impossible to come back. Many of your men would have survived if you had stayed in the North.” The younger sibling stared at the eldest, but he said nothing. “That was a folly to travel all this way in the snow, Gerold. Do you realize how many died because of your decision?”

Gerold Hightower didn’t move for quite a long time, and then he looked at the ground, gripping the goblet he had in his hand. “I didn’t know what to do.”

His brother sighed. When he spoke, it was without any blame in his voice. “They should have sent me with you.”

“Garlan… I was sent there to take back Ironrath. And when we arrived, I found out that some of her
family was alive.”

“Did your wife know about it?”

“She claims she thought them dead.”

“And you think she was lying?”

“No,” he replied very quickly.

“Well, you couldn’t expect her to wage war against her brother.”

“Do you think… do you think she could have used me, Garlan?”

Garlan Hightower looked at his little brother. “Do you think she did?” Gerold didn’t reply. “You know Mira better than I do, but I know one thing. She cared about you, and you cared about her. And I know you still care.”

“I do,” he confessed. His voice was down to a whisper.

“You’ll have a few things to talk about when you see her again.” Ser Gerold nodded. “In the meantime, I suggest you speak to her uncle. Malcolm Branfield deserves to know what happened to his family.”

They both drank. “Garlan, do you think she will be fine?”

“Even if the White Walkers are real, she’s not at the Wall. She should be safe. And the queen has no reason to kill her. Her uncle is her advisor, and Mira is your wife. She won’t kill a Hightower.”

“What do you believe Mira would think of me, if we killed some of her family, if they refused to surrender to Daenerys Targaryen?”

Garlan patted his brother’s shoulder. “I hope it won’t come to that. But no matter what happens, you have apologies to present to your wife, Gerold. You don’t want to lose her.”

Ser Garlan Hightower stood up and walked away. Kinvara stayed to watch his brother a little, then she walked away as well. She was in one of the three camps that were erected around the fortress. Dothrakis, soldiers from the Reach and the Stormlands were sharing the siege of the castle surrounded by water. Coexistence was difficult once more, and she was very conscious of the growing hostility from the Westerosi commanders towards her. They could hate her as much as they liked, she despised them as well. They fought like children for insignificant reasons and only followed the queen because they were afraid of her, or because they hoped to gain some advantage from her once the war would be over.

Kinvara tried to stay away from the soldiers. She knew that many of them had camp followers in their tents. A few days after they left King’s Landing, she had heard a woman scream while a man beat her. The two members of the Fiery Hand that accompanied her when she surprised the scene had taken care of the Tarly lieutenant swiftly and quickly. Dickon Tarly had protested, but when it was found out that the man was beating an innocent girl, he couldn’t say much, except that it should have been left to him to punish his own men. Kinvara had to promise on the queen’s insistence to refer the case to her if a similar situation was to happen again.

Each night, Kinvara lit a great fire to worship the Lord of Light. Followers from the three camps came to the ceremony. There were a few Westerosi among them, but most were Dothrakis. People from Westeros looked at her and the other Red Priests like foreign invaders, and the fact that most of
her followers they saw were Dothrakis scared them as well. Didn’t they know that she came here to save them? Of course not. All they saw was the stranger. She had to admit that Melisandre’s actions while in the service of Stannis Baratheon didn’t help. Kinvara had clearly forbidden all the priests who followed her to cause any strife with the other religions of Westeros. She herself had gone into a sept while they stopped near a village. She had entered it alone, and the place was empty, so she could contemplate the statues in wood of the Father, the Mother, the Smith, the Maid, the Warrior, the Crone and the Stranger. The septon of the place didn’t take long to appear and to order her to leave, saying that only those who believed in the Seven were allowed. She went as far as to say prayers and words of the Faith to make him understand that she had no desire for quarrel and that she respected his faith. How could she not? She knew what it was to believe in a different god. She had not been a servant of the Lord of Light for all her life. He still ordered her to leave, threatening to call the villagers to kill her, treating her like a witch. Kinvara wished them good luck if they attempted to kill her. The time for her to die hadn’t come yet. She finally left, deciding it would be better to avoid any problem. Westeros would need time to accept the Lord of Light.

She arrived on the top of a hill. Daenerys Targaryen was there, and her three dragons as well. Kinvara joined her, but the daughter of Aerys Targaryen didn’t show any sign that she acknowledged her presence. Her dragons seemed restless, but they remained where they were, causing no problem. Daenerys could control them. The Lord of Light was with her.

Kinvara looked where the new queen was staring. Surrounded by the waters of two rivers, the triangular castle deserved his name. Riverrun was almost impregnable. Even Revan said that he saw no way to take the castle other than through a long siege… if someone didn’t have a dragon. Daenerys had sent a message to Edmure Tully, the Lord Paramount of the Riverlands, demanding the same thing she demanded from every noble man and woman in Westeros: to bend the knee and recognize her as the only true queen of this country.

Kinvara saw the black ruins of Harrenhal on their way to the Trident. It was a testimony of what happened to people who dared to defy fire made flesh. Kinvara knew there were innocent people living inside Riverrun, next to Lord Tully, his family and his knights. These servants didn’t deserve to die, and she hoped they wouldn’t. On their way through the Riverlands, two minor lords refused to bend the knee to Daenerys. Their keeps were stormed easily. Daenerys used her dragons with moderation, mostly scaring the defenders away from the battlements or causing minor damages to a part of the keep. It had been enough for her troops to take these castles without heavy losses. However, Kinvara knew that things would be different if Riverrun resisted. She relied on Revan for military advice, and most of the commanders agreed that an assault on Riverrun would cause thousands of deaths. The only way to take the castle by force without sacrificing too many of their own men would be to set the castle aflame. Riverrun would become a second Harrenhal. As much as Kinvara hated the castles for what they represented, Riverrun was more modest than many others she saw up to now, and she didn’t wish for the innocents inside to die. Fire was brought to Westeros to fight the dead, not the living.

“No sign of answer, your Grace?” Kinvara asked to the queen.

“No. If they haven’t given me an answer before tonight, I’ll have to execute my threat.”

Kinvara thought she perceived in the queen’s words that she hoped the Tullys would surrender. People from the nobility who truly cared about their people were rare. Kinvara had met more than enough of these people to know it very well by now. The Lord of Light truly sent them a savior in the person of Daenerys Targaryen.

“You know, Kinvara, we have the Red Fork right under our eyes. Apparently, it goes into the Trident. The Trident is the place where my brother Rhaegar died.” The Battle of the Trident.
Everyone had heard about it. “Robert Baratheon slew my brother on that day. I never had the chance to know him. He was the first Targaryen to die in this war, and he wasn’t the last. The Baratheons, the Starks, the Tullys, the Lannisters, they did everything to destroy my family, to the last child.”

“And they failed.”

“Yes, they failed,” the queen agreed. “And now the Baratheons are gone, and if I wanted, I could make sure that the three other families disappear as well.”

“Yes, you could. Will you?”

The Mother of Dragons kept looking at the castle. “Ser Barristan told me back in Meereen who my father truly was. I know the Mad King earned his name. I know he burned people with wildfire and laughed as they died screaming.” She turned her gaze to Kinvara. “Do you think that Jaime Lannister told the truth, when he said that my father wanted to burn King’s Landing?”

Kinvara answered honestly. “I think he told the truth.” The queen looked again at the seat of the Tullys. “But you’re not your father, your Grace. We are not defined by our parents.”

There had been a time when she thought so, but the Lord of Light showed her the truth. Today, she still felt the shame of her former beliefs, of what she assumed to be the truth for a very long time. There was only one other thing she regretted more. The cries of a baby resounded in her mind and in her memory.

“No, I’m not my father. Ser Barristan told me the same. He should be here, by my side. And so Ser Jorah should.” They remained silent for a moment, and then Daenerys Targaryen asked her a question. “Do you think I made the right choice, concerning Trystane Martell?”

The prince of Dorne was left in King’s Landing to rule the city while Daenerys Stormborn fought the great war. “He is loyal to you. He did his best in Meereen, and I’m quite sure he will do the same in King’s Landing. The Martells showed loyalty to you sooner than anyone else in Westeros. He should be able to rule the capital well enough in your absence.”

“This isn’t what I’m talking about.”

Kinvara dropped her head to express an apology. “I believe he will make a decent husband.”

“The Tyrells are not happy.”

“The Tyrells are never happy. And you have Lady Margaery. This should keep them in line.”

“He didn’t show much enthusiasm when I told him I accepted his father’s offer. I think he even seemed relieved when I told him the wedding wouldn’t take place immediately and we would wait for the end of the war.”

“And how do you feel about it, your Grace?”

The Lord’s Chosen One sighed. “I need to marry, to forge alliances that will last.” She didn’t display much enthusiasm either.

“He still loves his betrothed who was assassinated, Myrcella Baratheon,” Kinvara declared.

“Myrcella Lannister, you mean,” the queen corrected.

Kinvara shrugged. “Names don’t mean much.”
The queen looked about to tell her something, but her lips remained closed. She said no more. They stayed there, side by side, two women from very different worlds, and yet two women who weren’t so different. Two exiles. Two women without family. The girl she was before had a family, but Kinvara gave up on it when she entered the order of the Red Priests a long time ago. She forsook everything from her past. The Red Priests were called to focus on the present and the future, not to dwell on the past.

A Dothraki rider came to them. He spoke to the queen in his rough language, and Kinvara understood that a delegation with a white flag was approaching her camp. It was time to leave the hill and to receive the surrender of Riverrun. Another one of the Seven Kingdoms was about to acknowledge the Mother of Dragons as their queen.

It didn’t prove to be as easy as they thought, however. On one side stood Lord Edmure Tully with his advisors on horse. There were Lannisters among them. Facing them alongside Kinvara and Daenerys Stormborn were three Dothrakis commanders, Dickon Tarly, Malcolm Branfield, Revan, Garlan Hightower and two other lords respectively from the Stormlands and the Crownlands. There were no representatives of Dorne, whose forces were left behind to occupy King’s Landing and the fortresses of the Crownlands and the Stormlands.

“Edmure Tully,” the Breaker of Chains began, “I suppose you came here to bend the knee. Unless you want to meet a similar fate to two of your bannermen.”

The man who called himself Lord of Riverrun seemed uncertain. The dragons were flying not far away from them, and he often gazed worriedly in the skies to look at them.

“Theres something we want to know first,” he said. “We want proof that Casterly Rock yielded to you.”

Daenerys Targaryen looked at one of her assistants who brought a small piece of paper carried by a raven from the Rock to King’s Landing before they left the capital and gave it to Edmure Tully. The Lord of Riverrun read the words on it, then stared at one of the Lannister commanders.

“It seems quite authentic to me, Ser Daven,” he said, handling the small scroll to him. Ser Daven Lannister, cousin of the actual Lord Casterly Rock, nephew of his mother Joanna Lannister, looked at the scroll as well.

“It is signed by Ser Damion Lannister,” the knight replied. He looked at the queen. “Did you receive any word from Lord Tyrion? Did he approve this decision?”

“We had no word from Tyrion Lannister,” Daenerys Stormborn replied.

Ser Daven spoke to Lord Edmure. “My lord cousin is still fighting at the Wall, Lord Edmure. Damion’s decision doesn’t represent his opinion or his will.”

“Casterly Rock surrendered. It’s written right there in your hands. The Westerlands gave themselves up.” Edmure Tully pointed the piece of paper.

“The Lord of Casterly Rock didn’t surrender. A decision like this cannot be taken by a mere castellan.”

“Well, he took it.”

“That’s not his decision. Lord Tyrion didn’t acknowledge Daenerys Targaryen as his queen.” He stared at the queen. “Jon Snow is our king, not you. And we will not bend the knee. My orders are to accept an alliance with you if necessary, but I am not to declare you my queen.”
“These are your orders, not mine, Ser Daven,” Lord Edmure Tully said. He turned his attention to the queen. “Your Grace, I am willing to surrender and bend the knee before you, but there are a few guarantees I want in return.”

“The terms you were offered said that an unconditional surrender was necessary. You are in no place to negotiate,” Dickon Tarly opposed.


“First, none of the people in Riverrun are to be mistreated in any way,” Lord Edmure began.

“That wasn’t in my intentions. They have nothing to fear as long as they don’t plot against me.”

“Second, my uncle, Ser Brynden Tully, is not be harmed or killed when you go in the North.”

“Agreed. Something else?”

“My nephew Brandon Stark and my nieces, Arya and Sansa, are not be harmed either.”

Kinvara chose this moment to speak. “If I recall, Brandon Stark is the Lord of Winterfell, and Sansa Lannister is the Lady of Casterly Rock. They are sworn allies of Jon Snow.”

“If they accept to bend the knee, I won’t hurt them,” Daenerys said flatly.

“Lord Edmure, don’t do this,” Ser Daven warned. “She is a Targaryen. We cannot trust her.”

“Do you think you are more worthy of trust?” Revan asked. “You organized the slaughter of people during a wedding. You broke the most sacred laws of your country. You sacked the entire Riverlands during the previous wars, and thousands of innocent people, civilians, are dying of cold and starvation because of you. I wonder why the Tullys are fighting with you? House Tully wouldn’t rule the Riverlands if it wasn’t for Aegon, and the Targaryens never burned their fields like you did.”

“At least, we don’t burn people alive to offer sacrifices to our gods.”

Kinvara intervened. “I’m afraid you have a misconception of our faith, Ser Daven. There are two Red Priests right in front of you, and we disapprove of these sacrifices that are only practiced by a minority. A minority whose many members were exiled by me these last years.”

“Then perhaps you might explain why Stannis Baratheon burned people alive.”

“The woman who did this came from Asshai, not from the cities that the High Priestess represents,” Revan said.

“That makes no difference. A Red Priest is a Red Priest.”

“Then I suppose you consider that all septons are like the last High Septon you had recently, who forced people to walk naked in the streets to atone for their sins?” Kinvara asked.

“We’re not here to discuss about religion,” Dickon Tarly said. “Lord Edmure, will you bend the knee or not?”

“Don’t do it, my lord. Remember what happened to the first betrothed of your sister,” Daven Lannister said.

Kinvara decided it was time to put an end to this squabbling. “What if I told you that Lord Tyrion
Lannister gave the order to Casterly Rock to surrender before Queen Daenerys?”

That caught the Lannister knight’s attention. “You’re lying.”

“I am not. Lady Genna Frey surrendered the castle on his specific orders.”

Ser Daven looked troubled all of a sudden. “And how could you know such a thing, if it was true?”

“The queen has an advisor with little birds everywhere.” She smiled sweetly. In fact, the visions that the Lord of Light granted her were more useful. “Your lord cousin decided to bend the knee because he knew he had no chance against Daenerys Stormborn.”

“You knew this? Is it true?” Lord Edmure asked Ser Daven. He obviously didn’t know about all this.

The knight tried to reason him. “Lord Edmure, she’s trying to turn you against us.”

“We all pledged ourselves to Jon Snow, and you betrayed him at the first opportunity!”

“We did no such thing. We are still fighting with him at the Wall, doing everything we can. We don’t run away before the battle, unlike some people do.”

“Well, I begin to understand why the Knights of the Vale turned on you at the Crossroads. I begin to think they were right. We cannot trust a Lannister.”

They watched the argument, as two allies were throwing accusations and insults at each other. The parley seemed to be between the Lannisters and the Tullys now. In the end, Edmure Tully turned to the Breaker of Chains.

“Your Grace, I accept your terms. Riverrun and the Riverlands are yours.”

Ser Daven Lannister was obviously unhappy as the head of House Tully bent the knee before his new queen. He lost many of his men at the Battle of the Crossroads, where an army from the Vale attacked the Lannisters by surprise and made a great carnage among their ranks. The knight had retreated to Riverrun, and with the Westerlands submitted to Daenerys and now the Riverlands, he had nowhere to go. The queen reported her attention to him once Edmure Tully was done swearing to serve the queen.

“What about you, Ser Daven? What do you decide?”

Ser Daven was furious, and you could hear it when he spoke. “I would be willing to accept an alliance with you to fight our common enemy, but nothing more. If my lord wants to bend the knee before you, then I will as well, but not before he does.”

“This is unacceptable. You must bend the knee, now. Or is your pride so important in your eyes that you can’t yield to save what men you have left?”

“This isn’t a question of pride. It’s a question of survival. The Wall has fallen.”

The silence that followed was so heavy that you would have heard flies if there were any. “I beg your pardon?” It was Revan who broke the spell. Kinvara couldn’t talk. The Wall has fallen.

“We received word from Queensgate, one of the castles there. There’s been... a great sound. Something like a horn. We heard it there, at Riverrun, but it seems it was heard at the Wall as well. A section fell at Castle Black. There is a large opening. Thousands of men died. We had no word from
Castle Black ever since. They said they would reorganize their defenses to hold the enemies, but…”

He didn’t finish his sentence. Daenerys looked at Kinvara. She wished she had an answer to provide to the queen, but she had none. The Lord of Light warned her and many others that the great war was very close, but she had no idea that such a thing would happen. She never heard of a horn that could bring down the Wall. They heard a horn several days ago, but had no idea of where the sound came from.


“Revan, what does it mean?” Kinvara asked.

“The Horn of Winter is an ancient magic artifact that was built thousands of years ago. It was built not long after the Wall was built. Men who were allied with the Others wanted to use it to bring down the Wall when the time would be right. However, the Night’s Watch stole the horn and hid it before the servants of the Great Other could use it. The horn we heard must be this one. Someone must have found it and used it.”

The Wall was down. If the Wall was down…

A few hours later, on the insistence of both Kinvara and Revan, Daenerys Stormborn accepted to delay the submission of Ser Daven Lannister. He would still follow her and obey her orders, but without bending the knee. The queen decided to head north with the bulk of her forces to fight the servants of the Great Other. Edmure Tully would give them what troops he could spare. The Unsullied would be left in the Vale to deal with the lords there, who still resisted. Daenerys also gave the order to bring the shipment of dragonglass that arrived in Saltpans to the Neck as quickly as possible, so they could bring it with them in the North.

“Are you really sure that this horn caused the fall of the Wall?”

They were in the command tent of Daenerys Stormborn when she asked this question some time later. Only the people who had come from Meereen with her were present. Mostly, they consisted of Malcolm Branfield and the Red Priests who were present, Kinvara, Melisandre, Revan, Geralt, Triss and Cirilla. The Dothraki commanders were not present since they weren’t considered useful for this discussion.

“Without any doubt,” Revan replied. “I was hoping the Children of the Forest and the First Men had destroyed the Horn of Winter, but it seems they didn’t. Perhaps they found no way to destroy it, or perhaps it cannot be destroyed.”

“How could a simple horn bring down a wall of ice and rock of seven hundred feet tall?”

“The horn was made with ancient magic, just like the Wall. These are things we cannot totally understand today.”

“How could that horn appear out of nowhere? It disappeared thousands of years ago according to you, and it reappears now? That makes no sense.”

“Samwell Tarly.” Raven said that name. “The fat novice of the Citadel. When we met him, he said Euron Greyjoy stole a horn that he thought could awake a kraken. He said he found the horn at the Fist of the First Men, and that they were attacked by the Others and the dead. Euron must have thought wrongly that this horn was to awake a kraken, and he used it.”

“You think the Others might have attacked them for the horn?” the queen asked, referring to the
battle that took place there between the Night’s Watch and the Others years ago.

“Possibly. They might have been trying to take it back.”

“What matters now is that the Wall has fallen,” Branfield said. “If the dead are leading assaults on it, Jon Snow might not hold them for long, and if the dead get through the Wall…”

“Jon Snow and his allies will not last long,” Melisandre said. “Without your help, your Grace, the North is doomed, and so will the other kingdoms as well.”

“I’m quite aware of that,” Daenerys Targaryen said. “We’re heading there now. Anyway, only the Vale remains to resist, and the Unsullied will take care of it. All the other men will follow us in the North. Dothraki, Reach, Stormlands, Crownlands, Riverlands, Westerlands, it doesn’t matter now. We bring them all with us. And I need the Fiery Hand as well.”

“They are at your disposal,” Kinvara declared. “I will also call back some priests from the other kingdoms to help us.”

“Very well. We leave tomorrow at dawn.”

They were dismissed on that note. Kinvara made a sign to Melisandre to follow her to her tent. They travelled through the camp. Officers from House Tully and House Lannister were now seen discussing with the commanders of the Unburnt. The common soldiers might be more hesitant to fraternize with their former enemies for the time being, so they wouldn’t see her many of them before the march tomorrow.

When they arrived at their destination, Kinvara faced Melisandre. “Did you have any vision announcing this?” she asked her straight away.

“No. Nothing that seemed to point to this event. The Lord didn’t warn us that the Wall would fall.” He didn’t warn them, indeed. No priest that Kinvara contacted in Westeros had any vision about this event.

“The ways of our Lord are difficult to penetrate. Even the wisest among us cannot claim to truly know what he wants us to do.”

“No.”

Kinvara looked at the woman standing before her. Melisandre had changed since she stopped at Volantis, and it seemed she changed for the best, but Kinvara wasn’t ready to trust her entirely yet. She had too much blood on her hands, and sullied the faith in the Lord of Light for too long. However, Melisandre proved that the Lord was talking to her and acting through her. She had a role to play in this war.

“The great war is here. We must be ready for everything, and to do everything to defeat the servants of evil,” Kinvara said to Melisandre. “But we must choose our methods carefully.”

Melisandre seemed to understand the meaning of her message. “I agree, High Priestess, but we mustn’t forget what is the most important.”

“And what is it?”

“We will need the three heads of the dragon. We will need ice and fire to fight alongside, and we will need something to bind them. Without the third head, everything is lost.”
Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Trystane

Happy New Year!
Trystane VI

Chapter Notes

A character many people love comes back.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

TRYSTANE VI

He sat in the Iron Throne. Trystane never thought he would be sitting there one day. He always saw his future as the Prince of Dorne, but certainly not as the king, even a consort king. And yet here he was. Most people would have been thrilled by the perspective of ruling the Seven Kingdoms, but truth be told Trystane didn’t feel like it. His father taught him to not hope for more than what life granted him. The last time House Martell got close to the crown, his father lost a sister, a nephew, and a niece. Not to mention an uncle. Trystane was too young to remember anything of Ser Lewyn Martell, but his father always spoke fondly of his late uncle.

Dorne was once again close to the Iron Throne. Trystane was officially betrothed to the queen, Daenerys Targaryen. She came to visit him before she left King’s Landing, saying that after much consideration, and as a reward for his family’s service to her cause, she accepted the marriage proposal. She made him understand very clearly that he would be a consort, and that final decisions would always go to her. She also left him with several instructions to rule the city while she would be absent.

Trystane knew he should feel grateful, or honored in the least, but truth be told, he didn’t know what to feel about all this. The queen didn’t show much enthusiasm about this marriage either, and she didn’t display any hurry to come back soon when she told him they would marry as soon as all the Seven Kingdoms bent the knee. This was no marriage of love. Trystane knew it was the rule in the nobility, but after his betrothal with Myrcella, it was hard to go back to the idea of an arranged marriage.

Trystane would do his duty. His family was engaged with Daenerys’s cause since she arrived in Westeros, and they couldn’t turn on her. His aunt Elia Martell left for King’s Landing a long time ago, to marry a man she barely knew, the heir to the Iron Throne. Only her bones came back to Sunspear. Trystane hoped things would be different this time.

For now, he sat on the throne of House Targaryen and held court in the name of Queen Daenerys, the First of Her Name. Lord Varys and Lord Yronwood were sitting with him on the dais. The Master of Ships and the Master of Coin were absent, the former because he was on his way to the city, the second because he rode with his army to secure the Westerlands. He was supposed to join Daenerys afterwards on her march on Winterfell. Now that Riverrun had fallen, only the North and the Vale resisted. Several messages came lately from the Wall and from Winterfell, claiming that White Walkers breached the Wall and threatened all Westeros now. They were sent by men and women serving the Houses Lannister, Stark, Tully and Arryn. Varys said it was unusual for such houses who were rivals for so long to state the same thing, and to keep their armies in the North when Daenerys Targaryen was invading their lands. Were the Red Priests right after all?

A merchant stepped forward. “My prince, my lords, I am here in the name of the guild of merchants of King’s Landing. We wish to know when the works on the harbor will be over.”
It wasn’t the first time Trystane received the visit of someone representing this association. “I’m afraid I cannot give you a date for now. Our workers are doing their best,” he gave as an answer.

“But my prince, we need the docks. Trade has ended. We’re receiving almost nothing from the sea, and we can’t send anything. King’s Landing is losing his position as the main harbor in Westeros.”

“It is very regrettable, but the queen left very specific instructions before she left us. The priority is to build shelters for the people, and to rebuild the granaries where the food will be stocked for winter.”

“But trade is a great source of income for the Crown, my prince. Without trade, you will never have the necessary funds to rebuild the city. And while our guild is waiting for the rebuilding of the harbor, we keep paying taxes, with limited income to pay them.”

“I will give you a temporary dispensation, if taxes are a problem for you. I understand you must struggle with the actual situation, but everyone is struggling. People are starving and freezing in the streets, vulnerable to the cold and the criminals, and for now the priority of the Crown is to help the people. The docks will be rebuilt when they will be rebuilt.”

He would talk no more about. He made a gesture to one of the Dornish soldiers in the hall, and he accompanied the merchant outside. The next matter to be brought forward was that of a woman whose husband was executed. She asked the permission to get his bones in order to bury him. When Trystane asked her why her husband was executed, she reluctantly admitted that he was sentenced to death for murder. Trystane allowed her to leave with the bones.

Then there was a man with his daughter. He yelled, accusing Trystane that a Dornishman, a soldier, raped his daughter. Trystane listened to the girl telling her story. She said she couldn’t remember how the man looked like, that he attacked her by surprise. Trystane offered his apologies and said he would inquire to discover the culprit, though he doubted he could find him. The accusations against the men of Dorne were as common as rats in this city, and he was sure that about half the accusations of rape and murder, if not more, were false. The people of King’s Landing didn’t like Dornishmen.

Trystane listened to petitioners until late in the afternoon. It was an exhausting work, but it had to be done. His father told him to care about he well-being of his people. He was responsible for them. And Daenerys left the city in his care for the time she would be away. Perhaps this was a test to see if he was up to the task of ruling. She wasn’t very impressed by his time in Meereen.

As Trystane walked out of the Great Hall, he heard Varys’s soft footsteps following him. “It was a good day, overall, my prince. Though I fear the tensions between the people of the city and your countrymen are growing.”

“Truly? I didn’t notice,” he said in faked surprise.

“I’m only trying to help you, my prince.”

“And I thank you for that, but right now I don’t need you to tell me evidences.” He was tired of his day. “So unless you have some important news for me, or some suggestion that could help us rebuilding the city, reducing the accidents involving my men, or repaying our debts to the Iron Bank, then I suggest you go back into the shadows.”

“I’m afraid I have no miracle solution to our actual problems right now, but I do have some news. She is here.”

Trystane stopped in his movements. “When did she arrive?”

“While you were holding court. About two hours ago. I had everything settled for her in the
Maidenvault.”

“Did anyone see her arriving?”

“No. I made sure she came here in secret. No one saw her.”

Trystane knew she would be there soon, but he wasn’t sure if it would be today. She could have arrived tomorrow or a few days later.

“Well, I’m going to see her,” he declared. Varys bowed. He and Trystane took different directions.

The Maidenvault was guarded by soldiers from Dorne, just like most of the Red Keep and the city. The Dornish forces remained in King’s Landing to maintain the order while the other allies of the queen helped her to take the remaining kingdoms. Dorne’s forces were there to ensure peace as much as to keep the queen’s conquests.

The Maidenvault was almost empty safe for the guards and a few servants. A large part of the Red Keep was deserted. Trystane approached his destination. He crossed the path of a handmaiden who carried a chamber pot. He told the guard standing before the door to announce him, and once it was done, he walked into the room. She was standing on the balcony, looking away as the light of the sun lowered. She wore a dress that made him think of those the women of the Reach use to wear, though it was slightly different, thicker. With winter that had arrived, he supposed this was no surprise. The air was cooler in King’s Landing than in Highgarden or Sunspear. He would have to change his clothes soon as well.

“Lady Margaery, I’m glad to see you.”

She turned her head slightly to look at him. “Prince Trystane.” She devoted her attention to the outside once again.

“I hope your journey was without trouble.”

“It was. The sea was quiet. It was uneventful.”

A long silence lingered between them. She kept looking away. Her voice wasn’t angry, but it wasn’t pleasant either.

“How do you feel?” he asked.

“Well, I lost three husbands, my brother is dead, and my son was taken away from me before I could see his face. You will forgive me if I’m not quite cheerful.”

“Oh course. There’s nothing to forgive.” Another moment passed before he spoke. “I just wanted to be sure you were all right. I would understand if you wanted to stay alone.”

“Yes, I do.”

“I’ll leave you then. Just so that you know, I’m going to the ruins of the Great Sept of Baelor tomorrow. I know that Tommen’s ashes are buried there. If you wish to accompany me…”

He waited for an answer. It came. “Yes. I’d like to.”

“I wish you a good night, my lady.”

Back in his chamber, Trystane reviewed the accounts of the Crown and looked at the various reports he received. Everything was going too slow. The city would never be ready for winter, even with the
Tyrells who brought provisions like it was never seen before to the city. His new betrothed sent word that she was now walking on the North to fight the White Walkers while Grey Worm would take care of the Vale of Arryn. He went to bed with the impression he didn’t do much today, and needed quite some time to fall asleep.

The next day in the morning, he went to see Lady Margaery. She was ready to visit the sept, wrapping herself in warm clothes. She also wore a hood. No one outside the Red Keep was to know she was here. She arrived the day before on a ship that didn’t display any sign of her family’s sigil, and most of its crew ignored that she was onboard. He didn’t know how Varys brought her inside the Red Keep, but she didn’t go through the streets, so it had to be one of those secret passages under the city. There could be problems with the people if they learned that a former queen lived in the Red Keep, even if the closest Tyrell soldiers were weeks away. For now, only a few people would know about her presence in the capital.

They were brought to the Great Sept in a veiled litter to hide its occupants. Only ruins remained of what once was the greatest sept in Westeros. The new City Watch, mostly consisting of Dornishmen for the time being, stopped the people from wandering among the ruins. It had been decided that a new sept would be built to replace the former when the time would be appropriate.

They climbed the steps, avoiding the rubble. At a certain level, there were more debris and it was more difficult to not walk on them. For Trystane, it was easy. He followed this way often enough to know it by heart. He helped Margaery to get through this mess until they arrived at a certain area that was cleared of any obstacle.

“I don’t know where Myrcella was buried, but I often come here, and I imagine she is right under my feet,” he explained to Margaery. She removed her hood. It was useless here, far from any prying eyes. She looked all around her.

“I was married thrice. I was wed to two of my husbands here, and then, I was sent into a cell under the very place where I professed my love for these men. I never thought that I would marry, pray, and be imprisoned in the one same place. And now it’s gone.” She moved a few rocks on the ground with her feet. “I was lucky to escape. Many people didn’t have this chance. And Tommen, he survived this, and he threw himself from the top of a tower because he believed I was dead.” He could hear the regret in her voice. She shook her head. “Or maybe Cersei pushed him. What do you think?”

The thought of a mother killing her son was unsettling. “I don’t know. I suppose you knew Cersei better than I did.”

“It seems I didn’t know her enough. I didn’t expect all of this from her. I didn’t think she could truly plot to have me and Loras killed. We didn’t believe the Lannisters would do something against us. They needed us, but Cersei did it all the same, and she ended in a cell similar to my own. Before she blew up everything.” She exhaled. “I’m glad she’s dead. Maybe Loras will find some sort of peace now.”

She looked down. She was grieving her brother and her husband. Trystane understood what she felt. He remembered the pain he felt when Quentyn died. His brother was supposed to rule Sunspear one day. It was never supposed to be him. He and Margaery were both heirs who were not supposed to be. And of course, he also grieved for the woman he loved.

“I’m sorry for your brother,” he told her.

“Thank you.” A gust of wind made her mantle fly a little. “You loved Myrcella, didn’t you? I can see it the way you talk about her, and you wouldn’t come here again and again if you felt nothing for
Trystane sighed. There was no need for hiding. Most of the people already knew or suspected his true feelings. Daenerys herself was aware of them. “I miss her. I wish she wasn’t dead.”

The lady standing not far from him nodded. “From what Tommen told, and what I know about her, she didn’t deserve to die.”

“No, she didn’t.” He saw her again, in Sunspear’s gardens, smiling at him, all joy, sweetness, beauty and kindness. “She shouldn’t have died.”

“Many people should never have died.” She looked straight at him. “I suppose congratulations would be in order, but do you want them?”

Trystane ignored the question. He knew very well what the congratulations were intended for, and truth be told he didn’t have much envy to hear them, not here where Myrcella was buried.

“You know, Trystane,” Margaery started, “all I wanted was to be queen. I wonder now if it was wise from me. My whole family suffered from our ambition, my brother more than anyone else. I suppose you’re aware of his affair with Renly.” Trystane nodded. Everyone knew. “When Renly died… Loras… I never saw him so… utterly destroyed. Renly didn’t deserve to die either. Of the three Baratheon brothers, I think he would have made the best king. Tommen shouldn’t have died either. Joffrey was the only one who deserved his death.” She made an attempt to smile, but when she spoke, it was seriously. “I hope my next husband will not die within the first year of our marriage, if I ever marry again.”

“I’m sure the queen will find you a suitable match. And you are the heir to Highgarden now.”

“I wish I wasn’t.”

They were lost in their thoughts. “Do you wish to make a prayer, my lady?”

“Of course.”

They did. They recited a long prayer for the dead and the loved ones, their voices joining to form a chorus. Trystane thought of Myrcella, but he also prayed for her brother. She would have liked it. He even made a prayer for her uncle, Ser Jaime Lannister, who rotted in the cells of the Red Keep. He hadn’t gone to see him yet, though the thought came to his mind more than once. He felt that he wouldn’t like what the knight might tell him, knowing he murdered not only his king, but also his own sister and lover. He had come to accept that Jaime and Cersei Lannister were lovers. However, he refused to believe that Myrcella could be the daughter of the Kingslayer. That simply looked impossible for him.

“Well, look at it.” Trystane recognized the voice immediately. His mind was filled with rage on the instant. The three of them were in King’s Landing. He opened the eyes and saw one of them, the woman who murdered his betrothed standing right in front of him. “Found yourself another pretty girl? And me who thought you would never get over the bastard.”

“Lady Tyene,” Margaery Tyrell welcomed her. “It’s a pleasure to see you again.”

“Really?”

“I owe you my life. If you didn’t get me out of this place before it blew up, I would be dead.”

Tyene made a muffled sound with her mouth that was the only sign of acknowledgement. Lady
Margaery’s thanks seemed forced.

Tyene looked at him. “So, here crying over your Lannister love?”

“What I’m doing here doesn’t concern you,” he shot her.

“Why not? If Daenerys Targaryen was to learn that you still mourn a false princess, or that you had a Tyrell brought to King’s Landing to run after her, what would be her reaction? I’m not sure she would be so keen to marry you, knowing your cock is growing whenever a false queen stands before you.”

He was boiling from the inside. “Our queen told me to bring Lady Margaery to King’s Landing, Tyene. Unlike you, the queen is talking to me.” It was the truth. It was some way to thank the Tyrells for their help so far, and also to keep the heir to Highgarden closer. It was also to increase the distance with her son.

“Only talking?”

She smirked mockingly. Trystane held her stare. “Leave me alone. Your father wouldn’t want me to have anything with people who murder innocent girls.”

“Innocent girls.” She spat on the ground. “That’s where she belongs. That’s where all the Lannisters belong. I can’t wait for the day the rest of them will die.”

She turned on her heels and walked away.

“I’m not the only one with issues about your cousins,” Margaery Tyrell said behind him.

He tried to calm himself and looked at her. “I’m sorry for how she treated you on your way to Storm’s End.” She acknowledged his apologies. “And I’m sorry about your son. It wasn’t my decision.”

She looked away. “I will never see him again.”

“I wouldn’t say that if I were you.” She looked back at him. “No one knows what the future holds for us.”

No one knew what could happen to them in the next days, the next weeks, the next months, or the next years. Not Trystane, not Margaery, not even someone like Varys. And certainly not Tyene or any of her sisters. Even his father, as wise as he was, couldn’t predict with certainty what would happen in the near or far future. He looked down, where his beloved was buried, and repeated in his mind the promise he made a long time ago. I will avenge you, Myrcella. I swear it. Those who killed you will pay.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter : Bran
Sorry for the delay. This chapter should have been published two days ago.

First chapter from Bran. The style is a little different from the usual one I use when I write a first chapter from someone's perspective. I hope you'll like it.

BRAN I

He was floating beneath the sky, flying through the wind with ease. It gave him a feeling of freedom he could only experience when he wasn’t trapped into his wheelchair. The snow and the wind didn’t bother him. He flew straight, looking on the ground all the time, focusing on every single detail. The great mountain of ice that stood straight wasn’t far on his right. The men built structures on the other side, and also over it. For now, they were alone on the mountain of ice, but certainly not for a long time. Strange things hid in the woods. He was looking for these things. They were not animals, and they were not humans either. They were a danger for everything that lived. For now, they were nowhere to be seen. The mind that was within him had seen these things through other eyes. He even met the eyes of the one. He flapped his wings more quickly, fighting the wind that pushed him back towards the mountain on the right.

He brought back his attention on the woods, but there was truly nothing to be seen, and yet his instincts told him that someone, or something, was watching him. He slowed down, losing altitude, and approached the top of the trees. The woods were thick there. It was very hard to see through the coverage of firs. All of a sudden, he had the impression the air was colder. He focused his attention even more on the trees, but there was still nothing to be seen. He followed his path, and after a certain distance, he felt warmer. He turned around and went back on his steps, and felt the same cold. They had to be there, but he couldn’t see anything.

“Bran.”

He opened his eyes and found himself into the godswood of Winterfell, at home. Sansa was standing right in front of him, a gloved hand on his shoulder.

“Bran, finally,” she said, looking relieved. “You’ve been here for hours like that. Everyone was worried.”

“Hours?”

“Yes,” she replied on a reproachful tone.

Bran closed his eyes and opened them again. “I’m sorry. I don’t see the time going on.”

“You should be more careful. Sometimes, I’m worried you might go into on of these visions you have and never get out.”

“I know. Meera told me the same thing.”
“Well, I’m telling it to you as well.”

She looked at the weirwood. His sister had become a woman since she left Winterfell. He was asleep back then, so he didn’t see her leaving, but he saw it later, when he decided he wanted to see her departure. She had looked so happy, but then her life had turned into a nightmare. Bran had seen her during Father’s execution. He witnessed her humiliations, every insult and mistreatment she went through. He also saw her receiving help, from Sandor Clegane, from Margaery Tyrell, and of course from the man who would become her husband. He saw her defy her captors. She looked like their mother.

Bran missed his parents. He missed Robb, and Rickon. He was afraid for Jon and Arya. He knew they could all survive to terrible things. They defied death more than once, beating the odds of survival but still, he was afraid.

“Did you see Tyrion?” Sansa asked.

“No,” he replied. “Not today. I was watching the other side of the Wall.”

“He should be here soon. I can’t wait for him to be there.”

Bran perceived the longing in her voice. Despite everything his gift allowed him to see, it was still strange for him to see his sister deeply in love with Tyrion Lannister. The sister he knew before he fell would never have loved a man like him. She changed. They all changed. They were all so happy once, just like their father, their aunt and their uncles before. This happiness wasn’t made to last. Sansa once told him that their parents shouldn’t have tried to hide the ugliness of the exterior to them. He had come to agree with her.

“How are things going with the lords of the Vale?”

“They’re not leaving yet. But they’re not staying to fight either.” His sister blew some air. “They still believe this isn’t their fight. The think they can hide behind their mountains like they did during the War of the Five Kings. Or perhaps they’re only afraid. Some saw the White Walkers. I think they just want to run away, and hope the dead won’t follow them. But we need their help. We need everyone’s help.”

“Maybe Tyrion can help you when he comes back,” Bran suggested.

“Yes, but he will probably wonder who these lords are the most likely to listen: a woman, or a dwarf.” She had thin smile. Bran returned it. “It will be good to see him again all the same. Joanna grew up so much while he was away. Soon she will be taller than him.”

“Could I see her?”

Sansa seemed surprised. “I thought your visions took all the time you had.” She said it half-accusingly.

“I think I can find a few minutes for my niece.”

His sister smiled. “Well, come then.”

She pushed his wheelchair out of the godswood. She got help from a few men to bring him to her chambers. On their way, Bran noticed the vast number of men with sigils from the Vale. They were the men who followed the lords who deserted the Wall and that Sansa desperately tried to keep in the North. They had been at Winterfell for two weeks now. His sister outdid herself to make them stay to negotiate.
In the nursery, Sansa took her daughter and brought her to Bran. “Here. Be careful. You must place her head in your arm’s fold. Like this. Yes.”

He looked at his niece who was sleeping. “Her hair is shining.”

“Yes, it is.”

Bran saw how Sansa looked at her daughter. It reminded him of the way their lady mother looked at him. It had to be love. He thought with regret that he would never have children. Bran missed his parents. He had time to mourn his lord father, but he never truly mourned his mother. She had died believing he was dead.

Screams filled the room, bolts and arrows flew everywhere. Throats were slit, hearts were carved. Daggers and blades took lives by the dozens. There was a woman lying on the floor next to Bran. She was pretty, with brown hair, and Bran recognized her. Talisa Maegyr. He saw her in some of his visions before. She was Robb’s wife. When he saw her, she looked so happy with his brother, but now, her eyes were half-shut, and she was bleeding from the belly. Her blood was spread all around her. But what stroke Bran the most was the small curb her belly showed despite the mess. She was pregnant. He approached her and looked closer. She was dead.

“The King in the North arises.”

Bran turned his head just in time to see his brother struggling to crawl to his wife. Bran stepped out, allowing Robb all the space he needed. He placed his hand over his wife’s belly and took her under the neck, slowly rising her. Bran had never seen his brother so heartbroken. She was gone. His wife and their baby were gone.

He heard some noise from his left. A woman grabbed a girl who hid under a table and put a knife on her neck. “Lord Walder! Lord Walder, enough! Let it end!”

Bran stared in shock. He moved so he could better see their faces. He confirmed that it was his mother who held the knife. The girl looked terrified. He had never seen his mother like that. That couldn’t be her. She couldn’t be holding a knife at the throat of an innocent girl. However, her next words were very different.

“She believes I’m dead. She believes Rickon is dead. She thinks Arya and Sansa are lost. Robb is all that’s left to her. I swore by all the gods your son would marry my daughter!”

“He is my son. My first son. Let him go and I swear that we will forget this. I swear it by the old gods and the new. We will take no vengeance.”

“You already swore me one oath right here in my castle.” Bran turned to see Walder Frey, the man who organized the slaughter. “You swore by all the gods your son would marry my daughter!”

“Take me for a hostage, but let Robb go,” she begged. She turned to his brother. “Robb, get up. Get up and walk out. Please! Please!” his mother shouted.

Robb didn’t seem to hear her. He kept looking at his wife. His mother was desperate. “And why would I let him do that?”

His mother straightened, tightening the grip of the dagger on the girl’s throat, and stared at Walder Frey. “On my honor as a Tully, on my honor as a Stark, let him go or I will cut your wife’s throat.”
No. No, she couldn’t do that. Bran could see the girl was innocent. She had nothing to do with that. Her mother had to know it would change nothing. Robb was going to die, and she couldn’t change it. It was bound to happen. She was only going to take an innocent life.

“I’ll find another.” Lord Frey’s sentence fell like an axe on a man’s throat.

“Mother.” His brother had talked. Robb looked at him. He had several bolts piercing his body. It was a miracle he could still stand. He wouldn’t survive. Bran knew it, and despair gained him as well. He wished there was something he could do. He couldn’t stand there and let this happen.

A man came to stand between Robb and him. “The Lannisters send their regards.”

Roose Bolton shoved a knife into Robb’s heart. He stood away as Robb fell on his knees, then his body collapsed on the floor. He was dead.

“NO!”

Bran joined his mother’s cries. He rushed to his brother, but before he could do anything, he heard a strange sound behind him, followed by the noise of a knife clattering on the floor. He turned and saw the girl his mother threatened a moment ago lying on the floor in her blood. The knife that took her life wasn’t far away. His eyes fell upon his mother’s right hand, covered with blood. She did it.

He looked, unbelieving, to the scene before him. His mother wasn’t moving anymore. Her eyes looked at nothing. Bran could only watch his mother. She said she would kill the girl, and she did it. Bran was powerless as he saw a man in chainmail seize his mother from behind and slit her throat.

He woke up in his bed, breathing heavily.

“My lord.” Wolkan was standing over him. “Finally. I was beginning to worry.”

“Bran! Are you alright?” Sansa came into his view, worried like his mother was whenever he was sick.

“Yes, I think. What happened?”

“You were with me. We were talking, and then, your eyes turned white, and you began to shake. I was afraid… What happened?”

Bran shook his head. “I don’t know. It’s just… I had a vision.”

“You had a vision?” Meera appeared behind them. “You started one?”

“No. It just… started. I didn’t want to. I… I saw the Red Wedding. I saw Mother, and Robb, die.”

The three people before him were silent.

“Bran,” Merra began. “That makes no sense. You told me you controlled your power. That you chose what you wanted to see.”

“Yes, and it’s true. It’s just… This time, it was different. The vision came like this. I never tried to access it.”

Another silence followed. “Wolkan, Lady Meera, please leave us alone.”

The maester left on the spot on Sansa’s order. Meera seemed about to protest, but one look from Sansa convinced her it would be better to not argue. When Bran was alone with his sister, her eyes
shot daggers at him.

“I don’t recognize you anymore, Bran.”

“I’m sorry, Sansa. I’ll work on it…”

“No. I don’t want you to try to have any other vision. It’s over.”

“Sansa, I can’t. We need them. They can help us…”

“You’re spending most of your time alone, lost in your dreams. You barely talk, you barely eat, and Meera told me you’re losing the notion of time. Sometimes you don’t even remember if it is day or night. I’m worried about you, Bran. We’re losing you.”

“You’re not losing me, Sansa.”

“Yes, I am. Don’t say the opposite.”

“My visions can help us to locate the White Walkers, to know their weaknesses, to know where to strike them…”

“You haven’t been able to see a single wight in weeks now. And I know that you’re spending most of your time looking at past events, and not scouting the North.” She stared at him. “This is becoming dangerous for you, and for the others.”

“I can’t hurt the others with that, Sansa.”

“Really?” For a moment, he thought she was going to throw Hodor’s name to his face. “What about Joanna? You were holding my daughter when your crisis started.”

By the Old God, he had forgotten this. “Is she alright?”

“You dropped her. We’re lucky she’s not injured.” Sansa was furious. “No more visions. I forbid you.”

She strode away. He heard her speak on the other side of the door. “Lady Meera, I want you to keep an eye on Bran for the night. Don’t let him go into his dream-visions, or whatever it is. Wolkan, examine him to see if there’s anything you can do. Don’t bother with his protests. You are sworn to Winterfell, and I am the Lady of Winterfell. He’s not our lord.”

He heard her walking away in the corridors. Bran was pretty shaken with her outburst, conjugated to the recent experience to watch his mother and brother die. He didn’t dare, or care, to oppose when Maester Wolkan examined him in detail. He answered to his questions in vague terms. The maester was trying to know how he got his powers, but Bran himself wasn’t sure of the way he gained them. He didn’t think he had any better idea of the effects of his powers than the maester did.

Later in the evening, he was dining alone with Meera. “Do you think Sansa is right, Meera?” he asked her while he cut some salted pork.

“Well, it is true that… Lately, I thought you were getting lost in your visions. Perhaps she is right and you should stop for some time.”

“I cannot stop. I’m the Three-Eyed Raven. We need me to see what’s going on if we hope to defeat the Night King.”

“Even at the price of your life?”
Bran shrugged. “The former Three-Eyed Raven gave his life for us. Maybe I’ll have to do the same.”

“Bran, how can you say something like that?”

“It’s the truth. The Children of the Forest have been waiting for me for thousands of years. They needed me.”

“For what? I know that seeing the enemy’s movements and understanding where the White Walkers came from can help us, but I don’t see how this can be so vital for victory, and enough for the Children to wait for so long.”

“I don’t know. I think I have another role to play. I’m not sure, but I know it’s important, and it could make the difference between victory and death.”

“Jojen is gone. I don’t want you to die as well.”

“I may have to. After all, Meera, what’s one life compared to those of everyone in Westeros?”

“Your life is everything to me.” She was looking at him with tears in her eyes. “And think about it. The Three-Eyed Raven himself told you could get lost in your visions if you stayed too long. If we lose you, what good will your visions be, if you can’t tell us about them?”

Bran could only reply this. “I must continue to look.”

“I won’t let you, Bran.”

The sound of men sparring in the courtyard could be heard, even late in the evening. Bran had to keep visiting the past, to see through the eyes of ravens. They needed that to defeat the Night King.

“You won’t be able to stop me, Meera.”

He didn’t see it coming. The palm of her hand met his cheek hard. He rubbed it in the hope to ease the pain, but it did little to help.

“I will stop you, Bran, by every mean necessary. I already lost my brother. I’m not going to lose you too.”

Before Bran could reply, the door burst open. One of the household guards of House Stark walked in. “My lord, we must go, now.”

“What?” he asked.

“There’s no time to discuss,” he said. Another man came into the room with him and they began to get Bran out of his bed. “The castle is under attack. Lady Sansa told us to evacuate you.”

“Wait. Who is attacking us?”

“The Knights of the Vale.”

“What?” The Vale was their ally.

“We don’t have time to explain you, my lord. We must go.”

Bran realized that the sounds of swords clashing outside were mixed with cries of pain and screams. This was no training. Fights started within the walls of Winterfell.
“Wait. Where are the fights taking place?” he asked.

“In the courtyards, over the walls, in the Great Hall, everywhere, my lord. We must leave the castle.”

“Bran will never make it to the gates. He can’t walk,” Meera protested.

“We have no choice, my lady. We’ve got to leave.”

“No,” Bran declared. “Meera is right. We cannot leave. Even if we get past the walls, the Vale has encampments outside. We won’t get far. We must hide.”


“In the crypts. That’s where Rickon and I hid to escape Theon the last time. Meera, you see this torch on the wall?” Meera looked at it and nodded. “Make it turn to the right. Do it.”

Meera did as she was told. Slowly, an opening appeared in the wall, enough to allow a grown man through it.

“How did you know about it?” Meera asked. Bran raised an eyebrow. She understood what it meant. He knew things no living souls were aware of.

“This passage leads to the crypts. No one knows about it. But we need someone to seal it behind us. We cannot close it from the inside,” Bran explained.

“My lord, we were given orders to escort you to safety,” one of the guards protested.

“We won’t make it to safety through the courtyards. The crypts are our best chance.”

The other guard stepped before. “I will close the passage behind you, my lord.” He turned to his comrade. “Go with them. Protect our lord. I’ll make sure no one follows you.”

The other guard hesitated, but finally gave in and helped Meera to carry Bran to the passage. Once the three of them were inside, the guard that remained in the room moved back the torch to its initial position, and the passage closed behind them. The guard carried Bran on his back. He was stronger than Meera. She seized a torch and used it to light the way ahead of them. They followed steep stairs that went downwards. Water could be seen dripping along the walls. They probably came from the heating system of the castle, which brought hot water from the underground to the surface, keeping Winterfell warm even in winter.

As they continued to walk forward, deeper into the depths of the castle, Bran decided to see what was going on. He concentrated, and projected his spirit to reach the present events.

He was flying over the Wall. There were fires lit under him, on the ground and in higher positions. The air was cold, colder than usual. There was a presence that didn’t want to see these things. He turned his head to the right and saw a storm coming.

He was flying over marshes. Bugs, swarms, water and trees were everywhere under him. There was a long line following a narrow path through the swamps. They were a strange collection of colors that contrasted with the green area all around them. He heard screams he never heard before, not far behind him.

He was flying over another column of men. This time, they proceeded through snow, slower than the others. They were easy to spot, with their red furs of steel. They were also fewer. They were far from any place where men lived and heading south.
He was flying south over fields of snow. He saw a beast with scales and large wings, cream colored, flying in the opposite direction. Their eyes met. His were two pools of molten gold. He opened his mouth and fire swallowed him at the same time than the throat.

He was in a familiar vast and rich room. He couldn’t fly, but he could walk. He was no raven here. He wasn’t in the present, but in the past. A man with silver hair going grey, violet eyes, and wrinkles digging his traits sat on a chair made of steel. A thousand swords made the chair. Bran saw the man sitting in the same chair before. *Burn them all.* He saw him die, killed by his own kingsguard.

He looked younger now. He wasn’t at the end of his life yet. He wasn’t of the first youth, but he wasn’t old either. He also held himself differently. Bran didn’t see the Mad King at this very moment. What he saw was a man who looked pleased with himself. He seemed happy.

The great doors opened to let a man with a rich doublet and short golden hair walk inside. Bran noticed the lion shaped pins on him. It wasn’t the first time he saw Tywin Lannister when he was young. He had the badge of Hand on him. The Lord of Casterly Rock walked to the throne and stopped where the steps were beginning. Aerys Targaryen stared at him, a smile on his lips.

“What can I do for you, my friend?” he asked.

“Friend?” The word resonated in the Great Hall. Tywin Lannister took off his badge and climbed the steps to the Iron Throne. He handed the badge to the man who sat before him. “I resign. I’m leaving today.”

Aerys looked at his Hand and the badge he offered with incredulity. “You resign?”

“You, Your Grace’s ear is very good.”

The Mad King obviously caught the veiled insult. “Your resignation is refused.”

“You would like a man who gave his resignation to serve you?” he asked on an impassive tone.

“No, I want YOU to serve me.” Aerys stared at Tywin. “I don’t get it. You finally got what you wanted, and you’re not smiling. I’ll never understand you, my friend.” The king smirked as he stopped talking.

“I didn’t get what I wanted.”

“You know damn well you did. Your daughter is too young. She’s only four. I can’t make the announcement yet.”

“I wonder when it will be made, if it is ever made,” Tywin replied on an icy tone.

“One day. I’d say the promise to see your daughter queen is far more for you than what you gave me in return. Though I appreciated every instant of the last night. It was worth it.”

Tywin Lannister was obviously furious, though the edge in his voice could barely be perceived. “I never gave my consent to this.”

“Really? Did you say something when I called her to my rooms? Did you try to stop her? Did you try to stop me? No more than six years ago. I may have been drunk, but I recall every detail. If you didn’t know what I intended to do, then it is your fault, because that means you are a fool.” Aerys Targaryen smirked like a mad man. “Tell, how did you feel when you found out that another man claimed her before you?”
Tywin’s eyes were as cold as frozen steel. “Your Grace makes a foul of himself every day.”

“Be careful, my friend. You’re talking to your king.”

“And I’m stating a fact by saying the king is making a fool of himself every day he lives. Especially yesterday.”

“What? That? It was a joke. You should learn to laugh.”

“My father laughed. Look where it brought him. You should take lessons from his example.”

“Well, he died into his bed. I see worse ways of dying. And we are both happier than you.”

“Your rule will be in danger if you keep acting this way.”

“And who will endanger it? You? I think not. Because you’re going to stay and to serve me as Hand of the King as long as I want. And if you want your daughter that the court just saw for the first time to be queen one day, I suggest you do as you are told.”

Slowly, reluctantly, Tywin Lannister closed the hand on the badge and put it back into his pocket. The Mad King was smiling widely.

“See? It’s possible to tame a lion. But you can’t tame a dragon,” the king declared.

“Even a tamed lion can be dangerous, your Grace.”

“Is that a threat?”

Tywin bowed. “I will return to my duties.”

He began to walk away when Aerys called after him. “We were friends once, or so I thought. But I wonder, today, were we truly friends, or is it just something I imagined? Did you ever consider me as a friend, Tywin?”

The young Lord of Casterly Rock turned on his heels to face the king. He was now below the dais. “You are no longer the man you were back then.”

“Really? Is it that I changed, or is it that I didn’t give you what you wanted?”

“I don’t remember asking you for anything.”

“No, but you wanted something, and you wanted a lot. You wanted my throne, even then.”

“I never tried to sit on the Iron Throne. It is yours.”

“Yes, and by marrying your daughter Cersei to Rhaegar, you hope to get your hands on it through your children and grandchildren.”

“You’re the one saying it, your Grace.”

“Think yourself lucky that I am actually considering a marriage between my son and your daughter. You are the Hand of the King. I AM the king. You’re not.”

“Any man who must say I am the king is no true king.” Tywin Lannister bowed and proceeded to walk away. Before he left the room, the Mad King shouted.
“Thank Joanna for me. And give her my apologies for leaving her early this morning, though I’m sure she must be used to it with you.”

The Lord of Casterly Rock barely slowed down, but Bran noticed how his fists formed balls as he left the Great Hall. Aerys Targaryen burst into laughs as soon as his Hand was gone. This was uncontrollable laughter. He was bent into two in his throne. He was the Mad King for sure.

“This Tywin. Never able to take a jape. I wonder how Joanna can suffer him. Bring me some wine. It makes me feel better.”

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter : Tyrion
Chapter Notes

This is a very very very VERY important chapter. It's a turning point for the story.
Expect something big. Really big.

For once, I am uploading four chapters at the same time.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

TYRION XXX

“Winter is coming.” Tyrion heard and said the words so often that he thought he might end up adopting them as his family’s new words before the end of this winter. And since this one was bound to be very long, he had a lot of time ahead of him to adopt them. But since they were the words of House Stark, Tyrion thought it might be better if he changed for something else, something closer to how Lannisters felt during winter. *Hear me feeze*, for example. His lord father would certainly love it.

“Well, winter is already here, and *tempest* is more accurate to describe it than *winter.*”

“Tempest? Accurate? You spent far too much time with fancy folk.”

Bronn smirked and they toasted. They were together in Tyrion’s personal tent. Winterfell was only one day ahead of them, and they had stopped for the night. Tyrion had already spent every night since they left Castle Black thinking about the best way to prepare the North for the upcoming invasion. He thought it was time to relax with one of his friends. It was a long time since he simply spent the night drinking, without worrying about his lordly duties.

Bronn grimaced. “Wine in the North is not very famous.”

“For someone who traveled north of the Wall, you have high standards.”

“You got me used to fine things. That’s your fault.”

“I’m sorry that you’re complaining about your current situation. You became a landed knight thanks to me, remember. And you have a wife, and a son.”

“Aye. To Tyrion of Blackwater.”

They toasted again. Bronn was right. There were better wine. “So, did you receive any news from Daisy?”

“At the Wall? No. But she wrote to me a few times at Winterfell. There might be a few ravens waiting for me there.” His friend drank again. “What is it, tell me, to be a father? Do you feel any different?”

Tyrion thought about it for some time. “Well, it is… special. I don’t know how to explain this, but… I mean, I knew I would need to have children with Sansa, but I never… truly thought about what it meant. So, when I saw Joanna for the first time… when I held her in my arms the first time… It’s
hard to explain. I’m not good at it.” His explanations were very clumsy.

“No, you’re not.” Bronn took another gulp. “I guess I’ll discover what you’re trying to say when I see Daisy again.”

“It was for her that I did this,” Tyrion confessed.

“Heh?”

“Not for Daisy, I meant for Joanna. And for Sansa, too. When I decided to set this trap with the wildfire at Castle Black, I was thinking about them. I thought that if the White Walkers got through the Wall, if they spread through the North, then what were the odds they could survive? I was ready to do everything to ensure their safety. Even if it meant killing thousands of people. Do you think we made the right choice?”

Bronn shrugged. “I can’t say I appreciated the sight but, it’s not that different from King’s Landing. Without the wildfire, Stannis would have taken the city, you would be dead, I would be dead, our pretty wives would be dead, your family would be dead, or most of them, and we might add to this that an entire city would have been set afire. It’s the same here. You did what had to be done.”

“In King’s Landing, they were enemies. It was Stannis’s men that I burned to death. But here, I sacrificed our own men.”

“Most were not from the Westerlands, so technically they were not your men. And none of my men died in this battle.”

“You know very well what I’m talking about, Bronn.”

“No, I don’t. You stopped these fuckers from swarming through the North and transforming everything that lives into some kind of fucking zombie. What is more to say? That was the right call. When you start setting rules about what is right and what is wrong, and that you try to follow these rules, then you’re fucked. All those who try to live this way end up the most popular dead men in town.”

“Just like people who try to get other people to love them.”

“Exactly.”

“You didn’t try to make Daisy love you?”

“No. She wanted to leave that brothel, I wanted a wife who wasn’t too complicated, both of us are happy and alive.” Bronn sighed. “Look, most of the people at Castle Black who knew about the wildfire hated you for that, but they’re all alive thanks to that, and we’re alive thanks to that as well. I’m not happy that we killed two thousand men for that, but I would rather see them die than die with them. If you had tried to make what the guys at Castle Black wanted you to do, they might have loved you, but not for long since we would all be dead.” He made a movement with his hand to mimic a slit throat.

As always, Bronn had a unique perspective on things. Still, that didn’t make Tyrion feel any better. He killed those men. He hated his father, despised him for events like the Red Wedding, but was he that different from him? Was he truly better?

“And if that’s not enough for you, then I don’t think Sansa would have liked it if you died,” he added.
“I wonder what she will think of me when I tell her what I’ve done.”

“You’re planning to tell her?”

“Better if she hears it from me than from someone else, if she’s not already aware of the explosion.”

“Aye, true. She’ll understand,” he shrugged off.

“I’m not as confident as you are, my friend. Are you going to tell Daisy about the role you played in that?”

“Why would I? Perhaps I’ll mention it if she wants to hear stories of war, but I’ll only keep the finest details.” Tyrion looked at him with reprobation. “What? What good could come out from her knowing the full story? That’s not as if many could tell her. And anyway, I was following orders, so that’s not my fault. My sword belongs to me, but I’m not choosing who it kills. You do.”

He raised his cup to Tyrion and drank. As Bronn talked about the fact that his wife would certainly be too much occupied with showing him the baby when he would see her again, Tyrion mused over what Sansa, and Joanna when she would be old enough, would think of him. Would Castle Black join Castamere, Tarbeck Hall and the Red Wedding among the words that made House Lannister both famous and infamous?

Tyrion was eager to see his wife and his daughter again, but at the same time, he eared Sansa’s reaction when she would discover the truth about what he did. He thought for a long time that Sansa would never love him, and he didn’t want to lose her now that he had what he always wanted. He didn’t feel like he could return to his previous life, made of wine, brothels and gambles, not after all the happiness he had with Sansa.

Podrick came in at this moment, carrying something heavy in his arms. “My lord, I brought you some more wine,” he explained, placing a full barrel inside the tent.

“Thank you, Pod.”

“Thank you, lad. Come and drink with us,” Bronn said.

“Well, I’m not sure if…”

“Come on, Pod. We might be good at drinking, but we cannot be sure if we’ll succeed to get through the entire barrel. You brought it, you deserve your share. Join us. Enjoy yourself,” Tyrion said. Seeing Podrick was still hesitating, he added, “I give you the order to join us.”

“As you wish, my lord.”

He sat on the furs covering the ground just like they did. It reminded Tyrion of the night before the Battle of the Green Fork. It seemed an eternity since that night, though it was only four years ago. That had been his first night with Shae. Podrick had been somewhere in the camp back then, but he wasn’t at Tyrion’s service yet. Now Shae was gone, far away. Tyrion realized he didn’t feel much when he thought of Shae. He didn’t miss her at all. It was Sansa he missed.

“A toast,” Tyrion declared, “to the nobodies who became somebodies. The Imp turned lord, the sellsword turned landed knight, and the discarded squire soon to be turned knight.”

“My lord?” Podrick looked at him in utter surprise.

“Don’t make this face, Pod. You saved my life, you served me very well, you fought very well, and
I heard you know how to fight very well now. When this mess is all over and the war is at an end, I’ll have you knighted.”

Podrick’s eyes were shining. He was agape. “Thank you, my lord. I don’t know what to say.”

Tyrion raised his cup. “Toast.”

“Toast,” Bronn repeated.

“Toast,” Podrick added after an hesitation.

“Remember that game we played, Bronn? At the Green Fork?” Tyrion asked his friend.

“The one that involved burning skin?”

“No, the one where we must guess the truth.”

“Ah, yeah. What a game. Your lady love at the time didn’t like it, though we got some confessions with that.”

The memory of his confession about Tysha came back. He hadn’t told the whole story back then. Jaime and Sansa were among the few to truly know what happened to his wife. He didn’t mention to Bronn and Shae that he raped her after his father’s men were done with her. Bad memories made for a bad evening. Tyrion drank, hoping the wine would help.

“What about we make another round?” he suggested against all common sense.

“Well, why not? Maybe we’ll learn some other dark secret about the Lord of Casterly Rock.”

“What dark secret?” Podrick asked.

“Nothing interesting, Pod,” Tyrion quickly said. “The game is simple. You guess something about a person. If you’re right about it, he drinks. If you’re wrong, you drink. Let me give you an example.”

Tyrion looked at Bronn.

“You would never give your father’s name to one of your sons.”

“You’ve got to be mad.” Bronn drank. “I would rather die.”

“See, Podrick. Easy and simple.” His squire had a dubious expression. “Next one. You would rather burn alive than be turned into a wight.”

“That’s an easy one,” Bronn said as he drank again.

“You have slept with three women, at the same time.”

“No.” Tyrion was surprised. Bronn made a movement with his head, telling him to drink. Frowning, staring at his friend, Tyrion drank. “Four, yes, but three, never.”

Bronn laughed as he saw Tyrion’s agape expression. He rolled his eyes and made his last guess.

“You love Daisy.”

Bronn looked at him with a strange expression. Tyrion wasn’t exactly sure what would be the answer. Perhaps he foolishly hoped for the better. After a long wait, Bronn emptied his cup.
“Are you serious?” he asked the knight.

“That’s how the game works. You cannot lie,” Bronn offered as an explanation.

Tyrion had to admit he was very surprised, especially since his friend never hesitated to go to a brothel when he had an occasion, even now that he was married. The knight of the Blackwater turned to his squire.

“So, lad. What about you? Want to try?” Podrick didn’t look sure at all. Bronn patted him on the back. “Come on, lad. Try on our little lord. Try to penetrate the enigma that he is.”

“Yes, go on, Pod. Give it a try,” Tyrion encouraged. He didn’t think his squire could say something that could place him in a delicate situation anyhow. Podrick wasn’t Shae.

“All right,” the squire finally said, still unsure. “You fought at the Blackwater.”

Bronn rolled his eyes. Tyrion snickered. “Pod, you must say something you don’t know about me, or something you’re not sure about.”

“Sorry, my lord.” He needed a long time before he came up with something else. “Your favourite wine grows on the lands of Brightwater Keep.”

Tyrion shook his head. “Drink, Podrick. It’s cultivated in Old Oak. I thought you would know my wines better, after pouring so much.”

“Sorry, my lord, but you drink so much wine and like so many that I wasn’t sure which one you like the most.”

“Well now, you’ll know it. You still have three guesses. Don’t forget to drink, before.”

“Yes, my lord.” Pod hurriedly emptied his cup. Bronn filled it again. “Um, you never wielded a sword, my lord?”

Tyrion raised his cup and drank. “Good job, Pod.”

“Not even a wooden sword?” Bronn asked. “I thought all the noblemen’s sons had one at six if not early.”

“Oh, indeed, but since I was a dwarf, the master-at-arms never thought it was useful for me to receive one, and neither did my father. So I was reduced to read and listen to the tales of Ser Duncan the Tall and Ser Arthur Dayne while my brother could imagine he was them when he sparred.”

Tyrion remembered something. “When my uncle Gerion left for the Free Cities, he promised me that I would be the first one to hold Brightroar when he came back. But he never did.” He forced himself out of his memories and back into the present. The last time he went into the past in a similar situation only brought back dark memories to his mind, and he doubted it would be different this time. “Go on, Pod, two left.”

“Are you going to name your first son Gerion, my lord?” he asked.

“That’s not how the game works, Podrick.”

“Um, I mean… You’re going to call him Gerion, my lord, won’t you? You’re going to do this?”

It was half a question and half a statement. Tyrion thought about it. Sansa had agreed that their first son should have a name from the Westerlands. He indeed thought about naming his first son after his
late uncle, the one who had been the kindest with him, when Sansa was pregnant, though the name was in competition with Jaime. After a moment of uncertainty, Tyrion decided to drink.

“A very good guess, Podrick. Now, to the last.”

“The Lady Sansa is the only woman you love, my lord.”

“Oh, come on, lad,” Bronn said. “Try to be more imaginative than that. It would take someone stupid, blind and deaf to not see it. He even stopped visiting brothels for her. It’s a miracle that he didn’t stop drinking as well.”

“Drink.”

Bronn and Pod slowly turned their heads to look at their lord, a puzzled expression on their faces. They didn’t seem certain that the word truly came from Tyrion. And yet, it did.

“Drink, Pod,” he repeated, “and we won’t talk about this.”

Pod needed some time to empty his cup for the second time. When he looked down, he looked surprised to see that he was actually holding something.

“I think we need some good rest. We’ll reach Winterfell tomorrow,” Tyrion said.

He stood up, hoping it would make it clear for the others that they were dismissed. His squire mumbled a my lord and left. Bronn lingered behind.

“Shae?” he asked.

He shouldn’t answer to that. That was a matter of private life, of personal feelings. He was the Lord of Casterly Rock. He didn’t have to justify himself to one of his knights. It didn’t concern Bronn. And yet, Tyrion replied.

“No. I barely thought of Shae for quite a while. She’s only a distant memory.” She had left his mind and his heart as quickly as she had come into it. Her image was already fading. Tyrion wasn’t sure he would remember how she looked like in a few years. Sansa occupied all the place the foreign beauty once used everywhere in his being.

“Oh.” Bronn slowly nodded. “Her?” He didn’t need to tell her name. Tyrion had his back turned on him and was pouring himself another cup of the wine that Podrick thought was his favourite. He distractedly nodded. “Still love her?”

Yes, he did. No matter how hard he could try, she always came back to his mind. He could never forget her, or what he did to her. He heard someone say one day that you could never get over your first love. He wasn’t sure whether it was because he could never get over her, or over what he did to her, but he didn’t think he could ever forget her.

“Well.” Bronn patted his shoulder. Tyrion turned to look at him. The sellsword looked about to say something, but nothing came out, except a few words. “Have a good night, my friend.”

He walked out, leaving Tyrion alone in his tent. After musing about everything that happened this evening, he decided that he should stop playing at this game he invented. Everything he did came back to bite him sooner or later.

Tyrion sighed and shook his head, trying to chase the feelings and the thoughts out of his mind. Sansa was the only woman who mattered now. She was alive, she was his wife according to all the
laws of gods and men, they had a child and they would certainly have others in the coming years. And she loved him, which was more than he could tell about the first woman he married. He went to bed with these thoughts in mind, trying to think about the future rather than the past.

In the morning, Tyrion noticed that Pod was more silent than usual when he brought him his breakfast. Pod usually talked little, but this time was worse than ever. He didn’t even care to say my lord, only nodding when Tyrion thanked him. Did he have a low opinion of him now that he knew his lord was in love with another woman than his wife? Tyrion wasn’t sure how Podrick could think poorly of him because of that. His squire never had a bad opinion of him when Tyrion was married with Sansa and kept Shae close to him at the same time. Did his squire’s view change with time?

As Pod helped him to saddle up, Tyrion had the impression that he was more careful than usual, if it could be possible. He found the young man’s actions quite strange.

“Is there something wrong today, Pod?” he directly asked him.

“No, my lord. Nothing, my lord,” he quickly replied.

“If you say so, Pod.”

His squire began to prepare his own horse, and Tyrion waited, sitting on the saddle that was designed for him a long time ago. He carried it with him wherever he went. If he used a normal one, he would suffer from serious pains in the back and in his legs. Podrick was adjusting his own saddle when he stopped all his movements.

“My lord, I’m sorry for last night.”

“Sorry about what, Pod?”

“Well… I… I mean, I’m sorry for what I asked you. I… I didn’t know about your first marriage. I didn’t know about Tysha.”

Tyrion looked intensively at his squire. “How do you know that? What do you know?”

“Bronn told me everything last night, after we left.”

His squire looked ashamed, but Tyrion barely noticed it. He was fuming against the former sellsword.

“I’m sorry, my lord. I didn’t know. I shouldn’t have asked.”

“Don’t feel sorry, Pod. As you said, you didn’t know.”

“How… How did she look like?”

Tyrion sighed. “To be honest, Pod, I can barely remember her. Anyway, she was only a lie, a whore that my brother hired for me.”

“Why do you still love her, then?”

“I don’t know, Pod. I guess we don’t choose who we love. My brother and my sister know something about it. Get yourself ready now, Podrick. I want to be at Winterfell before the day ends.”

He was more eager than ever to see Sansa and Joanna, and to leave behind any thought he could have about Tysha. Podrick resumed his preparations. He was getting much better now. He had fought well against the dead at the Wall, even though they opposed a weak resistance after the
explosion of wildfire. Podrick didn’t have the chance to truly prove his valor before, and Tyrion regretted he had to do it against an army of dead. Pod deserved better than this. He promised himself again to not forget to knight him after the war.

The storm hadn’t calmed down during the night. Tyrion had been too troubled with his thoughts to worry about it, but now he couldn’t ignore the wind and snow that constantly slapped his face. All men were tightly wrapped into what heavy cloaks they could find. Winter was definitely no time for campaign. You could easily lose more men to weather than to any actual fighting.

They slowly progressed through the snow, their vision limited to about a hundred feet ahead of them. Tyrion looked at his left and saw Bronn.

“How much time before we reach Winterfell?” he asked him.

“With this snow? I’d say between an hour and two, probably closer to two. We would already be there without it,” the knight answered.

Tyrion cursed. “I hate it when the Starks are right.” Bronn laughed. Tyrion shot him a glance. “I don’t remember giving you the permission to tell everyone about my failed marriage.”

Brron’s face turned more serious. “The lad deserved to know. He’s your squire. And he’ll never talk about it to anybody. You can be sure of that.”

“It seems I cannot be sure about you like I can be with him.”

“Relax, halfman. I told no one else.”

“I wish I could be sure. The word of a sellsword is not worth much,” Tyrion shot back.

Somehow, Bronn seemed wounded. Tyrion absurdly felt guilty about what he just said. “Right, a sellsword’s word is not worth much. But I know that if something like that happened to me, I wouldn’t want someone else to know.”

“What is that? Empathy coming from a sellsword?”

“Former sellsword. And yeah, you can call it empathy, or sympathy, depending on what you fancy.” Bronn looked at him with a sincerity Tyrion seldom witnessed. “Look, I only thought the lad deserved to know it. He served you well enough for years, and considering the kind of master you are, that’s a feat. I told him all the details, but he was the only one I ever told about it.”

“You really kept it a secret?”

“Aye.”

“Why?”

“Because we’re friends.” Somehow, Tyrion felt touched, in an awkward sort of way. “And because you would have made me lost much more than anything someone might have given me in return if I ever talked about it. Especially after your father died.” That was more like the friend he knew.

“You were an evil bastard with no conscience and no heart, you know Bronn,” Tyrion quipped.

“Sorry about that,” the knight of Blackwater replied with a smirk that wasn’t so innocent.

“That’s what I liked about you in the first place, but perhaps it’s no longer the case.”
“You don’t like it anymore?”

“No. Only, I’m no longer sure if you’re really this evil bastard with no conscience and no heart.”

A troubled silence followed.

“Perhaps that’s what happens when you get mar…”

Bronn never finished his sentence because an arrow got through his head. Before Tyrion could wonder what was going on, his horse reared up. He couldn’t hold the reins tight enough and heavily fell in the snow, face first. When he looked up, he saw the chaos around him. Many horses were out of control, and he saw more than one man with arrows thrusted into their body. A second volley came upon them, and Tyrion yelled in pain when he felt something dig deep into his right leg.

When he tried to look at his leg, his eyes fell upon the man he met in the Riverlands so long ago, who gave him his room for a golden dragon. The smirk was gone, and the arrow pierced his head from the left temple to the right cheek. His face and eyes seemed frozen in surprise.

“My lord, my lord.”

He heard someone shout his name. This someone made him roll on his back. Tyrion roared in pain immediately. “My lord.” He saw Podrick’s face looming over him, worried, his hands shaking. His hands moved to his chest and Tyrion felt another stab of intense pain when his squire tried to pull something. It was then that Tyrion realized that not only he received an arrow in the leg, but also in the chest. There was a third one in the arm. As he became conscious of them, he also became conscious of the pain their presence caused.

“My lord, hold on. We’ll bring you somewhere…”

Podrick stopped in the middle of his sentence. Despite the agonizing pain, Tyrion found the force to turn on himself and look in the same direction than his squire. He saw what caused him to stop speaking.

A large line of men on horses rode towards them, swords and spears drawn, ready for battle. One had a banner. It was blue, but Tyrion couldn’t make it in more details. Before he could understand it, the knights were upon them.

Everything became a bloody chaos. By chance, whoever attacked them was stopped by the line of defense that Tyrion’s men organized. He tried to stand up, to help his men. He couldn’t let them fight alone. They would be more eager to fight if their lord stood at their side. His thoughts of joining the fray were cut short when a new wave of pain filled his entire body as soon as he tried to put a knee on the ground. He miserably fell back.

Through the pain and the noise of the battle, he couldn’t make out much of what was going on around him. He even thought he saw a man in red armor stab another wearing the same colors. He got another glimpse of the blue banner, and saw something that looked like a bird on it.

Someone lifted him up by the arms. Tyrion screamed through the horrible pain again. He was placed on a horse. He felt a shock behind him, and the horse rushed forward. He struggled to grip the saddle and remain on the animal.

He managed to look behind him. “NO!”

The mere scream he released hurt like hell, but not as much as what he saw. A spear was thrust into his heart the moment Tyrion looked back, and he felt the spear was impaling him as well. Podrick
Payne fell on his knees, grabbing the lance that pierced his chest from behind. He looked up, and their eyes met for a brief moment before the most loyal lad he had ever known fell on the ground to never stand again.

Tyrion faintly noticed the fights taking place all around him as his mount kept riding, blue against red, but also red against red. What was going on? The fighting finally disappeared, and all he could see around him was snow again, like it had been all day. He felt the pain in his chest with more accuracy. He coughed repeatedly. When he tried to look at his injury, he slipped from his mount and fell head first into the snow for the second time within a few minutes.

He turned his head a little, to see anything that could be on his left. The right side of his face remained buried. He continued to cough. Carefully, he tried to touch the place where the arrow touched him in the chest. The shaft was broken, and he thought he buried the heads of every of the three arrows deeper into his flesh when he fell. He couldn’t look at his belly, but from the information his fingers provided, it didn’t seem to have touched the heart. However, he thought it might be close to a lung.

He tried to crawl, but the first attempt ended with another cry of pain. He tried a second time, then a third, then a fourth, barely managing to advance a few inches. He felt half of his face slowly freezing, and the pain kept growing. He stopped for a moment, and the pain didn’t subsidize in any way. If anything, it seemed worse than ever. It was a constant, lingering pain, to the opposite of the sudden stabs he had before, but he didn’t feel like he could endure another stab that caused a pain thrice the one he had right now, even if it helped to ease the lingering one for a few precious seconds.

_Sansa._ No, he couldn’t die. There was someone waiting for him. Someone he loved. He did horrible things for her. He couldn’t die now, not this way, not far away from her. He needed to get back to her, and to their daughter. _Joanna._ He didn’t have time to know his daughter. He didn’t have the time to know what it was to be a father. He had to go back to them. The thousands of people he killed at Castle Black, the reason why he fought the dead instead of running away to Casterly Rock, or sailing away to another continent or a deserted island, it was for them.

He tasted something strange in his mouth. Something thick. There had only been one other time when he felt this. It was at the Battle of Blackwater, when Ser Mandon Moore nearly cut his head in half. It was coming again.

No, he couldn’t die, not here. He made another attempt to crawl, and ended lying on his back instead, looking at the white sky. Blood was coming in quantity in his mouth. He struggled to breathe. He began to feel the pain receding. He knew what that meant. His vision began to darken. He couldn’t see the outline anymore. He had more and more difficulty to breathe. Tears ran down his cheeks as he struggled to say one word. A word that meant everything for him.

“S… Sansa.”

He couldn’t feel his hands, or his legs. He didn’t feel cold anymore, or warm for that matter. He felt less and less, and seconds swept away. The image of a beautiful woman with red hair and blue eyes who changed his life appeared before him, along with that of a pretty little baby who had his eyes and the hair of his family. Tears streamed on his face as he realized he would never see them again. He was close. So close. Only a few miles away. He only wanted to see them again. That was all he wanted.

His vision suddenly turned much darker. A large shadow covered him and he felt a great force tenderly gripping his body. Although he couldn’t see anything now, he felt himself being lifted in the air. He could hear and feel the wind all around. That was the last thing he felt. The wind all around
him, as he was carried away from the ground and up into the sky. His last thought was about a kiss. The first kiss he gave to the woman he loved. The kiss he gave her when he stood before the altar and said his vows. *I am hers, and she is mine. From this day until the end of my days.* That was the last thing that came to his mind.

Chapter End Notes

I can already see the bad comments coming into my direction, but before you smash me like many people did when I initially killed Margaery, I invite you to read the three next chapters I am uploading with this one. Don't judge me before you've read all of them.

Please review

Next chapter : Arya
As she sharpened her sword with a whetstone, Arya looked through the flap of her tent and saw that the storm that raged for weeks wasn’t about to calm down. Before the Fall happened, like everyone had come to call the destruction of a section of the Wall, she had lived in one of the buildings of Castle Black, but now that most of its construction was destroyed, she had to live in one of the tents in the camps nearby.

Jon positioned camps so they could make a semicircle around what once was Castle Black and repel the White Walkers if they managed to get through the first line of defense. The said first line was made of fortifications hastily made along the section of the Wall that fell last month, and of other fortifications and defensive positions installed over the Wall near the opening.

The first line was a rigid defense, focusing many resources on a single point and that couldn’t allow a breach. If the line was breached, the whole defense system would crumble. The second line was more flexible, made for the defenders to move from one point to another. The fortifications of this second line were not made to repel the attackers as much as to allow time for the men behind the lines to gather where the fight was the thickest. So far, the first line always held and they didn’t have to use the second line, but Jon did everything so that all men were ready whenever the situation would require. No less than ten thousand men were now positioned near Castle Black, an army similar in numbers to that of Stannis Baratheon when he came to the Wall, according to Jon. Her brother said that it was this army that destroyed Mance Rayder and his troops, but although he tried to sound optimistic, Arya could perceive he wasn’t sure this would be enough to repel an attack from the White Walkers.

The atmosphere in the camp was gloomy, to say the least. Men were depressed, some were desperate after so much time in campaign far from their home. The lack of activity caused by the storm that raged made things worse. Arya could suffer all the ordeals, from hunger to cold to thirst, but inactivity was killing her. Men didn’t want to train in this storm, and the officers didn’t want to force them to. The situation was particularly painful for men from the Vale, the Riverlands and the Westerlands. The Northerners fared little better, and even the wildlings said it was a real challenge to live in these conditions. Sylvie, who Arya befriended, said that there was no chance for her to shoot a rabbit, even if they dared to get out of their lairs. Without the possibility to hunt, she spent most of her days with Gared Tuttle, the black brother who brought her back with him from the North. Gared’s mood, that was already dark and gloomy most of the time, had gone even worse since Asher Forrester died. Sylvie did her best to console him, but this seemed to be a very hard task. Arya would rather hunt for her survival than console an inconsolable friend or brother as well.

She stopped to whet her sword and looked at the blade. There wasn’t a single scratch, a single trace of blood to be seen. With all the time they were stuck in their tents, she had everything she needed to perfect the art of making her sword shine like silver. She sheathed it, satisfied with her work and quite certain she couldn’t make her sword sharper than it actually was. Not that it would make much difference, since the sword she used couldn’t kill a wight, let alone a White Walker. Jon’s sword, Longclaw, could, and there were about five swords in their entire army that could destroy a White Walker because they were in Valyrian steel, but that was all. The men had to rely on fire to kill wights, and if a White Walker came to them, they could only try to hold him off the time that Jon
Arya sighed. She was bored to death. Men were also complaining that they might die of boredom if the White Walkers didn’t kill them first. They had attacked every day for the week they just went through, and the first line was able to stop them. The men had thought this would make things more exciting all of a sudden, but only those on the first line had to fight. The second line was only to be ready for everything, and for an entire week, men had to stay ready, in arms, in case the enemy would break through the first defenses. They didn’t, and men were bored and restless again at the fourth day. The moral of the army was very low. Arya had told Jon more than once, and he worried about this, but he said there was little he could do. Arya had argued there was certainly something they could do, but she had to admit that she didn’t have any solution in mind.

She stood up and walked out in the storm. She didn’t need to put anything. She was always fully clothed, with gloves, boots, mantles and everything. She also carried her weapons everywhere. Everyone had to be fully armed in every occasion. Men almost slept with their weapons on Jon’s order. Not all of them obeyed the order, though those who happened to be on the first line during the last week took the order more seriously. Arya left huge footprints in the snow as she made her way to Jon’s command tent. It was at the center of the second line of defense. She found her brother alone, sitting at his desk, wearing the furs Sansa prepared for him before he left Winterfell, after she accepted him as King in the North. He looked very much like their father with this. She struggled to believe that he was the son of Rhaegar Targaryen. Her brother was the living image of Lord Eddard Stark. Bran himself told her that Jon looked very much like their father at the same age.

Jon made a tired smile when she came in. She took some comfort in the fire nearby, but didn’t remove any of her clothes. It wouldn’t be wise, since they could be called somewhere at any moment. After the Fall, she knew that White Walkers were not to be taken lightly.

“How are you, Jon?” she asked.

“I’m fine.” He was lying, but she decided to not point it out. It was useless to tell him that she knew he was lying.

“Something new?”

“Not much. Preparing for the next assault of the Night King, I suppose.”

Arya caught his eye wandering to a certain point on his desk. There was a scroll at this place, and she noticed a half of the broken seal on it. A tail and large wings were visible. She suspected the other half would show three heads.

“You received a message from Daenerys Targaryen?”

Jon looked down, and sighed when he answered. “Aye. It came last night.”

“What does she say?”

“She’s coming. She’s bringing with her most of her forces. She says she intends to defeat the White Walkers and to protect the Seven Kingdoms from them.”

“And?” Arya knew her brother well. He wasn’t telling her everything.

“She also says that she expects me to bend the knee when we meet.”

“And you’re going to do it?”

“I don’t think you should.”

“I have no other choice, Arya. We don’t have the men to fight her. In her message, she specifies that the Westerlands and the Riverlands already surrendered, and this is only a matter of time before the Vale swears fealty to her as well. She has more men, she has dragons, and we have an army of dead men closing on us. We don’t have the means to fight her.”

“What if she’s like the Mad King?”

“I don’t know. I hope she’s not. So far, it seems she was merciful with the Tullys and with the Lannisters as well. And once I’ve taken the black, I will be no threat to her. Look, I know you disapprove,” he said before she could say anything, “but my decision is taken, and I won’t come back on it. It’s over. Westeros will be ruled by the dragons once again, and there’s nothing we can do about it. I must do like Torrhen Stark. He didn’t kneel before Aegon because he wanted to do it, or because he liked to do it. He did it because he had to.”

“What if you didn’t have to?” she asked.

He smiled sadly. “I have to. There’s no reason to imagine how things could be. We must make with our lot in life and acknowledge hard truths. A friend of mine told it to me one day.”

A squire walked in at this moment and laid a plate before Jon. Some stew and bread and ale, nothing more. Her brother ate the same thing than his men, to the opposite of many lords, including Sansa’s husband.

“Bring something for my sister as well,” he said.

“Yes, your Grace.”

He didn’t start to eat immediately. He waited. “Are you sure we need Daenerys to kill the Night King?” she asked.

“I think we do.”

“The last assaults were small. The Night King seems to remain quiet. What if we destroyed most of his armies?”

“I highly doubt it, Arya. I saw how many men he turned at Hardhome. And with all the others he turned, his army is certainly far over a hundred thousand men.”

“Then why doesn’t he attack us with his full strength now?”

“I don’t know.” Jon opened his hands to emphasize his meaning.

“What if the Night King is not such a serious threat and that we can defeat him ourselves, without help?”

“And what if we can’t?”

“What if we can?” Arya insisted.

Jon sighed. “Even then, we wouldn’t have enough men to fight Daenerys. The other kingdoms are giving up on us, Arya, and we lost too many men in the last war. Our wars against Joffrey, against Balon Greyjoy, against Ramsay, they weakened us. The Night’s Watch itself is on the verge of
disappearing. Even if I marched south with all our men right now, we couldn’t hope to defeat Daenerys, unless someone arrives with a miracle weapon that can kill dragons.”

Arya sighed. “Perhaps if Uncle Edmure and Lord Tyrion didn’t abandon us, we would still have a chance.”

“It’s difficult to keep fighting when the outcome of the battle is to be burned by dragonfire. Not all men are that courageous, Arya. They’re not ready to die for a cause that is bound to fail.”

“They proclaimed you their king,” she protested.

“Aye, but I won’t be their king for long now. All the noble houses are aware of my plans now. I wrote to every house in the North to tell them that I would take the black once the war was over. There’s nothing more to say.”

The squire came back with a plate of food similar to the one Jon had. They began to eat in silence. Arya didn’t need much time to end her own plate. She was used to eat quickly after years of wandering, and they had fewer time than ever to waste.

“I thought the Imp would support you against Daenerys. I began to like him, truth be told, and he wasn’t as boring or galling as those knights Sansa swooned after.”

“Certainly not.” Jon allowed a smile to crept on his face. Arya saw him smile less and less every day. “In truth, he suggested that I could marry Daenerys.”

Arya’s eyes grew out of the surprise. “Marry her!”

“Aye. Because among the Targaryens, it is deemed acceptable that an aunt marries her nephew.” Arya found it disgusting, and Jon as well. “Well, my aunt has already found herself a husband, anyway.”

Indeed, Trystane Martell, the son of Doran Martell, the Prince of Dorne and Lord of Sunspear, was betrothed to Daenerys Targaryen now. Despite the winter, news could travel fast, especially when they concerned a queen’s marriage.

“I think Tyrion thought he did for the best when he told his family to surrender. The Lannisters and the Gardeners were defeated by the Targaryens three hundred years ago, and they had a much larger army than Aegon. Tyrion’s choices can be questionable, but I think he’s really trying to do the right thing,” Jon said. “He wouldn’t have brought his army this far in the middle of winter if he didn’t, or risk so much to save you and free Winterfell from the Boltons. And he truly loves Sansa. I can see it in his eyes.”

Arya nodded. She wasn’t very good with feelings, but she knew her sister, and she had to admit that Sansa seemed to be sincerely in love with her husband just like he loved her. At least, he was funny. However, with the explosion of wildfire he caused, she didn’t know any longer what to think of him.

“Do you think he did the right thing with the wildfire, Jon?” she asked.

Jon sighed. “He thought that it was the lesser evil, between killing two thousand men or allowing the White Walkers to get past the Wall, but… Still, two thousand men, buried under the snow, burned alive.”

“His men tried to save those who were still alive afterwards,” she pointed out, but not with all the conviction in the world.
She saw the Imp after the explosion, ordering his men to search the debris and take out any man who was still alive. They managed to pull out more than two hundred who miraculously survived the blast. And there was also something she recalled, two days after the catastrophe. He was looking at the charred remains of Castle Black, all alone. He didn’t notice her presence, and she heard him whisper. *What have I done?*

Arya was ready to do everything necessary to protect her family and to avenge them, but she didn’t believe in killing innocents on the way. The men who died at Castle Black were all fighting with them. Many were Northerners. At the same time, she was there when the White Walkers overwhelmed them. She surprised an argument between Tyrion Lannister and a northern lord one day, who accused him of massively murdering his men. The Imp replied, *if it wasn’t for what I did, you would be dead, the people living on your lands would be dead, and your king would be dead.*

It was true. When Tyrion Lannister blew up Castle Black, he probably saved her and Jon. He said that he promised Sansa to keep an eye on her. Arya couldn’t really imagine someone of her family going so far to protect her or Jon, but the objective and the results were the same. Her father, her mother and Robb died trying to do the things honorably, by taking stupid decisions that led to their death. On that, she agreed with Sansa. Sometimes, you had to do what was necessary to reach your objectives. Still, seeing how many people died…

“I know that Tyrion is not his father,” Jon said. “He’s not Tywin Lannister. He protected Sansa in King’s Landing, he helped us to get rid of the Boltons, he keeps helping us against the White Walkers as we speak, even after Casterly Rock surrendered to Daenerys, but I can’t approve what he did. Though…”

“Aye?” Jon was holding back something.

“Arya, during the war, Robb sent two thousand men at the Green Fork to fight Lord Tywin’s army. He knew they were going to be butchered, but he did it all the same. He chose to sacrifice two thousand men, because he thought that would allow him to save you, to save Father, and to save Sansa. If what Robb did was right… Then, how can I say that Tyrion’s choice was a crime?”

Arya didn’t know what to answer to that. However, there was one thing she was certain of. “We’ll need to be ready to do anything necessary to defeat the dead, Jon. We both saw them. We know what they’re capable of.”

“Aye.” Her brother didn’t seem that convinced.

He wasn’t done eating to the opposite of her. He read scrolls and looked at maps while he picked a piece of bread, took a sip of ale or a spoon of stew from time to time. Arya was no strategist, but she could recognize the lines of the camps and the defenses. There was also a larger map on the table nearby, with chips indicating how many men they had in every castle in the North. Winterfell was the one with the fewer men, most having left with Lord Tyrion when he came to the Wall. One small piece with a lion was showing a small detachment approaching Winterfell by the Kingsroad. Arya wasn’t sure if it was a good thing to leave their home with so few defenders.

She told Jon a few stories about what was going on in the camp. He knew a few of them since he tried to spend time with his men, but he couldn’t spend as much time as she could. Soldiers had come to accept her after she fought side by side with them, and after they saw how dangerous she was with a sword. The wildlings had no trouble with her since women fought among them. A few Northerners accepted her quicker as well. The last were the southerners. She knew everything that happened in the camp, and so she informed Jon while trying to cheer him up a little by telling him the few funny things that happened. There weren’t many lately.
A man bearing the sigil of House Lefford entered in hurry. “Your Grace, another attack.”

Immediately, Jon grabbed what he needed and followed the soldier. Arya followed suit, without them asking her and without her asking their permission. They were at what was left of Castle Black in no time. The ruins weren’t much better than last month. Jon originally planned to have the fortress rebuilt, but the storm and the recent attacks from the wights put a stop to his project. Castle Black’s ruins now mostly served as a source of salvage materials, mostly wood to be burned and to warm up men day and night.

The defenses on the breach were much better than before. They even managed to build towers for archers, though the strong winds sometimes threatened to bring them down, if not to tear them apart. A large troop was ready to stop the wights if they managed to get through the barricade they erected to block the large entrance that horn created weeks ago. They had torches that were lit for every two men, and other sources of fire everywhere around. Three lines of archers were ready to rain fire on the enemy behind the barricade, and there were two more lines on the barricade itself, along with a line of swordsmen. They also freed and organized spaces in the ancients buildings so that archers could fire from the windows if the enemy was to get through the Wall. That didn’t consider the armada of catapults, trebuchets, scorpions, ballistas, onagers, and archers on the top of the Wall. Their defensive position couldn’t be stronger. Well, it could be if the Wall was still entirely standing up, but the horn ruined everything.

Jon went to the barricade. All men were ready, the swordsmen with their swords in hand, the archers with their bow out and an arrow ready to be shot at anytime, directed towards the north. However, none shot. There was no action, no sign of battle yet. Arya found it odd. She kept following Jon.

“Your Grace.” Lord Ryman Sarwyck commanded the defenses today. He bowed before Jon when he arrived.

“Lord Sarwyck. What’s going on? I was told there was an assault.”

“We thought so as well, your Grace, but I don’t know what this means. We have one of these creatures that can’t be destroyed. It’s standing right there, away from our range, and it keeps observing us.”

Jon looked at the north, and Arya peeked to see what was before them this time. Indeed, there was a sole White Walker. It stood there, unmoving, but Arya had the distinct certitude that he was watching them. Perhaps he was only gathering information. Arrows, even afire, couldn’t destroy a White Walker. Maybe boulders or heavier projectiles could have an effect on him if they were afire, but they never tried. Arya wasn’t sure if their siege engines on the top could reach this target.

“The Night King.” Jon’s voice sounded afraid. “I saw him at Hardhome. He raised his hands as we were floating back to the ships. And they all stood up at once. Tens of thousands of them. The biggest army in the world.”

Arya looked again at the thing Jon called the Night King. She couldn’t distinguish much about him from this distance. He looked like the other White Walkers from there. Why was he there, all alone? Perhaps his whole army was destroyed. Perhaps they managed to destroy all the wights. After all, with all the times they pushed them back and the many wights that burned when Tyrion Lannister set his trap, there may not be many men left to this Night King.

All of a sudden, he did something strange. It seemed as if he was… kneeling. Was she dreaming? Did the Night King come to surrender? Did he come to bend the knee? Something told her it wasn’t the case.
From over the crenellations, Arya caught glimpse of something on the ground. She saw the snow moving in a strange way. It wasn’t the wind that made it move like that. And then she almost lost her balance. Some of the men around her didn’t manage to stay on their feet. The next moment, a part of the barricade collapsed.

“Retreat! Leave the barricade now!” Jon shouted.

She felt him grabbing her hand. The people around them took some time to react to Jon’s directive. He and Arya had almost left the barricade when they began to move.

“Keep running!”

Jon released her hand and turned north. Arya stopped running. “What’s going on?”

Before Jon could reply, a thunderous crack was heard. Arya remembered a similar noise. Without thinking, she grabbed her brother’s arm like he did a few seconds ago and forced him to run toward the south. They ran as quickly as they could and only stopped when the crashing sound was gone. When they looked behind them, toward the north, they saw something they already saw not long ago.

Two pans of the Wall had fallen. The sides of the breach had collapsed, burying the barricade, its many defenses and many of its defenders under snow, ice and rock. Another wave made the ground shake, and Arya witnessed for the first time with her own eyes a part of the Wall crumbling. New pans fell, increasing the length of the breach. Arya witnessed a trebuchet falling. She noticed no less than a dozen men following it to their graves. A few buildings they managed to free from the Fall disappeared for the second time.

She felt two strong arms seizing her shoulders. Jon’s grey eyes looked into hers. “Arya, you must leave. Go back to Winterfell.”

Her eyes grew. “What?”

“You heard me. Go back to Winterfell.”

“I’m not leaving you!”

Another wave of shaking hit them. Jon stood up and shouted to his men. “Retreat! To the second line. Come!”

The last word was for her. They ran away from the Wall. They probably felt three or four more earthquakes on their way back to the many camps that surrounded Castle Black from the south. Once they were safe in one of the camps, if they could call it safe, Jon gave orders to his men. He ordered some to prepare to fight, others to pack everything necessary and to ride south, some to the Last Hearth, others to Karhold, Queenscrown, the Dreadfort, Winterfell and many other strongholds. Last, he turned to her.

“You have to go back to Winterfell.”

She refused. “I won’t. I’m staying here to fight with you.”

“You don’t understand, Arya. The Wall is down. It’s really down this time.” Arya saw from the corner of her eyes that the storm was getting stronger. She heard a voice shout Wights! “You’re faster than anyone I know. You must go to Winterfell and warn them. Find Tyrion and Sansa and Bran. Tell them what happened. Tell them to prepare for a siege. Tell them to do whatever is necessary to survive.” Jon looked behind him. Arya saw a large group of wights coming on them from over the
delimitations of the camp. There were many. Too many. And they didn’t have wildfire to save them this time.

“Go!”

Jon pushed her away and drew his sword, preparing himself for battle. Arya wanted to follow him, to fight the enemy, but she felt it wasn’t the right thing to do. The Hound knocked her out at the Twins, for she would have died if she went inside the castle. Jon told her to warn Sansa and Bran, their brother and their sister. She recalled her father telling her that they had to look after one another. She recalled him telling her that Sansa was her sister, and that she had to protect her. She also had to protect Bran. Jon could protect himself. She looked at him leading men into battle, sword in hand. Neither Bran or Sansa could do the same. She was the only one aside from Jon who could fight with a sword. If she died with Jon today, they would have no one to protect them.

She shot a last look at her brother. He would get out of it. He survived too many things, he even came back from the dead. He would live. She ran away to her horse, saddled it, and rode south as quickly as she could. She shot a glance behind her to watch the armies of four kingdoms fighting the dead. From this distance, she couldn’t see her brother anymore. She kept riding south until the camps and the Wall were no longer visible.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was intended to focus more on Arya's thoughts, but I finally opted for a chapter centered around the main event that happened in it.

Please review

Next chapter : Daenerys
Chapter Notes

Daenerys IX

Daenerys in the Neck. Let's see how she fares when compared to Tyrion and Sansa.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

DAENERYS IX

Viserys used to tell her that Targaryens couldn't get sick. As far as she could remember, Daenerys was never sick, so despite her brother's stupidity, she considered that he could be right. After all, she could resist to fire, so why not disease? However, she was sure of one thing, she wasn't immunized to hunger, or to cold. Hunger wasn't a problem for the time being. As the queen, Daenerys got the best food that was served in the army, and she had plenty of it. If it came to the time when they would need to ration, she didn't expect much problem since she was used to starve when she was a child. Cold, on the other hand, was something she wasn't used to. Climate in Essos was much warmer, winter was little felt there, and she was seven when the long summer began, so she could barely remember anything from the last winter.

She wouldn't forget the cold of a Westerosi winter anytime soon. She arrived in the Stormlands at the very beginning of winter, then moved south to Oldtown. The weather was very clement down there, but after that she moved south through the Crownlands, the Riverlands, and now the North. Snowflakes fell there and there. She experienced her first snowfall not long after they left Riverrun. In the Neck, the temperature was a little higher, but her guides told her that past Moat Cailin, the weather would get harsher and colder very quickly. The Dothrakis were strong warriors, and some had gone so far north in Essos through the centuries that their people knew about the existence of snow, but very few of those who followed her actually faced it in their life. The members of the Fiery Hand didn't fare better than the soldiers from the southern kingdoms. The few men that Edmure Tully provided before her departure and those from the Westerlands supported the weather better. She made the right choice by leaving the men of Dorne back in King’s Landing and a part of the Reach’s troops to secure the southern kingdoms.

The army she was leading along the Kingsroad through the swamps of the Neck was a patchwork of people coming from various places, as it was the very moment she set foot on the soil of Westeros. The greatest part of her army was made of Dothrakis, about forty thousand men ready to fight at her signal. The Reach was the second largest part, with thirty thousand men. The Crownlands gave her five thousand men, many whom fought at the Battle of King’s Landing. The Riverlands provided the same number, and Ser Daven Lannister had about two thousand men who survived the Ambush at the Crossroad against the Vale of Arryn. Finally, there was the Fiery Hand, about five hundred people. Eighty thousand men marching north to fight the greatest threat in their existence.

She could reach Winterfell within days if she wanted with Drogon, but she couldn’t bring her whole army with her. Her military advisors told her that Moat Cailin was impossible to take from the south. Ser Gerold Hightower, who took part to the siege led by the Lannisters months ago, described all the hardships and difficulties he faced while they besieged the castle, their failed assaults, and how they needed a double attack from both the north and the south to take the fortress. Of course, the Lannisters and their allies didn’t have dragons like Daenerys, but her dragons had to be present at Moat Cailin to take it, or else her army wouldn’t get past the Neck. They already had several
casualties due to the northern climate and the winter.

They slowly progressed along the road. The Dothrakis traveled lightly and quickly thanks to their limited luggage and their lifelong experience on horseback. They wore extra clothes due to the rough climate, something they weren’t used to. They were eager to fight, and growing tense. The battles they had so far weren’t enough to satisfy their lust for war and blood, especially with the way Daenerys restrained them. They had been able to plunder the Stormlands, though not as much as they would have liked. They also had a real fight with the Ironborn at Oldtown, but no true battle ever since. They were forbidden to plunder the Reach, the Crownlands after Cersei died, and the Riverlands as well for the most part. The faster they reached the army of the dead, the easier it would be to keep them calm. Daenerys didn’t want to see the Dothrakis turn on all the Westerosi because they felt they needed a battle.

“You seem concerned, your Grace,” Kinvara said. The High Priestess was riding with her.

“I am. Who wouldn’t be? We are riding to fight an army of dead people.”

“True. Only fools wouldn’t be afraid.”

“And yet some of your men are not afraid, Kinvara,” Daenerys observed.

“There are fools even among the servants of the Lord of Light,” she replied with a regretful voice. “We cannot expect someone to not be afraid when he is about to fight the servants of the Great Other, the enemy of our Lord. Fear is a normal thing in such cases.”

“I thought you said to your followers to never be afraid.”

“Telling or asking them to not be afraid is something. Ordering or expecting is different.” The High Priestess turned her head to face her. “I must warn you, your Grace. Your advisors are not pleased with my presence, or that of my fellow priests.”

“I know.”

That was another tension in her army that preoccupied her every day. A few brawls were started over religious beliefs. A few men from Westeros in her army began to worship the Lord of Light. The Seven, the Lord of Light and the Great Stallion were in competition. Leading such an army proved to be very difficult. She missed the discipline of the Unsullied and Grey Worm’s presence. The Unsullied didn’t quarrel, and usually they helped to solve the quarrels, but right now they were taking care of the Vale. She couldn’t rely on them in the North. She could only rely on herself.

“You had to expect such resistance by coming,” Daenerys said.

“I didn’t expect the people of this country to welcome us with open arms,” the priestess conceded. “The New Gods and the Old Gods are well established on this land. That doesn’t mean they are better or closer to the truth than the Lord of Light.”

“I already told you, High Priestess. I will not give favors to your faith over the others.”

“And I’m not asking for it. All that matters for now is to stop the enemy.”

Daenerys could agree on that. Once the war would be over, she could give more time to religious matters and allow the followers of the Lord of Light to do their rituals and ceremonies, just like the followers of the Seven, the Old Gods or the Drowned God, but her priority was to ensure her rule and to save her country from demons with blue eyes. The vision in the flames that Revan showed her still haunted her dreams, and the visions of the future that the Red Priests reported were everything
but reassuring. Melisandre didn’t stop saying that the dragons would be vital to this. Daenerys looked up to see Drogon and Rhaegal flying over the army. Viserion was nowhere to be seen. She didn’t see him in days now. She was beginning to worry. He was gone far longer than usual.

At nightfall, their column stopped. She noticed the days were growing shorter. Daenerys didn’t like the fact that their flanks were exposed. The commanders of the Riverlands, the Westerlands and Ser Gerold warned her about the threat the crannogmen could represent. So far, they met no resistance, though according to the Hightower knight, they would have to deal with a strong garrison at Moat Cailin. Two days and they would reach it.

Not long before her supper was brought to her, when they just settled for the night, Daenerys received the visit of Lord Dickon Tarly. Despite his young age, he was more or less the leading commander for the army of the Reach in her army.

“Your Grace.” He bowed and went straight to the point, like he always did. “Your Grace, with your permission, I must bring again to your attention the discomfort of many of my men and my officers about the rituals those red men and women make every night.”

It wasn’t the first time she had this conversation with one of the commanders of the many troops marching with her. “I understand your concerns, Lord Tarly. However, I cannot forbid these rituals.”

“Your Grace, most of my men worship the Seven. They are not comfortable at all with these foreign ways. And if you permit me, I am not either.”

“Your men are free to worship their own gods, Lord Dickon. Everyone in this army is free to worship the gods he wants.”

“Yes, but this is different. My men are used to the Old Gods, even to the Drowned God. They know these gods exist, they are used to it, but this Lord of Light is foreign to them.”

“The fact it is a foreign god changes nothing. Some people in my army choose to follow this god, I will not stop them from doing so. This is their choice, and I respect it. I hope the same from you and your men, unless you’re telling me they are sacrificing people, which is not the case. I made sure and clear that I wouldn’t tolerate that kind of sacrifices.”

The Lord of Horn Hill sighed. “Your Grace, we are on a difficult march to the North, in the thick of winter, against an enemy… Forgive me, but an enemy I still struggle to believe in. We accepted you as our queen, and we will go where you demand, but an army divided by origins and languages is already bad enough. We cannot add to it religious divisions. I do not ask your Grace to forbid the people from worshipping the Lord of Light, or this horse god that the Dothrakis say they revere. I only ask you to refrain these… fanatics. Stop them from conducting these ceremonies around huge fires they make every night.”

“Fanatics? That’s how you see them?”

“Please forgive me, your Grace, but half of what they say is nonsense or absurdity. They keep talking about a great war, about heroes with names I can hardly utter…”

“Lord Tarly, when I was in Essos, I don’t remember the Most Devout or the septons to have helped me, or the Old Gods or the Drowned God for that matter. The Red Priests did help me. They helped me fight slavery, while the High Septon was crowning kings with no right upon the Iron Throne, or forcing people to walk naked in the streets to atone for their sins. Did you see any septon fight Cersei, or Euron, or any enemy that threatened the Reach?”
“No, your Grace, but…”

“There were Red Priests who fought at Oldtown and at King’s Landing. They fought to make a better world, and so did their soldiers of the Fiery Hand. They risked their lives. No septon risked his life in this war. And before that, the Red Priests helped to fight the slavers in Meereen. I will not forbid them from conducting their rituals because you and your men don’t feel well because of a fire. Or else I may as well forbid you from following your own ceremonies because your prayers and your incenses bother them. If you are to follow your own gods, you’ll have to accept they are following their own.”

“I am only concerned with the unity of the army, your Grace,” Lord Tarly said.

“Your concerns are noted, and I will make sure that everyone can follow their faith freely, without any trouble from the others. This is valid for the people who follow the Seven as much as for those who follow the Lord of Light. Unity will not be achieved by imposing religious beliefs or by stopping people from practicing their faith. This is my decision.”

“As you wish, your Grace.” Lord Tarly obviously didn’t agree, but he didn’t insist further. He left with a bow and Daenerys was alone in her tent.

The place the Red Priests occupied as her advisors didn’t escape anyone’s notice, and everyone who was Westerosi disapproved the fact that Daenerys was listening to their advice as much as theirs, but Daenerys had found the advices of Kinvara and Revan very useful. Some military men even acknowledged Revan’s skills as a strategist and a tactician. They had much more reserves towards Kinvara.

Truth be told, Daenerys appreciated Kinvara’s advice very much. They shared the same will to make things better for the people. The High Priestess didn’t come from the nobility, from what Daenerys could judge, but that didn’t make her an incompetent. When she had to discuss about matters concerning the people, and not the war or the ruling of the Seven Kingdoms, Kinvara was the best to talk with. She had an obvious disdain for lords and knights, though she showed respect to some of them, including Trystane Martell.

For the time being, things seemed to go well in King’s Landing with the prince ruling the city and the Dornish troops to maintain the peace in its streets. Kinvara may claim that he did his best and that the attack from the masters of Volantis, Yunkai and Astapor was inevitable, Daenerys wasn’t very impressed by the Prince of Dorne so far. He wasn’t incompetent or stupid, she had to give him that. He did manage to conquer the Stormlands rather well, and his advice concerning Jon Snow was sound. At the same time, she wasn’t eager to marry him, no more than she had been to marry Hizdahr zo Loraq. She missed Daario’s presence at her side at night. She didn’t miss his presence in the day, but at night she remembered him, when she was alone in her bed. She wondered how Trystane would be when the time came to consummate their marriage. When she thought about it, she never asked anyone if he had any experience. Surely he had some, if what they said about the customs in Dorne were true.

Right after Daenerys ate her frugal supper, she received the visit of the Red Priestess whose company she enjoyed the less.

“My queen.” Melisandre of Asshai slightly bowed.

“What do you want?” Daenerys asked, a little abrupt.

“I only wonder what are your Grace’s plans concerning Jon Snow.”
“My decision did not change. Jon Snow must bend the knee.”

“What if he doesn’t?” The Red Priestess looked worried.

“Then he will die.”

Melisandre’s eyes were cast down. “I think your destiny and that of Jon Snow are more tied than you would like to admit, your Grace.”

“I have no proof that Jon Snow is my nephew. You claim that you felt in him a power similar to mine, but that is not enough. From what I’ve heard, Jon Snow could be the son of a servant.” Or he may not.

“I don’t think he is.”

“What you think is irrelevant. If Jon Snow lied about his origins, then he must die. I won’t have people running around, claiming that they are of my house.” However, if what people say was true, if she still had a nephew alive, even a bastard, then she hoped that Jon Snow would surrender. She lost her brother long ago. She didn’t want to kill the last member of her family who was still alive.

“Your Grace, the same vision is haunting me all the time. I see ice and fire meeting at Winterfell. Good against evil, life against death, the Night King against Azor Ahai. You will face your greatest challenge in the North, and you will need Jon Snow to face it. I can feel it.”

She wasn’t the only one to feel it. Daenerys had the distinct impression that her conquest of Westeros had been far too easy. She expected something to bite her back, like it did in the Bay of Dragons. Taking Astapor, Yunkai and Meereen had been too easy back then. Ruling these cities had been completely different and far more difficult. Daenerys expected the same here in Westeros. She was a stranger after all. She didn’t see herself as a stranger in this country. It was her homeland. However, many people didn’t think that way. She was a foreign queen, with a foreign army, a foreign religion and foreign advisors.

Still, Daenerys expected her real challenge to be against these White Walkers. She only saw one in the fire, but it was real enough for her to take this threat very seriously, especially with all the messages they received from the North. However, she wasn’t convinced that Jon Snow was essential to this fight.

“I will fight the White Walkers, Melisandre, and I do hope that Jon Snow will help me to fight them, but it will be up to him to decide whether or not bend the knee before his rightful queen. Now leave me. I need some rest.”

The Red Priestess reluctantly bowed and retreated. Daenerys remained alone with her thoughts. At some point, a few hours later, she heard people chanting. She knew who were doing this. The way through the Neck was long and wearisome, yet boring. Nothing happened, and it was always the same landscape of bogs and swarms, no matter where they looked. To change her ideas, Daenerys decided to see the ritual.

A huge fire was lit in the middle of the large camp. Their army was spread all along the Kingsroad and Kinvara, like every night, was conducting a ceremony where her followers prayed to the Lord of Light. From where she stood on a height, Daenerys estimated they were over a thousand, of all cultures. All the Red Priests who followed her army were by the side of their High Priestess. Geralt, the muscled priest with white hair and yellow cat-like eyes, who acted as Kinvara’s bodyguard and followed her everywhere, stood straight next to her. Daenerys knew he hid two swords under his robes. He was as silent as he always was. Daenerys often had the impression when they stood next
to each other that Kinvara was the voice of the Lord of Light, while Geralt was his muscles.

Among the other priests standing there, Melisandre stood in retreat. She stared at the fire, the flames reflecting on her red hair. Standing next to her, in retreat as well, Revan stood out from the others with his mask, but also the way he carried himself. His calm and cold attitude, with his two hands clasped behind his back, made everyone weary of him, even military men like Dickon Tarly. Two young priests, both wearing ragged robes that saw better days, one with long black curly hair, the second with brown hair falling on his eyes, were the less noticeable of the group. Daenerys would barely have realized they were here if she didn’t stop to look at every priest. Another, far older, not far from them, attracted more attention thanks to the long white beard that almost reached his waist. A group of three young priests also caught her attention. The one in the middle was a young man with dark hair and eyes that were just as dark. Daenerys even thought that his robes were of a red that was darker than the others. Two women who approximately had the same age stood by him. The one at his left was wearing robes in the same dark shade, and she had black raven hair. The one on his right wore a red which was way brighter than his, which accompanied well her short red hair. Another priest who was as built as Geralt, though older, stood behind him. Finally, two young women, one with short red hair and the other with blond hair that competed with Daenerys’s, completed the college of Red Priests.

Lord of Light, show us the way.

Cast your light upon us.

Protect us from the darkness.

Burn away our sins.

Yours are the stars that guide us.

Kinvara’s voice was carried through, melodious, with a hint of power, though only just enough. Daenerys felt Drogon and Rhaegal land behind her. This prayer made people feel safe, at peace. Daenerys had never truly believed in any god, but listening to Kinvara right now, she could understand why some people took comfort in them, if praying for them could bring such a peaceful state, even if it was only temporary. Kinvara’s words were so sweet that they managed to calm down Daenerys herself.

You are the light that shows us the way in the darkness.

You are the heat that keeps us warm in the cold.

You are the fire that keeps us alive among the dead.

You are the joy we receive among distress.

You are the beauty we see through the ugliness.

You are the passion that drives us when everything is lost.

You are the…

Kinvara stopped herself. Everything turned silent. Only the crackling of the wood devoured by fire could be heard. Daenerys saw nothing that could cause this interruption. She didn’t see it, but she felt it. A few of the Red Priests turned their gaze north, just like Kinvara did. Drogon and Viserion straightened behind her, and she felt his presence long before his screech tore the air.
Viserion, his cream scales reflecting the light of the fire, appeared out of nowhere. People rushed around to stay out of his way and he quietly landed right next to the great fire. The flames barely swayed under the flap of his wings so much it was slow. He came on the ground as if he was afraid that the ground might give way under his feet.

Daenerys was relieved that her third child was back. Viserion was always the kindest and the easiest to approach of her dragons. He had never been gone for so long before. She saw people marvelling at his sight, and she saw a few others standing away in fear. Marvel and fear, two feelings her dragons caused among the people who set eyes on them.

Viserion raised one of his claws and dropped something on the ground, near the fire. It was probably something he brought back from his hunt. Kinvara approached the leftovers Viserion brought and stopped close to it. Melisandre approached as well. She knelt on the ground and moved this thing. Daenerys realized at this moment that this was no ordinary thing. The Red Priestess just turned it over. She stood up immediately after she turned it.

Just as Daenerys proceeded to make her way down the height and through the crowd, she heard a scream shattering the silence. No, not another baby. It couldn’t happen again, not now. People could start blaming her dragons and wanting them dead again, and she didn’t want another father crying over his daughter’s dead body because of her.

She got to the clearing space where Viserion still stood nearby. She felt his gaze on her, but all her attention was on the body lying right before her. It was a small body, that of a child. Her heart was about to sink at the idea of what Viserion did, when she noticed the face. It wasn’t a child’s face. He had a scar running from his forehead to his jaw, and she quickly realized this was no injury made by a dragon.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter : Melisandre
Melisandre

Chapter Notes

My first Melisandre chapter. I already wrote a few chapters from Kinvara's POV, but unlike the High Priestess, Melisandre cannot be called an original character, and GRRM already did an amazing chapter about her in ADWD. I don't pretend to do as well, even less better than him, but I hope you'll like the first chapter told from a character that is much more complex than what we thought when we first met her in Season 2.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

MELISANDRE I

“You see there, Ser Daven? This is where the arrow that caused the death penetrated.” The maester pointed one of the wounds, the one on the chest. “The head went through the flesh directly, without anything to block it. No chainmail, no armor. It offered no resistance. It pierced the left lung and caused an internal hemorrhage, but more importantly, it filled his lungs and all his respiratory system with blood. He didn’t last more than a few minutes. There are two more arrows that struck him. One was in the left leg.” He indicated the said leg, where another wound was visible. “The third was in the right arm. Again, they went through the flesh without resistance. There was nothing to stop the arrowheads in these places either. From the traces of blood near the wounds, I would say the arrows hit their target approximately at the same time. The scar on the face was probably caused…”

“By the sword of a kingsguard, who is now dead. Thanks, maester, we know where this came from.”

Ser Daven Lannister’s voice was filled with both anger and grief. He was wearing full armor from head to toes, his sword in its scabbard. He couldn’t leave his eyes from the lifeless body laying on the table before him.

“There are a few traces of marks on the back, where the clothes were slightly ripped, probably left by claws. However, they are not deep enough and no trail of blood is visible around it. If there’s no blood, then whether the marks were made before this man died and his body had time to heal and conceal any deep wound, or the marks were left by the dragon after this man was dead, which explains the absence of blood around these areas. In all cases, the dragon can in no way be the cause of the death. I think the most likely explanation is that the victim was killed by arrows, and probably attacked when he didn’t expect it, which explains the lack of armor or any kind of protection. From my observations, it is my opinion that Lord Tyrion Lannister was killed a few days ago in an ambush, or while he was in the midst of a battle he didn’t expect to be a part of.”

The maester was done with his explanations. He had spent two hours examining the body, and he just gave the results to everyone who was present. The queen ordered him to make one after Ser Daven Lannister accused her of having his lord murdered. Daenerys Targaryen and her main advisors, the High Priestess Kinvara, Revan, Malcolm Branfield, Dickon Tarly, Garlan Tyrell, and two Dothraki commanders, Jakho and Morokho, were present. There was also Daven Lannister, cousin to the now deceased lord, and Gerold Hightower, who spent some time with the Lord of Casterly Rock when he traveled north. Finally, there was her, the woman they all called Melisandre, standing in retreat, staring at the lifeless body right in front of her.
The last time she saw him was at Winterfell. Of the three men who stood in the Great Hall, he was the only one to advise against sending her away. He certainly didn’t know it back then, but she knew what he told Jon Snow. In the end, she was exiled all the same. Melisandre wouldn’t have run away from the death if Jon Snow had sentenced her, but he decided to send her away because she saved his life. So she joined the other Red Priests who gathered alongside the Mother of Dragons. The High Priestess didn’t reveal the truth to the queen. Daenerys Targaryen wasn’t aware of how Shireen Baratheon died. From what Melisandre witnessed, she would be dead by now if the truth wasn’t kept a secret. The fact she was still alive gave her a chance to unite ice and fire against the dead, though for now Daenerys Targaryen saw Jon Snow more as a contender than an ally. She was hoping that someone could bring these two together, create an alliance that would destroy the dead, but now that hope was gone. He was laying there, dead.

Melisandre felt that the dwarf had an important role to play in the great war. He had gone in the North to help Jon Snow, made it possible to defeat the Boltons. Without him, her visions about the banners of House Bolton burning on the battlements of Winterfell would never have come true. And while she was travelling back south to meet the Breaker of Chains, she had become more certain than ever that the Imp would play a vital role. Wasn’t he the one who defeated Stannis at the Blackwater, who used fire to defeat the king she once served? She should have considered it a long time ago. And yet, it seemed she was wrong. Tyrion Lannister was dead. Whatever role she believed to foresee for this man, she had been wrong, again. Just like she was wrong for Stannis, wrong for Jon Snow… until the Lord brought him back from the dead.

“Ser Daven,” Malcolm Branfield began, “Lord Tyrion was not killed by the queen. She issued no order, and it is plain that her dragon wasn’t the one to kill him. He was killed by men.”


“I don’t know,” the Mother of Dragons replied in sincerity. “But you have my word that I will do everything I can to discover who did this?”

Daven Lannister looked at her, anger obvious on his face. “Why was your dragon carrying his body?”

“I don’t know.” She didn’t answer immediately. Daenerys Targaryen had the same resolve and will than Stannis, but like her nephew, she showed signs of hesitations and doubts when she had some, however hard she tried to hide them.

The knight stared at her accusingly. “My cousin and lord is dead. Your dragon brought his body to you. If I find out that you had a hand in his death…”

The Dothrakis brought their hand to their arakh at their belt, eager to fight. Dickon Tarly also tensed and put his hand on the pommel of his sword.

“I have nothing to see with Lord Tyrion’s death, Ser Daven,” the queen explained. “As I told you before, I was ready to let him rule the Westerlands for me and to keep Casterly Rock if he bent the knee. I did the same with every lord, lady and knight in the Seven Kingdoms. Why would I treat your cousin differently?”

“Perhaps for the role we played in your father’s downfall, and to satisfy Dorn’e’s desire for revenge. I am no fool, your Grace. Trystane Martell is your betrothed. We know how the Martells despise us.”

“Considering what your family did to the Princess Elia and her children, this is no surprise.”

“Tyrion had nothing to see with that. He was barely a lad when it happened.”
The Breaker of Chains stepped forward to stand right in front of Ser Daven, a few inches from him. The knight was smaller than him, but she didn’t allow herself to be intimidated by this.

“Let me be clear, Ser Daven. I had no love for your cousin. I didn’t know him. He sided with another king, but so did you and the Tullys, and I didn’t have you killed. I’m not saddened by his death, but it makes things much more complicated for me. From what I gather, the Lannisters have most of the troops in the North, and without a lord to command them, they will be disorganized and unable to face the army of the dead. And now that he’s dead, I cannot have his allegiance for all House Lannister.”

The queen and the knight kept staring at each other until Dickon Tarly broke the silence. “Since Tyrion Lannister is dead, who is leading House Lannister now?”

Ser Daven broke his stance and walked away to the other side of the tent, string at the hanging. “My cousin had a daughter not long ago. Her name is Joanna. By all the laws of the Seven Kingdoms, she is now the Lady of Casterly Rock.”

“The girl in question is only a baby, your Grace. She’s not even one-year-old,” the High Priestess informed them.

Melisandre had heard about this girl. She never saw her. Lord Tyrion’s wife, Jon Snow’s cousin, had given birth to a small girl at White Harbor not long before the Boltons were defeated. A girl. Tyrion Lannister had a daughter. Melisandre thought about it. She didn’t consider this fact.

“I don’t hold children responsible for their parents’ crimes. I will acknowledge her as Wardeness of the West if House Lannister bends the knee,” the queen declared. She looked at the Lannister knight. “Your family’s destiny lies in your hands, Ser Daven. What do you decide?”

Daven Lannister stared back at her. “This is not my decision to take.”

“Then whose decision is it?” There was an edge on Daenerys’s voice. “Your lord is dead, his daughter happens to be a baby. She cannot take the decision. She probably can’t speak yet. The decision to bend the knee to me depends on you.”

“It’s not my decision to take!” the knight snapped. “My lord trusted me to lead armies and for military advice, but I wasn’t the one to take decisions in his stead if he was to die. If you want a Lannister to tell you if he bends the knee or not for the whole family, then you didn’t pick the right one.”

“Very well,” the queen conceded rudely. “Tell me who in your family can bend the knee for you all.”

The knight sighed. “I don’t know.” He looked down at the lifeless body of his cousin and lord. “We shouldn’t be talking about it here. Not while his body is here.”

“We don’t have time for this, Ser Daven. You refuse to bend the knee, so be it, but you better give me the name of someone who can, if you don’t want House Lannister to burn to ashes. I won’t hesitate to destroy your home if need be. My ancestors burned Harrenhal, and I will feel no remorse doing the same to Casterly Rock if you show the same behavior than Harren the Black.”

The knight seemed to realize that she was serious, for after a few moments he sighed heavily and reluctantly gave her names. “If you want an oath of fealty, then ask Lady Genna or Lady Sansa. The first was Tyrion’s aunt and he let her in charge of Casterly Rock when he left. As for Sansa, she was his wife and she is the mother of his only child.”
“Genna Frey already surrendered Casterly Rock and the Westerlands. I suppose the Lady Sansa is at Winterfell.”

“Yes, with her daughter, unless your dragon burned the castle before picking up my lord’s body.”

“He didn’t.” She turned toward all the people who stood in the tent. “We will discover who killed Tyrion Lannister, and he or they will be punished accordingly. However, our priority for now remains to reach the North and to defeat the enemy we can’t ignore. We leave at first light in the morning, and if anyone at Moat Cailin resists, we will destroy the fortress. Nothing will stand in our way.”

The people who were present left one by one, but Ser Daven stayed behind. Melisandre was one of the last to leave, casting one last look at the man they called the Imp. Just when the queen was about to leave, Ser Daven asked her something.

“Your Grace, I would like to send my cousin’s body back to Casterly Rock. He deserves to be buried along with his ancestors.”

Daenerys didn’t answer immediately. “Bury your cousin, Ser Daven.” She left.

Melisandre went to the personal tent of the High Priestess. They needed to talk. However, the High Priestess was at the war council of Queen Daenerys, so Melisandre had to wait for the Volantenesi priestess. They were in the thick of the night. It had been three hours at most since the dragon happened with the body as they all prayed to the Lord. Melisandre felt it coming, just like Kinvara did. That was why she stopped her chants.

Melisandre wasn’t sure if she could lead people to the Lord of Light anymore. She had failed with Stannis, misinterpreted the signs that her Lord sent her, misled thousands of people. Perhaps the Lord had wanted it for her, but it didn’t change the fact she failed. How could she preach the faith in the Lord when she wasn’t sure of her faith herself, or when she led people on the wrong path. After so much time, she thought she had the answers, but she was wrong. She needed to discover the real role the Lord prepared for her before she could convert people again. So instead of leading ceremonies around the fire, she only watched them and prayed in silence, leaving the lead to the High Priestess. She did it very well anyway. She could inspire fervor among the followers just like Melisandre used to.

“I thought you would be here.” The High Priestess arrived. “It seems that you were wrong.” The word again was left unsaid, but Melisandre knew that Kinvara meant it.

“Maybe.” Melisandre stared in the flames that burned at the center of the tent. A priest always needed a fire nearby. “I thought I was wrong before as well, when Stannis died. I thought I was wrong about everything. I even lost faith in our Lord. But then, Jon Snow came back to life, and he made the things the Lord showed me become real.” She looked back at the High Priestess. “The Lord brought him back.”

Kinvara looked at her evenly. “No.”

“This might be our only chance,” Melisandre argued.

“No,” the High Priestess repeated. “He is dead. Our Lord tells us to fight for the living so they might find peace in death. Let the dead bury the dead, Melisandre.”

The High Priestess walked past her and poured herself some water. “I thought that Jon Snow was gone, but I was wrong. He wasn’t gone. Our Lord brought him back. What if he could do the same
thing with this man?"

“He could. To our Lord, everything is possible. But what’s telling you that he will bring him back? Why would he want to bring a dwarf back to life?”

“There’s only one way to find out. Let me try,” she begged.

“Out of the question.”

“We lose nothing by trying.”

“And what will we do next? Are we going to beg R’hllo to bring back from the dead every man, woman and child? Every time someone dies, we will ask him to resuscitate him. We will make the reasoning that if we don’t try, these people have no chance to live, but if we do then they will have a chance. That’s not something I will allow, Melisandre. I will not have people begging our Lord to bring back from the dead every people they want. Every man must die. Valar Morghulis. Bringing someone back will only delay the inevitable. The people will start to believe that death is possible to escape, but it is not. We must learn to live with the idea that life is not endless, and this is why we must accept that when somebody is dead, then it is for good.”

“He has a vital role to play in this war.”

“How can you know it?”

She was asking without saying if Melisandre had visions. “I just know it.”

The High Priestess looked into the flames. “I saw him die.” Melisandre didn’t say anything. She wasn’t expecting this. “I had a vision of this, in Meereen, but I didn’t understand its meaning. Now I do. This man was destined to die.”

Melisandre looked down. “That can’t be.”

“It is. That was his fate, and we must accept it.” She felt a hand on her shoulder. Kinvara approached without her noticing it. “That doesn’t mean you were wrong about everything, but we must let it go. We must accept our mistakes.”

The blue eyes of the High Priestess were kinder than she expected. Kinvara despised her when they met, but Melisandre noticed that her behaviour turned softer as time went on. She bowed her head to thank her, and she left. She may have another chance. Tyrion Lannister might not have one.

She reflected that the Neck was a place as particular as the Wall as she proceeded to walk back to her tent. She could feel magic in this place. These marshes didn’t appear naturally. This meant that her powers were stronger in this place, and so were those of all the other priests. It was in these places that they had the best odds to defeat the great enemy.

There was a time when there were no enemies. It was the time before people called her Melisandre. Melony, lot seven. The words haunted her, and especially at night. It was one thing she was very grateful to her Lord. The ability he gave her to not sleep for days, even for weeks, and to remain stronger than any man who had his share of rest allowed her to escape most of her nightmares. Still, the words kept haunting her, but less during the day than in the night.

She chose her path a long time ago, so long ago that no living man could have been there when she made her choice. No living man but one. It all began when he entered the brothel. She never saw him before. He hid his face and didn’t show it to anybody. Later, much later, he would show her his face, but at the time, he said nothing. He just unsheathed his flaming sword and declared all the
people here were free. The people who ran the house and their guards were easily defeated. The man was glowing with an energy she never felt in anyone. She already had a certain power at this time. She had the power to feel the power within the others, but she had never felt something like that in any man or woman she came across. This one was different. He was a Red Priest, and he gave her back her freedom.

She thought that he knew, or at least suspected that she was special, for she was among the three girls he brought to the Red Temple. He left her there and disappeared. She didn’t see him for years. First was her training, then her trials, then her ordination. She changed her name, cast aside everything that linked her to her past, and devoted her entire life to the Lord of Light. The only thing that remained from her past were the nightmares. Melony, lot seven.

She could have been High Priestess if she wanted, become the most respected Red Priestess of all time if she wanted, but she turned her full attention to magic and sorts instead. She learned to manipulate, to bring people to do what the Lord wanted, what she thought the Lord wanted. The years of her previous life were useful, as both men and women were vulnerable to her charms. She became feared. She could have been powerful, take revenge upon all those who wronged her. Melony, lot seven. But she didn’t. The Lord called her. He showed her what was coming. So instead, she waited. She isolated herself, hid her face from the rest of the world, buried herself in her studies and her visions. And she waited. She prepared herself for the time when she would need to come back into the world to save it. Only then would she be freed of her nightmares. Melony, lot seven.

When she saw the war that would devastate Westeros, right when the great winter began, she knew the time had come. The Lord didn’t tell her everything or in the most clear way, so she had to discover what he wanted her to do. When she learned that Selyse Baratheon had embraced the faith in her Lord, she thought of it as a sign. Her husband Stannis Baratheon was of the blood of the dragon, born amidst smoke and salt. She thought it was him, but she was wrong. She couldn’t be sure of anything now. Was Jon Snow the Prince that was promised, or was it Daenerys Targaryen? She didn’t know. What she knew was that they had a great role to play in this war. And so she thought about the man that fire made flesh brought to her, dead.

Back to her tent, she found the fire lit like it usually was. She stared at it for a very long time, wishing for answers, asking her Lord to provide some. Time didn’t matter anymore as she focused to discern the truth in the flames. She saw several shapes that were difficult to distinguish. She focused on the matter that troubled her the most: the Great Other. She saw him, at the head of his great army. She didn’t look at him for long. She knew he could see her. She tried to find something related to him.

She saw bodies, a lot of bodies everywhere, some moving, some not. She also saw the living, working, preparing, crying, despairing, fighting. She saw a great storm, and then the great battle. She could never see the outcome, only that there would be one. She saw ice, and blue eyes, and dead men walking, slaughtering the living, destroying the realms of men. And then she saw fire meeting ice, fighting it. Fire and ice were everywhere, on the ground, in the air and even underground. Swords of ice clashed against swords of fire. Fire made flesh met flesh turned to ice.

She asked the Lord where Lightbringer was. He answered her. The answer wasn’t at all what she expected. She wasn’t shown a sword, but something else that brought light. And she saw who were to yield it. She saw them side by side, and she saw the one who could make sure the other two would never turn on each other. Lightbringer had to be united and complete so it could defeat the Great Other. Every part was necessary to make it complete, but there was one part that was needed even more since only her could make sure it would be united.

She saw the battle in the snow. She saw the battle in the midst of a storm. She saw it with more clarity than ever before, and the battlefield was covered by three large shadows. She saw where the
shadows came from.

The fire came back to its normal shape. The vision was over, but it was more than enough. She knew exactly what she had to do.

A few minutes later, she was at the tent where the body was kept. Dawn was beginning to appear. She reached the entrance of the tent and was surprised to see that there were no guards. Even more surprising were the chants she heard coming from the inside.

She entered and found the High Priestess. Her hands were placed on the lifeless form. She was reciting a long prayer in High Valyrian.

*R'hllor, Lord of Light, Heart of Fire, God of Flame and Shadow*

*The only true god, who was, who is, and who will ever be*

*Source of life, origin of joy, goodness itself*

*I am your servant, my life is yours, as is all life*

*This man’s journey is not over yet*

*Revive his mind and body*

*So he may be ready*

*When the time comes for him*

*Make his heart who is silent pound again*

*Make his lungs who are empty be filled with air*

*Make his blood who is congealed run again*

*Make his brain who is still vibrate again.*

*R'hllor, Lord of Light, Heart of Fire, God of Flame and Shadow*

*The only true god, who was, who is, and who will ever be*

*Source of life, origin of joy, goodness itself*

*I am your servant, my life is yours, as is all life*

There was a little hesitation before she said the last sentence of the prayer. *Grant this man his life again, if that is your wish, for all your wishes are always right and just.* The High Priestess remained in this position, her hands on the chest of the body, her eyes closed, breathing steadily. She breathed
in and breathed out regularly, deeply. For minutes, she was like that, saying nothing, doing nothing. Melisandre knew there were many possible ways to bring back someone from the dead. Thoros of Myr did it with simple words. She did it with a ritual that required almost an hour and involved burning hair and washing the body of the dead. Kinvara did it with long and complex prayers, asking to the Lord in mind and spirit.

She removed her hands and crossed her fingers, keeping her eyes on the man lying dead before her. “I suspected you would come. The Lord doesn’t grant his visions to only one person,” the High Priestess said, keeping her eyes on the body.

“What did you see?”

“It doesn’t matter. It seems I was wrong, just like you were.” She bent over his face and granted him the last kiss. A flicker of flame was seen escaping her mouth. The last kiss, also called the kiss of life, was usually kept for followers of the Lord of Light when they died, though Melisandre recalled seeing Kinvara give it to non-believers before she became High Priestess, back in Volantis. She walked to the exit and stopped next to Melisandre.

“I’m sorry, but he’s gone. I hope you were wrong and that his role wasn’t that essential.”

There was a real note of sadness in her voice. She began to walk out for good as the sun cast its first light when Melisandre caught her arm and stopped her in her track. She felt it. She looked, expecting the impossible to happen under her eyes.

And it happened.

Chapter End Notes

So, I hope that some are guessing why I uploaded four chapters at the same time, and why I ended with this chapter.

Please review

Next chapter : I let you guess :)

Since I uploaded four chapters in a row, the next chapter will be uploaded in two weeks. See you soon.
Chapter Notes

To confirm what many people already guessed, Tyrion is back, alive and well. To quote a certain actress, Tyrion was "deader than dead", but not anymore.

So, we have a lot in store for our favourite dwarf here, he's got a very long chapter, and a lot happened while he was dead. He sees faces he hadn't seen for a while, meets others for the first time, and he already has difficult choices to make. Not to mention what happens at the end of the chapter. A huge chapter for a huge return for Tyrion Lannister.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

TYRION XXXI

Air rushed within his lungs. His body reacted instantly by taking in as much as he could, and it released the air as quickly as it came in, then took some more. He opened his eyes instinctively. He distinguished nothing in particular.

He continued to take air in and to blow it off as if he was running for his life. He raised his right hand to his face and looked at it. He turned it both side to see if anything was amiss, but it looked perfectly normal. He noticed the hole in his arm. That was where the arrow struck. It was gone, but the wound was clearly visible. He straightened up and looked at his chest. He saw the wound he felt before he died, right where his lungs were.

Still, his lungs were functioning normally. He breathed as if he had never died. He shot a glance at his left leg, where he saw another place where an arrow pierced. He remembered dying, his mouth filled with blood, his vision darkening, his body being lifted in the air. He was dead. And yet, he wasn’t, not anymore. He looked ahead of him. A woman who had to be in the late thirties, with red hair, a heart-shaped face and red robes was standing in front of him, not far from a line by which some light came in. When she approached him, he recognized her.

“What are you doing here?”

The Red Priestess Melisandre, who Jon Snow exiled from the North, was staring at him, her mouth wide open, her eyes showing shock. She slightly shook her head. “I thought… I thought it might be possible, but… I didn’t really believe it.”

Tyrion looked back at his chest, where the arrow went through. “Why am I here? I… I died.”

“The Lord of Light brought you back.” A melodious voice came from behind him. He slowly turned to face its owner, and caught sight of another woman. She was wearing similar robes to Melisandre, with a similar diamond-shaped necklace, but instead of the intense red, her hair was black as raven’s wings and her eyes a deep green. The eyes were scrutinizing him.

Tyrion blinked, trying to have a better view of this woman. She looked younger than Melisandre, but displayed an assurance that the other woman didn’t have. While Melisandre looked at Tyrion in shock, this one looked at him with interest. He thought he perceived a trickle of wonder in her eyes as well.
“Who are you?” he asked.

“My name is Kinvara. I am the High Priestess of the Red Temple of Volantis, and the First Servant of the Lord of Light.”

Something triggered in Tyrion’s mind, something he read a long time ago. “The Red Temple of Volantis. Positioned near the Black Wall on the eastern side of the Rhoyn. Built upon a great plaza. Date of construction unknown to maesters. Similar height to Aegon’s High Hill. Three times the size of the Great Sept of Baelor. Protected by the Fiery Hand, made of one thousand slave soldiers, never more, never less.”

Information he found in several books, like Remnants of the Dragonlords, came back in a rush to his mind and it was all he could do but recite them.

“You know a lot for someone who never visited the Free Cities,” the woman who called herself Kinvara said.

“That’s what happens when you spend most of your life reading,” Tyrion replied. A small smile quickly appeared on the priestess mouth, but disappeared immediately. She took a chair and sat next to him.

“You must be confused. I understand that. Very few people make it from the other side. Do you remember anything?”

Memories cascaded through his mind. He placed a hand on his forehead at the headache that took him. He saw men dying all around him. Bronn with an arrow through the face. Podrick impaled on a spear. Horses and their riders everywhere, spears and swords drawn. He remembered a sigil. A sigil he saw on a banner. The banner that their attackers bore.

“The Knights of the Vale.” He whispered. The blue falcon flying over a white moon, against a blue field, took shape before him. The men who attacked them bore the sigil of House Arryn. “We were on our way to Winterfell. We were attacked. We were taken by surprise. Everyone died. The Knights of the Vale… They were the ones behind that.”

He looked up to meet the green eyes of the High Priestess. She was listening closely. Tyrion looked down again, closing his eyes, trying to remember anything else. “There were…” He remembered red cloaks turning against other red cloaks. “Some of my men fought with them, I think. I’m not sure. I managed to escape. Pod put me on a horse. He died to save me.” He saw the spear piercing his squire’s heart again. “I was injured. I didn’t make it far. I tried to get up. I couldn’t.” He remembered the taste of blood in his mouth, his struggle to breathe. “I… I died.”

He straightened up again, but didn’t look at anyone in particular. “It’s the Knight of the Vale. They betrayed us.”

Some of the Vale lords had deserted from the Wall before Tyrion left Castle Black. They were heading south. They couldn’t stop them from leaving. Not all of them left. Many, under the command of Lord Royce, were still at the Wall. If they were to betray them as well, then Jon Snow was in danger. But it wasn’t at the Wall that these men attacked him. They attacked while Tyrion and his men were approaching Winterfell, and some of his own men helped them.

“Sansa.” He tried to stand up from his bed, and ended up lying face down on the floor. His legs were weak. He couldn’t stand on them.

“You shouldn’t move too much. You will probably feel weak for a while,” Melisandre warned him,
but he gave no mind to her advice.

“You don’t understand!” he shouted as he sat on the ground. “The Knights of the Vale betrayed me, and some of my men were probably with them. We were closing on Winterfell when we were attacked. My wife and my daughter are there. They’re in danger.”

Melisandre somehow looked alarmed. She looked somewhere over him, probably at this High Priestess.

“Stay with him. The queen must be informed of all this.”

The woman left, her dark wavy hair the only things decipherable apart from her robes when you looked at her back, leaving Tyrion alone with the woman who burned the daughter of her king.

“You should put something on yourself. You will get cold.”

Tyrion realized at this moment that he wore nothing. He saw a thin piece of cloth on the floor. He thought it covered his private parts when he lied on the bed, but nothing more. It had fallen away when he tried to stand up. Melisandre brought him a blanket, probably from the bed he just left, and he wrapped himself in it. It was cold, indeed. He didn’t care about it, but now he realized that he was shivering like he never did. He felt colder than he ever did. Melisandre knelt before him. He was still on the ground.

“You’ve been on the other side. What have you seen?” she asked after some time.

What was she talking about? “I have to warn Sansa, and Jon Snow as well. Is there a rookery around here? Is there a raven I can send somewhere? Where are we first?”

Melisandre didn’t answer immediately. “Where are we?” he pressed.

“We are on the Kingsroad, in a place you call the Neck.”

“The Neck? How… How did I arrive here? Last time I died, if my memories are correct, I was miles away in the North.”

“One of the queen’s dragons brought you here.”

He blinked once, then twice. “A dragon brought me here?” He detached the words very carefully. Melisandre of Asshai nodded. Wait, didn’t the other priestess talk about a queen?

Right when he reflected about it, the flap of the tent opened. The woman who said she was a High Priestess was back with another woman, younger, with dark clothes displaying a red dragon with three heads on the arms and the legs. She had silvery blond hair and purple eyes, and she was looking at him as if she saw a ghost. As far as Tyrion could tell, unless Jon Snow got married while he was dead, there were only two queens right now in Westeros, and she could only be one of them.

“Judging from your hair and your eyes, and unless there are other people of this family alive that I’m not aware of, I suppose you are Daenerys Targaryen. Please forgive me if I don’t stand up. I didn’t plan to die and to come back afterwards.”

She just kept looking at him in astonishment, showing no reaction to his words despite his usual sharp tongue. Her eyes trailed all over him. “You were dead. I saw it.” That was all she said.

“It seems someone decided to play the necromancer with me,” he mocked.
She looked at Melisandre who had stood up as soon as she entered. “What happened? Did you do this?” A hint of anger was perceptible on the Targaryen’s face.

“No. I did.” It was the other priestess, the High Priestess, who answered. Daenerys Targaryen, Tyrion was quite sure it was her even though she didn’t confirm it, looked at the other woman.

“Why did you do this?”

“I only asked the Lord to bring him back if it was his wish, and here we are.” She indicated Tyrion with her arm.

“Wait, you’re the one who brought me back?” Tyrion asked the priestess with green eyes. She looked back at him with indifference.

“We’ll have to talk about it later.” Daenerys Targaryen had an edge in her voice. Tyrion supposed she wasn’t happy to see an enemy brought back to life. She turned to look at him, her eyes bright as steel. Somehow, it remembered him Cersei, though it didn’t cause a chill to run on his back like his sister was able to do. “Your return is… unexpected, to say the least, Tyrion Lannister.” She said the last word in disgust.

“Sorry to disappoint you, though I’m not the first one to who it happens. Your nephew went through the same process thanks to this woman.” Tyrion pointed Melisandre with his chin. “And there’s a certain Thoros of Myr who claims he brought back a knight from the dead half a dozen times.”

Her face turned even harder. She stepped forward and towered him. Tyrion had seen taller people in his life, but she was definitely taller than him. Most people were. “Is Jon Snow truly my nephew?”

He saw no reason to hide her the truth. He had the impression he shouldn’t play with fire with this young woman, especially considering the family she came from. “He is. He is the child that your brother Rhaegar had with Lyanna Stark during the war. A bastard son, but a son nonetheless.”

“And how can you be sure of that?” She defied him to prove that what he said was true.

“Because we have an eye-witnes, a man who was at the Tower of Joy when Lyanna Stark died and who saw her baby, and who saw Eddard Stark bring him back to Winterfell where he raised him along his own children.”

She remained silent for a moment. Tyrion could see she had an internal debate. “How can I know that you’re telling me the truth? You are a Lannister. Your family slaughtered mine.”

Tyrion rolled his eyes. He knew this was going to happen. “Yes, and you slaughtered mine. You already killed my brother and my sister, and you’re probably planning to kill more of us. Am I on your list? If that’s the case, I’d be happy to know it now. If I am to die a second time, I would rather know it in advance.”

He was definitely playing with fire, but he just came back from the dead, and there was a Targaryen girl who asked him all sorts of question when he should be doing everything to save Sansa and Joanna.

“Your brother is not dead. He’s in the black cells of the Red Keep right now. I didn’t kill him yet.”

Tyrion was speechless for some time. He thought there was a possibility that Jaime could have died, though he hoped that his brother escaped and even believed it. After all, he managed to escape the Starks. A Targaryen was certainly possible to escape for his big brother.
Jaime is alive?” he asked.

“For now.” Jaime was alive. He was truly alive. Relief flooded Tyrion. For now. Jaime was alive for now.

“What are you going to do with him?” He already suspected what the answer would be, but he needed to know all the same.

“He will stand trial for his many crimes, including the murder of my father, and the murder of his sister.”

That shocked Tyrion a lot. “Jaime… killed… Cersei?” he slowly asked.

“He did. Does that surprise you?”

“Yes.”

He thought that it might have come to the point when he or Cersei would kill the other, but he never thought that Jaime could do this. Jaime and Cersei were in love since their birth, and Cersei always managed to control their brother with her cunt. How could Jaime have come to kill her? Tyrion wondered how his brother felt right now. He killed the woman he loved, after all. He remembered how broken he felt after he raped Tysha, and he still felt guilty about it, despite knowing that she was a whore.

“As for you, I wasn’t planning to kill you,” the Targaryen woman continued. “I was going to offer you the same choice I gave to every lord in Westeros. Bend the knee and swear fealty to me, or die.”

So, the time had come. He didn’t expect to do it in such circumstances, but he knew that sooner or later, he would have to stand before Daenerys Targaryen and to make that choice. He had only hoped that she wouldn’t be like her father. So far, he couldn’t tell which type of queen she was from their short discussion.

“What will happen to Jaime?”

“Just as I told you. He will be judged for his crimes.”

She said nothing more. Maybe she offered him a little hope that his brother could be spared, but he knew better than that. He shakily stood up, trying to enhance his position face. “I will bend the knee to you, on three conditions.”

She didn’t reply for a moment, but finally she said, “Say them.”

“You hold my brother captive. He killed your father, I do not deny it, but the rest of my family has nothing to do with it. My father who betrayed your father is dead, and so is my uncle Kevan who was his main advisor at the time. Gregor Clegane who killed your brother’s children and his wife is dead as well. My sister who sat on the Iron Throne is dead and so are her husband and her children. Everyone else of House Lannister has nothing to see with the horrors committed against people of your blood. Many were only children during the rebellion, or were not yet into the world. I ask that no charges be held against them and that no harm comes to them.”

She hesitated. “Done. What else?”

“Men from the Vale of Arryn tried to kill me.” He told her everything that happened near Winterfell, and his suspicions of the Vale’s treason. “I want the men responsible to be executed, and if any of them harmed my wife or my daughter, I want them dead as well.”
“Agreed.” She hesitated for a shorter time. “What is your third condition?”

“My brother. I want a fair trial for him. I want him to have the right speak and to expose his own version of the story. I want the right for him to call witnesses and to question the witnesses you’ll bring against him. I want this trial to be public and open for everyone. And I want three judges. I want the three to agree if he is to be sentenced to death.”

A long silence lingered after he was done. “That’s unacceptable.”

“You can be one of the judges and choose the others. All I ask is for him to have a chance to defend himself. And if a judge disagrees on the death sentence, you’ll only have to send him to the Wall.” *I’m quite sure he will be considered guilty well before the trial.* Even if he wasn’t, Jaime did kill the Mad King and everyone knew it. What many people ignored were the reasons why Jaime killed Aerys Targaryen.

“I refuse. I will allow this trial to be public, and Ser Jaime will be allowed to speak, but if the judge or the judges decide he is guilty and that he deserves death, he will be executed. That is not negotiable.”

Tyrion was fuming. She specified *judge or judges*, which meant she may be the only person to judge Jaime. His brother had no chance. Still, she said the trial would be public and that Jaime could speak. He asked for a lot on purpose, hoping he could get something for his brother, a chance to escape somehow, but this queen wasn’t easy to play like Cersei.

“All right,” he said under his breath. He knelt and swore an oath to Daenerys Targaryen the First of Her Name. He did his duty to save House Lannister, but probably sacrificed his brother at the same time.

“Good,” she said once he was done with his oath. He went back to sit on his bed, his legs still weak. “I expect your men to join mine when we arrive in the North.”

“Wait, your Grace.” Tyrion had to ask her one question before she left. “What will happen to Jon Snow?”

“I will offer him the same choice that I gave you. However, if I find out that he lied about his Targaryen origins, he will be executed.”

Jon Snow didn’t lie, but Tyrion supposed it was useless to tell her. Her eyes were throwing daggers. Howland Reed better be alive to explain her everything. Unless of course she decided to get rid of Jon Snow because he could be a threat to her. A bastard son of the previous heir to the Iron Throne remained a threat, no matter what was said.

“Jon Snow will not pose you any problem, your Grace. Anyway, you must know that he is planning to take the black again as soon as this war is over.”

Daenerys Targaryen frowned. “What do you mean?”

“He sent you a raven that explained all of it, and was asking for your help against the White Walkers at the same time. It’s been some time now that it was sent.” When he looked at her, he saw a real confusion in her eyes. “You didn’t know it?”

“I received no such raven.”

*Damn it!* “Maybe it was lost in the snows and the storms.”
“Maybe.” She took her queen’s expression again. “I hope what you say is true, and I hope to hear it from Jon Snow when we meet.”

“I’m sure he’ll be happy to meet you,” Tyrion said as she left. He didn’t know if she heard him, but the two other women in the tent definitely heard.

“You like to play with fire,” the youngest of the two said.

“What do you want? I have a sharp tongue,” he replied.

She left, and Tyrion thought he saw her lips twisting before she disappeared. Tyrion turned to Melisandre. “Since I’ve been dead for a while, I’d like to know everything I need to know, from what happened in the south while I was alive that I’m not aware of to what happened in the North while I was dead.”

Melisandre filled him about the war in the south. The Vale of Arryn and the North were the only kingdoms who didn’t bend the knee before Daenerys Targaryen. She believed the White Walkers were a real threat and prepared weapons made of dragonglass for the coming battles. Tyrion didn’t know if Melisandre was a reliable source, but if this dragon queen considered the dead like a serious threat and was ready to go north to fight and stop them, then it was probably for the better. They wouldn’t be able to hold them off by themselves, and Tyrion had to admit he would rather die burning alive than cold and be revived as a wight. He would need to verify if there was no part of him that took a blue coloration.

The army he was in the midst of was enormous, about eighty thousand men. Half of them were Dothrakis. Tyrion had never seen them fighting, though the tales about them had reached him. He would be more enthusiastic about seeing them fight if he could be sure they wouldn’t kill him as a weakling, or turn their weapons against his countrymen. Savage warriors who were not afraid of death might be very useful against dead men, but Tyrion didn’t want to see them burning the whole country either. He also wondered how these horsemen would fare in the northern climate.

Before long, they broke camp. Tyrion had to follow far behind, mostly hidden from the rest of the army and kept away under the guard of knights from the Reach. Still, he received the visit of a few people while on the march. Daven was very happy to see him back, though he was struggling to believe it. Tyrion was glad to see his cousin. They were never close, but Daven was always kind and lively. He informed him of the state of their forces and confirmed him that the Knights of the Vale ambushed them at the Crossroad. Melisandre had already told him. The Vale had truly betrayed them. Daven thought that Tyrion was aware and told him they sent a raven to warn him. It seemed that many ravens got lost lately. Tyrion understood very quickly that they had no choice but to follow Daenerys. Their army would never be strong enough against hers. They barely had more than a thousand men riding alongside tens of thousand Dothrakis, Reach men, Crownlands men, Riverlands men, and Stormlands men.

Not long after their departure, Tyrion saw a great shadow flying over them. When he looked up, he saw a giant beast with black scales, gigantic wings of the same color and a very long tail. He stared at the creature from far away, hearing his screams very well, until it almost disappeared on the horizon, heading north. Tyrion stared in its direction long after it was gone and only a point in the sky was left of him. For the first time in his life, he just saw a living dragon. It was bigger and more impressive than he imagined them, and he imagined them as very great and impressive animals. As they progressed through the swamps and bogs of the Neck like he did almost a year ago, he couldn’t help but carefully listen and look repetitively in the sky, in the hope to catch another look of the dragons. He only saw one. He wondered how the two others looked like.

They stopped in the middle of the afternoon. Thoughts of dragons and any excitement he felt upon
seeing one vanished, replaced by the memory of Bronn’s and Podrick’s deaths, and worry for his wife and daughter. Darkness was already falling on them and the last shades of the sun were slowly disappearing. The column stopped. Tyrion was kept away from his men, certainly on purpose. They had allowed Daven to pay him a short visit while they rode, but they wouldn’t allow him to be anywhere close the thousand men loyal to House Lannister. Still, according to his guards, he was provided with his own tent and even a servant. He was an honored guest, to speak gently, but he was a prisoner and a hostage to speak truthfully.

Before they could begin to settle, a young man with the arms of House Hightower rode to him. “Lord Lannister, the queen requires your presence.”

For a moment, Tyrion wasn’t sure, but he recognized him. “I guess I have no choice, Ser Gerold. Lead the way.”

Lady Mira’s husband did as he said, though it wasn’t really an order. They talked on their way to the queen. “I’m glad that you’re alive, my lord.”

“I’m not sure everyone shares your belief, ser.”

“Mira has a high esteem of you, and of your wife.”

“If that’s the case, then why did you leave the North?” Tyrion retorted.

The knight didn’t look at him when he answered. “I had to. My family is sworn to House Tyrell. I did my duty by my family.”

“I’m sure that your wife admired your loyalty,” Tyrion mocked.

Gerold’s voice was shaking now. “I did everything I could for her. I wanted her to come with me, but she didn’t want to. She was my wife.”

“Was?”

“She still is,” he corrected. “She should have come with me. I would have protected her.”

Tyrion snorted. He knew the whole story. Asher Forrester and Jon Snow told him all about it. “And when she refused to follow you, you left her all alone in the North, with an army of dead men threatening the place where she lives, in the thick of winter, cold, within a house in ruins.”

“I wanted to bring her to safety, and she refused,” Gerold Hightower retorted harshly.

Tyrion sighed. “Tell me, how many of your men survived the trip back south?” When Lady Mira’s husband didn’t reply, he had his answer. “I don’t believe it would have been very wise for a pregnant woman to travel miles in the snow and among storms.”

The knight slowly looked at Tyrion, his eyes big like balls. “What?”

“Lord Tyrion.” He realized that a man with a mask and wearing robes similar to those of Melisandre and Kinvara was waiting for him, on foot. “The queen is waiting for you.”

They had arrived near a small hill that allowed them to see Moat Cailin very well. Tyrion dismounted and followed the masked man.

Gerold Hightower shouted after him. “Wait, my lord! What did you mean by pregnant?”

Fed up, Tyrion turned to look at the knight before he went to see the queen. “have many flaws, Ser
Gerold Hightower, but abandoning a woman alone with a child when he’s yours is probably one of the things I despise the most. I hope you will never meet a Forrester again, because they all want to skin you alive right now.”

Tyrion resumed his walk toward the queen who waited for him and gave no other thought to the knight of the Reach. He had visited many brothels in his life, been with many women, but if he had had a child with one of them, he wouldn’t have left the woman and the baby with nothing. The child would have been his own blood, and the woman his mother, and abandoning a girl and the child she bore you was despicable in his eyes. He had known Mira Forrester, and she didn’t deserve this.

Daenerys Targaryen was waiting for him near the cliff, looking at the fortress beneath her. The black dragon Tyrion saw earlier was standing next to her. The creature eyed him suspiciously as he approached the queen of five of the Seven Kingdoms. The said queen didn’t turn to welcome him, didn’t even look at him. Someone might have tried to stab her in the back, but Tyrion reflected that any man who would try such a move right now would be a fool considering the dragon watching over her.

Tyrion walked carefully under the dragon’s gaze, trying to not make any abrupt movement that might cause him to react, until he stood next to the last living child of the Mad King. A long drop was only a few feet ahead. No one would survive such a fall. Tyrion observed this queen. She was beautiful, no one could deny it, with the striking features of the Valyrian civilization that only the Targaryens inherited in Westeros. Tyrion had seen Rhaegar Targaryen a few times when he was a lad, but always from afar. They never properly met, and he had few memories of the man his sister might have married. As for the Mad King, he had even fewer memories of him. He had no basis to compare her to other Targaryens, except for Jon Snow, but the boy obviously inherited his physical appearance from the Stark side. However, compared to the Westerosi standards, the young woman was quite attractive, though not as much as Sansa.

She turned her head, caught him spying on her. “I heard you took this place before.”

Tyrion looked at the fortress in ruins far away. “Yes.”

“How?”

He looked back at her. She didn’t leave her eyes away from him. Her gaze had an expression of challenge. Was she gauging him?

“We attacked Moat Cailin from both sides. Our allies in the North and a small group of men we sent through the swamps assaulted the northern side while the bulk of our forces led the attack from the south. The Boltons couldn’t hold us on both sides, their defenses were overwhelmed, and we took the fortress.”

She seemed to consider his words for a time. “How did you send men north of Moat Cailin?”

“We got the help from the crannogmen. They live in the Neck, and many people call them frog-eaters. Before you think about doing the same thing, I must warn you, these people are fiercely loyal to the King in the North. They will not help you to take Moat Cailin, and your dragons won’t convince them. They will hide in the bogs and the swamps, and you won’t be able to set this forest afire to kill them all. The only way to bring the crannogmen to kneel is to have Jon Snow bend the knee before you, and it won’t be done before you meet him at the Wall. Howland Reed is leading the crannogmen and he is at the Wall too.”

“Is an attack from the south likely to succeed?”
“No. Moat Cailin cannot be taken from the south. No one ever succeeded to take the castle without forces north of it.”

“Did any of them had dragons?”

“No,” Tyrion reluctantly said after a moment. The silence that followed was heavy.

“How many men are there in garrison here?”

“About two hundred. It’s enough to hold the place.”

“We have no time to lose. What you’re telling is mostly what Gerold Hightower told me. Your siege lasted months. We cannot afford it. I’m aware of the threat from beyond the Wall.” Tyrion noticed she was serious. There was no trace of jape or mockery on her face or in her voice when she talked. “Did you see them?”

Tyrion nodded. He saw wights during one of their assaults on Castle Black. “Do you know a man from the name of Aemon Targaryen, your Grace?” He decided he should begin to call her this way. After all, he bent the knee.

“I heard about him. He was maester in the Night’s Watch, and a brother to my grandfather Aegon.”

“I met him a few years ago when I visited the Wall. He told me that winter was coming, and that dark things would come with it. I didn’t believe him back then, but I should have.”

The young woman looked thoughtful for a moment. She looked back at the ruins that stopped her army. “I must continue on my path right away. The White Walkers threaten all the Seven Kingdoms, and I must stop them. I would rather not kill anyone on my way, but if these men are stopping me, then I might have no choice but to destroy Moat Cailin. Are the men inside this castle yours?”

“Half of them,” Tyrion replied. “The other half is made of Northerners, mostly sworn to House Manderly.”

“Can you convince them to let us pass?”

“My men will obey my orders, but the Northerners may not accept.” For the men of the North, Jon Snow was their king, and Northerners weren’t likely to turn their cloak for a southern or foreign queen.

“If they don’t let my army through, I will have no choice but to destroy this place.”

The dragon hissed. She didn’t need to tell him how she would destroy Moat Cailin. Tyrion highly doubted that the place could withstand dragonfire. “If you destroy Moat Cailin and kill the men defending it, no one will welcome you as a savior in the North, no matter what you do,” he warned her.

“In this case, I suppose you are these men’s only hope.”

As she stared at him, Tyrion understood what she expected of him. She wanted him to bring her Moat Cailin. It was a test to prove his loyalty, and to force him to truly side with her. He had no choice. He was in no position to refuse, and she was right, either the garrison surrendered, or all the men inside Moat Cailin died. He was the only chance for two hundred men to live.

Several minutes later, he was riding towards the southern gate of Moat Cailin, carrying a white banner to indicate a truce for negotiations. Two people followed him. Daenerys Targaryen wouldn’t
let him go in there alone, though he didn’t see how she could think he would escape. If Moat Cailin
didn’t surrender at dawn, Daenerys Targaryen said she would unleash her dragons and take it by
force. The three of them were flying south of his position now. Tyrion never saw a dragon in action,
but he read more than enough history books to know what kind of damage they could do.

However, his two guards weren’t the ones he usually had. One of them was the High Priestess
Kinvara, the woman who supposedly brought him back from the dead, though she claimed it was her
god who did it. Tyrion wasn’t sure what to think about it yet. He knew he was dead. He didn’t
dream of it. He was alive again. He would need to think about it later.

The other guard was another Red Priest. When Tyrion saw the two of them saddle up to follow him,
he tried to know why they accompanied him. The woman only said she was coming, as if it was
enough of an explanation. As for the man, he said nothing, but from his impressive shoulders and the
two swords he carried, he understood why the High Priestess chose him as her personal guard. She
said he followed her everywhere she went. When Tyrion asked if he was a Targaryen after noticing
his silvery hair, he got a harsh look from the priest, and he quickly realized the man might have the
Targaryen hair, but he definitely didn’t have their eyes. As a result, he was being followed by two
foreign priests to negotiate a surrender on which depended two hundred lives. He didn’t feel right
about it.

“Who goes there?” came the shout from over the gate. Tyrion squinted his eyes to better see who
yelled. The man had a red armor.

“The Imp,” he loudly replied. “And you better open that fucking gate before I hang you for not
recognizing the lord you serve.”

It didn’t take long for the gate to open. Once inside, Tyrion immediately saw that the men could have
been in better shape. Time in the Neck never proved to be easy, though they fared better than the
Bolton soldiers after the battle. The two captains of the garrison were waiting for him. One of them
was named Damion, like one of his cousins. He led the Lannister forces at Moat Cailin. Tyrion chose
himself. The other one was Duncan, commander of the Manderly garrison. Tyrion had to ask his
name since he didn’t remember it.

“We didn’t expect you here, my lord. And not really coming from this side,” Damion said.

“I understand. That’s a long story, Damion. We need to talk, and now.”

“Who are they?” Duncan asked, pointing the two people behind Tyrion.

“My name is Kinvara,” the High Priestess answered. “I am an advisor for the queen Daenerys
Targaryen, and this is Geralt.”

“You are Red Priests?”

“We are.”

Of course, that made everyone around suspicious. “We have no time for this,” Tyrion cut. “We have
important matters to talk about. You have a full army before you, with three dragons, and they will
attack you before the next day begins.”

A few moments later, they were sitting around a table, Tyrion, the two Red Priests and the two
commanders. Tyrion explained the situation to the commanders and how he happened to be here. He
didn’t tell them he died. He only told them he was gravely injured and somehow managed to survive
long enough while a dragon brought him here. As for the fate of Moat Cailin, he hid nothing.
“Can we defeat a dragon?” Damion asked.

“Three dragons, and no, you can’t defeat them, not all of them.”

“Dragons never took Moat Cailin,” Duncan said.

“They never tried,” Tyrion specified, “and I’m not eager to test it.” He let a moment go. “I bent the knee.” He didn’t tell them yet.

“You swore an oath to our king.” Duncan was outraged.

“Our king intends to take the black and bent the knee the moment he meets Daenerys Targaryen. We need her dragons to defeat the White Walkers. She brought dragonglass with her. She made vast quantities of weapons with it. She is probably our only chance to stop the Night King from devastating the entire North.”

“You want us to welcome a Targaryen, a woman who grew up in Essos, not even on this continent, into the North?” Duncan asked, bewildered.

“She will get into the North whether you like it or not, Duncan. A few ruins with a few crossbowmen will not stop her. If you fight her, you will die.”

“So that’s why you betrayed us? She threatened to kill you, didn’t she? You bowed before her like a coward.”

Tyrion pursed his lips to contain his anger. “I want my house to survive this winter. I’m quite sure you want your family to survive it as well. If you do, then I suggest you do just like me.”

“The dead are coming for you,” Kinvara added. “If you refuse the queen’s help, if you fight her instead of fighting the White Walkers with her, you will die, whether it is by her hand or the hand of the true enemy. You must put aside your past enmities if you are to survive this long night.”

“Damion.” Tyrion looked at the man he chose to command his men here. After a moment, he bowed his head.

“I will follow you, my lord. You are my lord.”

“You’re a fucking traitor!” Duncan yelled.

“I’m being pragmatic!” Tyrion retorted. “We are facing the greatest threat in history, and stubbornness and pride will not save us from them. Even your king knows it.”

“I don’t believe what you say. You are a Lannister. You switch your cloak whenever it suits you. But House Manderly swore an oath to House Stark long ago. Honor still means something for us.”

“Like it meant something for Robb Stark. Look where he is now.” That wasn’t the right thing to say. Can’t I learn to shut up when I must?

The commander looked at him straight in the eyes. “Tell your queen that she can go and fuck herself. We are not going to serve a Targaryen.”

“You already serve one. Or is it that you prefer Jon Snow because he doesn’t have silver hair and looks like Eddard Stark. He may look like the last Warden of the North, but that doesn’t make him his son or a Stark.”

Another silence followed. “Tell your Targaryen that she is welcomed to attack us tomorrow. We will
welcome her with arrows. She’ll see that we can rain fire just like her.”

Duncan walked toward the door, but before he could do more than a few steps, strong arms seized him by behind, a hand with a knife was raised and his throat was cut clean. In an instant, he was one floor, emptying himself from his blood.

They all stared in shock at what just happened. The only who didn’t show any surprise was the killer. Geralt, that was how the priest was called, wiped the blood off his dagger and put it back at his belt. The door burst open and two men bearing the colors of House Lannister entered. They were as shocked as everyone else was.

Before they could react, Tyrion stopped them. “Close the door.” One managed to carry out the order. Tyrion looked at the rough man. “What have you done?”

“You want these men here to die?” the Red Priest asked in a rough voice. “That wouldn’t have been possible with this moron in command.”

“We will never be able to bring the Northerners to surrender now that you killed their commander,” Tyrion angrily observed. These were supposed to be negotiations. Parleys were as sacred as guest rights. What laws were left that couldn’t be broken in Westeros now?

“When the Northerners find about this…” Damion’s voice trailed off.

“They mustn’t find.” Tyrion’s mind raced quicker than ever. “We must surrender the castle before they realize their commander is missing.”

“But, my lord…”

“Do as I say. Hide the body. Make sure no one finds it. Send your most loyal man to Daenerys. Put a white flag over the castle. Send men to the armory to take control of it. I want all weapons to be in our control. Distribute it to our men and place them at strategic points. Confine the Northerners to their rooms. If they ask questions, tell them Duncan tried to kill me. Only use force if they resist. Do everything with discretion.”

“My lord, many Northerners are in the courtyard. They’re training. It won’t be possible to do it discreetly.”

“Then start by the men outside the courtyard. Confine them. Then place your men with crossbows and swords around the courtyard and surround the Northerners.”

Damion obeyed, though it was obvious he didn’t like how things turned.

“I’ll go to the courtyard. Your men might have need of another sword,” the rough priest said before he left. Tyrion had no doubt this one was ready for battle.

He turned to the High Priestess to who he owed his life. “Daenerys would be better to save us from the dead.” He shot one last look at Duncan in his own blood, and walked out of the room. “The Northerners have a choice to make,” he whispered, fearing what decision they would take.

Tyrion went to a balcony overlooking the courtyard. Many men were practicing there. Tyrion counted about thirty Northerners. For now, everything seemed normal. As minutes went on, things started to change. New men appeared on the battlements, crossbowmen and bowmen took position all around the courtyard, and Tyrion noticed other on the ground level with real swords at their belt.

“This isn’t how you wanted it to happen. I’m sorry.”
The priestess had joined him and watched the events unfolding before them. “I suppose parleys have no value where you come from,” he retorted under his breathe, loud enough for her to hear.

“Geralt’s methods are crude and sometimes cruel, but sometimes cruelty is necessary. I didn’t choose him to protect me for nothing.”

Some Northerners were beginning to notice that something was strange. “There was surely another way.”

“Sometimes we have to do things we would rather never do.”

“I know it only too well.” What he was doing right now was a perfect example of this. The die was cast.

Damion walked in the yard with a small escort. He and all his men were fully armed. No Lannister man was left training. The Northerners still there only had blunted sword for close combat.

“Men, we must ask you to go back to your rooms,” Damion loudly declared, while remaining at good distance. The crossbows were all in position. Tyrion noticed Geralt on the ground, closing on the practice area while remaining at respectable distance.

“Where is Duncan?” one of the men asked.

“Please go back to your rooms. We will explain you everything in time.”

“Look! A white banner!” The Northerners all looked up to see the flag that announced their surrender on the top of the tallest tower of Moat Cailin.

“Traitors!” another shouted.

“Wait, let me explain to you,” Duncan tried, but Tyrion knew it was too late. He knew Northerners too well.

“Men, loose!”

The order came out easily. He gave it without hesitating. Bolts and arrows flew from everywhere towards the half-expecting Northerners. Strangely, they didn’t move to take cover. All they did to protect themselves was to raise their arms and hands, as if it could block an arrow as well as it could stop the light of the sun. The next moment, Lannisters rushed on the Northerners. Their allies stood no chance. They didn’t have any real weapon for close combat, and it was too late for them to use the bows and crossbows they had for training. Furthermore, they were in an open place, vulnerable to archers when Tyrion’s men were not. The Red Priest joined the fight and cleanly killed three or four men. It was all over within seconds.

Tyrion climbed down the stairs to look at the carnage more closely. Men with the sigil of House Manderly and their vassal houses on their arms lied everywhere, killed by arrows, swords and knives, but mostly by arrows, the arrows Tyrion ordered to be released on them. He didn’t want it to happen this way, but after Duncan was killed… He shot a dark look at the man who killed him and started all this madness, and Tyrion made a note in his mind that a Lannister always paid his debts.

“Bring the bodies away and clean this place. We must prepare for the queen’s arrival.”

The orders sounded hollow in his mouth. His men executed them, but without more enthusiasm than he had himself. He later ordered that the bones be kept and sent to the families of the victims as soon as possible. That was all he could do.
At dawn, Daenerys Targaryen rode through the gates with the most powerful lords of the Reach and the Stormlands. Tyrion was there to inform her that Moat Cailin was hers. She granted him a smile and said, “Well done.”

They didn’t stay long at Moat Cailin. His new queen wanted to continue her way as quickly as possible. She didn’t joke when she said they had no time. Tyrion had to give it to her, she didn’t underestimate the enemy they faced. One hour after she entered Moat Cailin, she was heading north again with the bulk of her forces.

Tyrion found himself following this army again. Forty-five. It was the number of people who died at Moat Cailin that night. Forty-five men. Forty-three Northerners, and two soldiers at the service of House Lannister. It wasn’t as much as two hundred, but it was forty-five too many men who lost their lives. Tyrion found it strange that he was more affected by the death of forty-five men than by the two thousand he killed at the Wall with his wildfire trap. The principles were the same. Sacrificing men to save many more. However, this time, it was different. Men died all day at war. The casualties at the Wall could be considered as an inevitable loss in such a war, but the deaths at Moat Cailin came from… treason. He had turned against allies, against men his own had fought alongside with. He had worked hard to build the Lannister-Tully-Arryn-Stark coalition, and he just ordered his men to slaughter, no butcher other men they called allies and friends just a few hours ago. He had betrayed Jon Snow. A voice in his mind kept saying that he saved one hundred and fifty-five men, he couldn’t shake out the idea that he betrayed the North. And if he betrayed the North, then not only he betrayed Jon Snow, a man who considered him as a friend and that Tyrion had come to consider a friend as well, but he also betrayed Sansa.

He felt more miserable than ever. He tried to atone, to heal what wounds his family’s crimes left behind, and now he created new ones. He could say he wasn’t responsible, that it was this Red Priest who broke the sacred laws of parleys, but it didn’t ease the weigh he felt on his mind.

In the evening, when they stopped for the night, Tyrion was called to dine with the queen. He didn’t look forward to it and would rather stay alone with his thoughts, but he knew better than to refuse a queen, especially one who had all the reasons in the world to hate him and his family.

The queen was courteous enough, though she didn’t seem very happy to see him either. He supposed she was trying to better know who he was, and in that she was clever. A king, or a queen in this case, should always know who her bannermen are. He supposed the fact he was a dwarf might intrigue her a little too. Dwarves who happened to be lords were rare.

Servants brought them some chicken with carrots and lettuce. It wasn’t the high gastronomy Tyrion was used to, but it was a respectable service all the same. Maybe this queen was used to frugal meals. She spent her life in exile after all, and not always in the best living conditions.

“Kinvara told me about what happened at Moat Cailin,” the Targaryen queen said after a while. Tyrion was pouring his second cup of wine.

“I don’t know how the Red Priests ended at your service after supporting Stannis, but they don’t seem aware that there are certain laws to respect in Westeros, like not killing people during a parley.”

“I already berated Geralt for that. Though I heard the Lannisters have a tendency to not respect sacred laws either.”

He should have known this would come. “The Freys broke the guest rights. There were no Lannisters at the Red Wedding.”

“So you deny any involvement of your family in this Red Wedding?”
Tyrion laid down his cup. “I had nothing to see with that, if that’s what you want to know. Whoever was behind it wouldn’t have told me anyway. I’m married with a Stark, should I remind you. My mother-in-law and my brother-in-law died at the Twins, and I made the Freys pay for that later. Anyway, I was only the Master of Coin back then. My job was to count stags and dragons, not heads.”

“Edmure Tully told me about your family’s involvement. I know Tywin Lannister was behind this.” She didn’t look at him accusingly. Her eyes were hard, but not accusing. “It doesn’t matter to me. Starks, Freys, Lannisters, you all fought against my father. I don’t care that you killed each other afterwards. However, this Red Wedding only proves how the Lannisters treat their enemies. Like when you butchered my brother’s family.”

Tyrion took a great inspiration. “What my father ordered was a horrible crime, and one of my first actions when I became Lord of Casterly Rock was to make sure that Gregor Clegane, the man who savagely killed Elia Martell and her children, was killed. If I was in King’s Landing back then and that my father asked my opinion, I would have talked against it, but my father never asked my opinion and I was only a lad back then, kept away from the rest of the world because my father didn’t want people to know too much that he had a dwarf for a son.”

A short time went on before the queen replied. “I thank you for the death of Ser Gregor Clegane, but that doesn’t erase what your family has done.”

“Killing me will not bring your family back to life either. Nor will Jaime’s death bring your father back.”

“What do you know of my father?”

“Not much. I seldom saw him, and from afar. My brother and my father knew him better, but what I know about him mostly comes from rumors and things every noble in Westeros knows.”

She took her own cup. “I know what my father was. What he did. I know the Mad King earned his name.” She took a sip.

“And what do you think of it?” Tyrion asked, out of curiosity and fear for the answer.

“I think I want to be a better ruler than he was.”

That shouldn’t be difficult. It might be more difficult to be a good ruler. “Then I suggest you start by not killing any Stark. Your father and my nephew made the mistake of executing a few of them. Look where they are now.”

She seemed to take into consideration what he said, but she asked a question without relation to the topic. “I was told of what happened at Moat Cailin. Tell me, why did you order your men to kill the Northerners?”

Tyrion sighed. “Because they left us no choice. You told me to give you the fortress before dawn, or else you would burn it to the ground. When they decided to resist, that was the only decision left to take. Of course, if your Red Priest didn’t kill their commander, it might have been possible to end this without bloodshed.”

“He’s not my Red Priest. Still, you swore allegiance to Jon Snow, and yet you didn’t hesitate to kill his men.”

“I just swore allegiance to you.”
“So you switch your allegiance whenever it suits you?”

Tyrion tried to stay calm. “Do you truly believe the other lords wouldn’t switch their allegiance if they saw an interest in that? Dorne sided with you because they hate the Lannisters, the Stormlands surrendered to you because you ravaged their lands, the Tyrells chose you because Cersei killed their heir and tried to kill their daughter, and I’m quite sure Edmure Tully chose to side with you because you would have destroyed Riverrun if he didn’t. The lords of Westeros side with whoever they feel is the best choice for them, or else Dorne and the Reach wouldn’t have abandoned your family after your father died.” He took a pause, but continued. “This is the first time I switch my cloak, your Grace. I was loyal to my family for years through the War of the Five Kings. When my nephew Tommen died, my sister seized the power for herself, after destroying the Great Sept of Baelor and almost killing the previous queen, and she had no claim on the Iron Throne. So when I had proofs that Jon Snow had Targaryen origins, I decided it was more appropriate to declare for him. He makes a better king than Cersei, and he has more claim than her. I didn’t turn on Cersei. She never was my queen. Now we have an enemy we cannot defeat without your help, and if our allegiance is the price for your help and a chance to survive for everyone in Westeros, then I gladly make it, especially since the king I swore an oath to before doesn’t intend to remain king for long. Are you satisfied with my answer?”

She didn’t move a single inch of her body before she spoke. “I’m trying to figure out who you are.”

“So, what are your conclusions?”

“That you might be useful, and more honest than most people have been with me over the past twenty years.” She took another sip. Their supper was finished. “One more question. How did my dragon end up bringing you here?”

“I don’t know,” Tyrion answered in all sincerity. He still wondered about it and couldn’t find a satisfying answer to that. There were many questions he was asking himself that he couldn’t find an answer to. Still, he regretted he wasn’t awaken during the flight.

“Thank you. You may leave.” Tyrion stood up. Things had gone better than he thought they would, and considering his sharp tongue, it seemed this woman wasn’t as mad as her father was. “I hope you prove to be loyal to me as much as you did yesterday,” she added as he left.

Tyrion only made a few steps out before a tall figure appeared before him.

“I guess thanks are in order, since you brought me back from the dead,” he said after it seemed that the woman wouldn’t say anything.

“It isn’t me you should thank. It’s the Lord of Light,” the High Priestess Kinvara said.

Tyrion sighed. “Look, I don’t believe in gods, and despite the fact that I am clueless as to how I was resurrected, the fact we do not understand something doesn’t mean the explanation is a god or some greater power.”

In the darkness, he thought she was smiling sadly at him. “Were you always a cynic?”

No, not always. “You’re losing your time if you’re trying to recruit another follower for your Lord of Light. I lost any faith I could have in gods a long time ago.”

She nodded. “You misunderstand me. I’m not trying to convert you. You don’t need me. But there are other people who need us.”

“Could you stop talking in riddles?”
“There’s a reason for everything that happens in this world, good things and bad things all alike.”

“Let me doubt about it.”

“Really? What’s the worse thing that ever happened to you? What do you regret the most?”

He knew very well what he regretted the most, and he didn’t need this woman to remind him.

“That’s none of your business.”

“I understand.” She didn’t press the matter further. “If this thing hadn’t happened, do you think you would be the same man today, or that you would have the same life?”

“No,” he replied shortly.

“And you’re right. All the horrors we go through, all the mistakes we make, they are what defines us. I made mistakes as well, Tyrion Lannister, and I regret them. But they are in the past, and we can’t change the past. We can affect the present and change the future, on the other hand.” She knelt and looked straight into his eyes. “Do you want to make this world a better place?”

Tyrion looked back into her eyes, green like emeralds. “I’d like to not make it worse than it already is.”

“It’s a start.” She had a condescending smile as she stood up. “You may not believe in our Lord, Tyrion Lannister, but he is real, and your beliefs won’t change it.”

“Your beliefs won’t change mine either.”

She ignored his latest comment. “Melisandre believes you have an important role to play in the war against the dead. She was wrong on several occasions in the past, but I think she may be right on this. There is a great battle coming, and R’hllor showed me that you would be part of it. That’s why I asked him to bring you back. However, there’s one thing I must be sure of.”

She walked to the opposite direction Tyrion was heading to and stopped after a dozen feet, signaling him to follow her. Uncertain about what to do, disobey one of the queen’s closest advisors or take the risk to follow a fanatic, Tyrion finally opted for the second option. They walked through tents and fires. They were no longer in the Neck and properly in the North. Tyrion felt the air was already colder and drier.

“I heard you have a daughter,” the High Priestess said all of a sudden.

“Yes, I do.” He didn’t see what he could gain from hiding it. Everyone certainly knew it by now, or would know it soon enough.

“I had a daughter once.”

Tyrion frowned. “I didn’t know the Red Priests could have children.”

“I wasn’t always in the orders.”

“What happened to her?”

“She’s dead.”

“I’m sorry.” He meant it.

“It’s in the past, and it happened a long time ago.” They maintained a silence for some time, but she
broke it again. “She didn’t look like me. Not at all.”

“The same thing happened to my wife. Our child inherited my family’s traits. Shining blond hair and green eyes. It’s a chance she didn’t inherit my size.”

They said nothing after that and walked without a word, until they arrived to a clearing. At the center of it stood a dragon. He was smaller than the black one Tyron saw with the queen. This one was cream-colored, though Tyron noticed his bones, horns and spinal crest were golden. He also seemed quieter than the black one and didn’t move when they entered the clearing. He only looked at him, and did nothing else.

Tyron observed him for a quite some time, and after a while, he realized the beast kept staring at him as well. His eyes were two pools of molten gold. Tyron kept looking into them. Before he could realize what he was doing, his legs brought him closer to the creature, and when he finally realized it, he was midway between the dragon and the younger Red Woman. He kept looking at him. The beast didn’t fly away, or roared, or showed any sign of hostility or fear.

According to some maesters and other people who studied them, dragons were intelligent creatures, maybe more than men. Looking at this one, Tyron was tempted to agree with them. He kept approaching him, as if Tyron was drawn to him, until only a few meters separated them. The dragon’s eyes didn’t leave him, though Tyron looked at other parts of the dragon, like his wings, his claws and, of course, his mouth lined with fangs. He started to be afraid as he got closer, but also excited. The dragon lowered his head to be at the same level than him. He closed the distance, eliminating most of the distance left between them in the process.

Instinctively, Tyron raised a hand and slowly approached it to the muzzle. The air was hot, burning around the animal. Right when he was about to lay his hand on the scales, the dragon closed his eyes and lowered his head. For a short moment, Tyron thought it was kneeling before him, but he quickly realized this was a stupid notion. Dragons didn’t kneel, and the legs of the beast were not bent anyway. The position was certainly only meant to allow him to better touch the dragon. He lowered his hand and touched the scales. As he caressed them, Tyron realized that one of his oldest dreams had come true: to see a dragon and to touch it. If it had been possible for him to have a dragon, he would have liked it to be this one. He wondered what was his name.

A voice from behind gave him the answer. “Viserion!”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is very special, for three reasons. The first is that Tyron is resurrected. The second is that this story reached the line of 200 bookmarks. The third is that now, "A Shadow and a Wolf" accounts for over 900,000 words. It makes this story the longest fanfiction of Game of Thrones and A Song of Ice and Fire ever written to that day on Archive of Our Own. I think it is quite remarkable that the chapter making it is the one where Tyron comes back to life.

I want to thank everyone who read this story, kudoed it, left comments, or added it to their bookmarks. I started writing it almost two years ago, and I can't believe the way it did ever since. Thank you, dear readers. The journey is coming to an end, but there are still plenty of chapters left, about 30-40, and I can't wait to share them with you. Keep following this story. You'll find out at the very end why it is called "A Shadow and a
A fourth reason why this chapter is very important is probably that this is the first meeting of Tyrion and Daenerys. And a fifth reason would be a "confirmation" of a dragon theory concerning Tyrion. Shortly, there are plenty of reasons why this chapter is so important.

Please review

Next chapter : Mira
Mira XII

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

MIRA XII

She felt a shock coming from her stomach. It moved a lot now. The swelling of her belly had become apparent now. Talia firmly commanded her to move as little as she could and to not exhaust herself, but if Mira could be commanded easily by the lady she served or by her parents, her sister was another story, considering she was the eldest. Mira tried to spare herself all the same.

The Iron Grove was empty. The place, once filled with the sounds of feet crunching the leaves and taping the ground, and with children playing hide and seek, was now dead. Rodrik, Asher and Ethan were dead. Talia and Mira were busy rebuilding their home and preparing their people for winter the best they could. Ryon spent his days learning how to fight. Winter had come for House Forrester. If the snows had only covered the ironwood at night, then the sigil of House Forrester would take all its sense.

She gazed at the trunk where she read the evening before her departure. Asher was the only one who hadn’t been there when she left. He was already exiled. Just when she thought she found him again, they lost him. Was House Forrester destined to lose all his men? Ryon was furious when they received the news of Asher’s death. He only trained harder than ever with Beskha. They couldn’t even burn his body in the Grove. Instead he was burned with all the others at Castle Black. No ceremony, no words from their family. Her baby moved again. Mira rested a hand on her belly. Perhaps he felt her grief. She thought it was over, that she was done grieving when she discovered a part of her family survived, and when Highpoint fell, but she was wrong. She lost Asher a first time when he was exiled, then a second time when she heard Ironrath was burned to the ground, and now she lost him for the third time.

“Mira!” Her sister found her.

“Talia.” She didn’t move as she joined her from behind. Mira heard her footsteps as she approached.

“You shouldn’t stay here for long,” Talia warned her.

“I needed some fresh air, Talia. I’m suffocating inside these walls.”

Talia didn’t reply. She just stayed with her.

“Is Ryon still training?”

“Yes. I tried to order him inside, but he wouldn’t listen. Ethan held from Rodrik. I suppose Ryon holds from Asher,” her sister said, fed up. “He’s worse than you.”

“We all have our ways to grieve.”

“Sometimes I envy Ryon, truth be told. While he fights, at least he doesn’t get to think about it. I cannot stop thinking about it. I can’t believe that Asher is gone. And Gwyn… What will happen to her?”

“I don’t know.” She remained silent for a moment. “What do you think is the worst? Losing your husband in the war, or being abandoned by him and knowing you might never see him again?”
“I don’t know,” Talia replied. “The next time I see him…”

“I doubt we’ll ever see him again. He doesn’t even know for the child. I lost him.” Mira shivered. “You’re probably right. I should get back inside.”

“I’m coming with you.”

The sisters headed back together to the castle. They only had each other now. Mira had never been closer to Talia. With Sera, Lady Margaery and Lady Sansa far away, her husband gone, and Ryon training all day, barely noticing his remaining siblings, her sister was all that was left to her. On their way, they saw their little brother, now the new Lord of Ironrath, sparring in the courtyard. Many people were working on removing the snow from the previous days again. They walked past them and entered the Great Hall. Talia followed her into her rooms. She wanted to make sure that Mira would remain there, and Mira knew it. The fire was better kept there, and her sister always asked if she was missing anything. When Talia was satisfied with Mira staying in her chamber, she left.

Still, Mira asked for the ledgers to be brought to her. She looked in despair at the numbers before her. Their stocks of food would never last through winter. She had been sure of that for a whole week now, and like every time she opened the ledgers during this week, she found herself coming to the conclusion that they only had two possibilities. Whether they reduced rations, or they asked for help from Mira’s new house, the Hightowers.

Mira remembered a discussion she once had with Maester Ortengryn a long time ago. She just finished reading her favourite northern tale for the first time, and she was asking him questions about it. She had to be only seven or eight.

“Maester Ortengryn.” She was done with her sums, while Asher and Rodrik still worked on them. Rodrik would probably finish before Asher. “When a man and a woman get married, do they know each other?”

“Of course, Mira,” the maester answered. “The families try to introduce them both before the wedding.”

“So, my parents knew each other before they were married?”

“They were introduced to each other a week before the ceremony.”

Somehow, it seemed rather short for Mira. “Is a week enough to know someone?”

“It depends. Why are you asking all these questions, my lady?”

“I just finished reading the tale of the kingdom of Arendelle. There’s a prince in that tale. He was ready to kill the woman he was about to marry, and her sister as well. He mocked the girl he was supposed to marry, saying she was ready to marry him without knowing him. All he wanted by marrying her was to become king. He didn’t love her.”

Maester Ortengryn had kindly smiled at her. “This is only a tale, Mira. Tales and reality are two very different things.”

“Will my husband try to kill me and Talia, and everyone else to get Ironrath?” she bluntly asked.

Everyone seemed surprised by her question. They shouldn’t be. She was worried for all of them. Their maester had a strange expression on his face. “Mira, no one will ever try to kill you. What kind of man would want to kill you?”
“A charming prince who seduces women so he can get his hands on their home.”

He laughed. “Perhaps, but you will not marry such a man. Your lady mother will never allow it, and neither will Lord Forrester.”

“So, my lady mother is like the Queen Elsa?” she asked.

“Yes, in some way,” he replied with a smile. “Your parents will never marry you to someone you won’t be happy with, Mira. Don’t worry, you’ll marry someone good.”

About ten years later, Mira was still wondering if she should ask help to the Hightowers. They still had no ravens, and a messenger would take some time to arrive to the nearest castle with some. There might not even be ravens for the Hightower there. There would be some for the Citadel, and the Citadel could relay the message to Lord Hightower, but after the way her husband left, she wasn’t sure she wanted to ask help from him and his kin.

“Did I really use you, Gerold, or did you just walk away because you couldn’t get Ironrath? Were you the Hans who only wanted to get his hands on Arendelle?”

She asked the question aloud, not truly expecting an answer. Despite the way they parted ways, Mira still felt something for the man she wed. She felt a pang in her heart whenever she thought about him, but at the same time, she couldn’t forget his last words. *I don’t want to see you again.* She felt betrayed, abandoned, shattered, and angry, all at the same time. She had a child coming, and his father left her, like she was his paramour or his whore, and not his wife.

Mira started to be afraid for the future. Not only did they have to face an army of undead, but now Asher was dead. Ryon was too young to rule, too wild, too unpredictable. He spent his entire days training and buried his grief in fighting and anger. Mira had prayed in the godswood with her sister for Asher, and they tried to mourn him the best they could, though they had a lot of work and little time for grieving. However, unlike Talia, Mira couldn’t bury herself in work to escape the thoughts of her dead brother, and with her worries concerning her child, she didn’t have much time to rest. She would feel safer if Gerold was still with her and if the Hightowers could help them in these difficult times, but her husband was gone.

As a consequence, because of Ryon’s wild behaviour and of her own physical condition, it was Talia who ruled Ironrath. She often asked Mira for advice, but Talia was the one to rule their house for the time being, while Mira spent most of her days trying to remain warm and enjoying the doubtful pleasures of a pregnancy. She felt another kick coming from the inside. For the thousandth time, she wondered how she would raise her son without his father. The future of House Forrester was in peril with Asher dead. Their alliance with the Whitehills through his marriage with Gwyn was weakened, and Ryon wouldn’t be able to marry and produce an heir before many years. And now, thanks to Gerold, they lost the support of the Hightowers. Winter had come for House Forrester.

Mira sat still, debating whether she should ask or not help to the Hightowers. She didn’t want to beg the people who abandoned her and her family when they needed them the most. On the other hand, she couldn’t let the people of Ironrath starve, but everyone around here talked against the Hightowers since Gerold and his men left. To her kinsfolk, this was treason, and dishonorable.

The door of her chamber opened. The servant remained on the threshold. “Lady Mira.”

“What is it?” she asked.

“Lady Talia summons everyone in the castle to the audience chamber. She has an important
Mira frowned. It was strange. “Very well, I’m coming.”

She wondered why Talia didn’t come to talk to her about this. If the matter was so important that you assembled everyone, she should have talked to her about it before. Unless the matter was so important that her sister didn’t have time to warn her. Mira hurried to the audience chamber.

The place was already half-filled when she arrived. Because of her station and the fact that she was pregnant, people stepped aside to leave her space as soon as they saw her, though Mira went to the dais from the sides of the room, like she always used to. Her parents always taught her to remain modest and to not attract attention on her. She did so as she grew up here, and she continued to do so in Highgarden and King’s Landing, safe for the official ceremonies where she accompanied her family or Lady Margaery and when decorum demanded it. Crossing the room in the middle would be a violation of their teachings.

Once she arrived at the dais, she saw Ryon who struggled in their father’s big chair. He didn’t stop to move, and Mira knew that sitting, talking and listening were the last things he wanted to do. Beskha stood near. She was the only person who could make him stay still. She had become a sisterly figure, to the detriment of his real sisters. Mira couldn’t help but be jealous of Asher’s friend. Ryon didn’t remember her well. He was almost a baby when she left Ironrath for Highgarden. It was even harder for Talia, who saw him grow, but now had to look at a foreigner take her place as the oldest sister.

Talia was ahead of Ryon, and she spoke with a man who wore the colors and furs of the Night’s Watch. His back was turned on her. Talia saw her and made a sign with her head to the man she was speaking with. She turned immediately to look at Mira. At first, she didn’t recognize him, but then she remembered the night before her departure, when she was reading in the Iron Grove, and that he came to see her. He asked her when she would come back, and she said she didn’t know when.

“Gared!”

Asher wrote to tell them that Duncan’s son was still alive and had safely arrived at Castle Black, but it was one thing to hear he was alive and to actually see him alive. He was taller than in her memories, bigger, and he had a growing beard all around his chin and on his cheeks. He also looked more serious, harder, but the moment she said his name, his expression mellowed.

“Mira.”

He stayed there, looking at her. Mira smiled, and she closed the distance to give him a large hug, like they used to do before. Gared returned the embrace. Seeing him alive were the only good news they had for a long time.

“I’m glad to see you,” she told him after she broke their embrace.

“Me too, Mira.”

“You’re a man now,” she said, almost in wonder.

“And you’re a wed woman, and soon a mother.”

Mira looked at her belly, the source of many joys and torments during the last days. She turned back her attention to her old friend. His expression had gone darker. “Why are you here?”

Gared looked at Talia, who nodded while turning her gaze to the crowd. The room was completely filled now. Mira stood proud, the face neutral, like she was taught. Talia spoke.
“My friends, we gathered you because we have important tidings to bring to you.” She looked at Gared. “This is Gared Tuttle. He was the squire for Lord Gregor Forrester during the war, and fought valiantly for our family. He is now a sworn member of the Night’s Watch, and he has important news to share.”

Gared stepped forward while Talia backed off. He didn’t do any introduction and went straight to the point. “The Wall has fallen.” There was an absolute silence in the hall. Mira felt her heart stop.

“Our defenses at Castle Black were brought down. The dead are coming for us, and there is nothing to stop them,” Gared continued. People were chattering among themselves, afraid and panicked. “Jon Snow, our king, ordered every man and woman in the North to take refuge in one of the great castles. Ironrath is not well defended enough. You must leave. Jon Snow decided that you would take refuge in Winterfell.”

Debate irrupted immediately under the form of shouting. “We can’t abandon Ironrath!”

“How many of us will die on the way to Winterfell?”

“Our walls are not strong enough. They will kill us all!”

“I already abandoned this place to the Whitehills before. I won’t leave it to the White Walkers as well.”

“Please!” Talia said loudly. “Our king gave us an order. We are to assemble at Winterfell to organize a strong defense and have a chance to live. We won’t stand a chance here at Ironrath.”

“And if they kill us before we reach Winterfell?” a man asked.

“This is a risk we must take,” Gared replied. “I know this is not an easy choice. We are asking you to abandon your homes and everything you hold dear, but if you don’t do that, you will die.”

“I will not go.” Ralten, the blacksmith, spoke up. Among the smallfolk of Ironrath, his voice carried weight. “I already abandoned Ironrath once. I will not do it twice. This is where I live, and this is where I will die.”

Many in the room approved him. Mira couldn’t let this happen. “Ralten, the last time, when the Whitehills took Ironrath, you fled, didn’t you?” she asked him.

“Yes, my lady. I did, and I regret it.”

“I don’t.” He looked shocked by her reply. “If you hadn’t fled, you wouldn’t have come back to rebuild Ironrath today. If everyone fought to the death against Ludd Whitehill, none of us would be alive today, and Ironrath would still be a ruin. Ironrath can be rebuilt. By leaving, we are not abandoning our home. We are giving it a second chance. If we stay and we all die, there will be no one to rebuild the castle once the war is over. Worse, after our death, what’s left of us will join the army of the Night King and help him to kill every living Northerner. Ironrath is my home, and it your home to every one of you here, but if we want it to be our home, we must live. We have to abandon it so we can come back later. If we all die, Ironrath will only be a ruin without anyone living in. And without its people, Ironrath is nothing.”

Silence settled among the assembled people. No one dared to contradict her. Mira didn’t want to abandon her home when she just came back, but if the dead had crossed the Wall and were closing on them, they had to leave, and now, or else they would die.

“We leave in an hour,” Talia declared. “Bring everything necessary with you. Byron, charge all the
carts we have with all the food we can bring. Only take what is necessary.”

People scattered to prepare the departure. Some lingered behind, but at the end they followed the others. Mira went to her chambers where she took a few personal belongings, things she didn’t want to leave behind. The broach Lady Margaery gave her. Ethan’s carving. Asher’s Yunkish coin. The last book Rodrik offered her. And, after some hesitation, a golden shawl that her husband offered her a few days after their wedding.

Just when she was about to leave, Gared came to see her. “We’re arranging a place for you in one of the carts with the provisions. It would be dangerous for you to ride,” he told her.

“Thank you.”

She placed heavy furs on her shoulders and left her chambers. She cast one last look behind, reflecting that it might be the last time she would see the place where she grew up, and left, Gared on her heels. “Are you alright?”

“Yes,” she said. It wasn’t entirely true. She was tired. Bearing a child truly was a battle.

“I’m sorry for what happened, with your husband,” Gared said.

She chased the thought of it from her mind. “We have more important concerns right now, Gared.”

“Yes, I agree.”

They arrived in the courtyard, where carts and horses were being assembled. A thin snow was falling, but Mira was afraid that it would get worse. Gared helped her to climb into one of the carts. They positioned sacks of grains so they were like cushions, and she had a cover for her as well. Despite this, Mira shivered when she sat in the cart. Her father’s former squire stood for a while next to her.

“Gared, why did you disappear for so long beyond the Wall?” she asked him.

“It’s a long story,” he said. “I’ll tell you everything on the way if we have time, or when we arrive at Winterfell.” He looked around him, as if to verify that no one was spying on them, then produced something hidden under his furs. It was a small sack he could hold in the palm of his hand.

“Mira, take this, and hide it. Don’t let anyone know that you have it.”

“What is it?” she asked.

“I’ll tell you on the way, but know that the future of House Forrester may depend of what’s inside this.”

After a moment, Mira decided to take it. Gared walked away and saddled a horse near Talia. Mira weighed the sack and touched it to guess what could be inside. As the order was given to go forward, she felt the small rounds inside. She looked at her home slowly reducing, then disappearing as they rode south toward Winterfell, fleeing away from the dead, and as the last trees came out of sight, by the shapes of the things that were inside the sack, she knew what Gared gave her. She never thought she would touch and see real ones, for it was said that the original seeds disappeared thousands of years ago.
Please review

Next chapter: Trystane
Where Trystane must inquire on a murder. As you will be able to see, it is another normal day in the capital of the Seven Kingdoms.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
to them. They won’t believe a single word of what I say, but they will believe you. I need your help to prevent all this to end into an open war between Dorne and the Reach.”

“What happened?” she asked.

“We’re not sure, but according to the first testimonies I collected, it seems a quarrel was started in a tavern where Lord Ashford was, and it ended up in a huge fight between my countrymen and yours. Lord Ashford died of his injuries not long later. Two Dornishmen lost a hand. If we are not careful, this could all come to a war. Is that really what you want?”

Her gaze wandered away before her eyes came back to him. “I’ll talk to Lord Ashford’s men, but he is one of my father’s most loyal bannermen. Even if I convince everyone to stay calm, they will ask for some retribution. A lord was killed.”

“I’m making my own investigation on all this. We will discover the truth.”

“You’ll have to give something to my father’s men. The promise of an investigation will never be enough. They will demand that someone pays for Lord Ashford’s death.”

Trystane shook his head in disbelief. “Just convince them to do nothing rash. We must maintain the peace.”

“I might succeed, but sooner or later, they will take action. Don’t expect them to remain idle when my father arrives with his army. Your ten thousand Dornishmen won’t convince him to stay quiet when he sees the body of his ambassador.”

“I thank you, my lady.”

Trystane proceeded to walk to the door, already dreading the task ahead of him, when Margaery called him. “Trystane, keeping the peace is wonderful, but when you face someone who doesn’t want peace, it’s a lost cause. My family made this error with Cersei. Don’t make the same mistake with your countrymen.”

Trystane left and went to the Grand Maester’s chamber. The Citadel finally chose one. His name was Perwyn, and he came from Old Oak. This meant that he would likely be favorable to the Tyrells. Trystane would have to be careful with this man considering the situation. He couldn’t be considered impartial. He was still observing Lord Ashford’s body when Trystane came in, writing notes on a piece of paper nearby while using a Myrish glass to better see the injuries.

“My lord.” He straightened himself to salute Trystane. He decided to not point out that he was a prince and not a lord.

“Grand Maester. How are your examinations going?”

“Well, for now, I cannot find the cause of the death, my lord.”

“What do you mean?”

“He has several bruises, certainly the results of some punches and kicks in the brawl. In fact, these are the only injuries that are visible on eyesight, safe for a cut on the right arm, but it is superficial. I thought Lord Ashford died of some broken rib or another broken bone that might have pierced a vital organ, especially considering the blood on his face, but that doesn’t seem to be the case. Every bone seems to be in perfect position. And he has no other injury.”

Trystane looked at the body. It was one of a man of middle-age, about forty-years-old, with blond
hair beginning to turn grey and a fair face. “Is it possible that he had a heart attack?”

“Maybe. I’m considering the possibility, but I would rather be sure. In fact, I am wondering if my lord would allow me to open the body.”

Trystane stared right in his eyes. “Out of the question. We can’t.”

“This might be the only way to know for sure how Lord Ashford died.”

“I said no. I’m sorry, Perwyn, but you’ll have to find your answers another way.”

“As you wish, my lord,” the Grand Maester said, defeated. Trystane knew they might get better answers, but the Tyrells wouldn’t appreciate that they treated the body of their dead lord this way. He didn’t want to give any more reasons for a general fighting between Martells and Tyrells.

“I’m going to question Lord Ashford’s men, and then I’ll interrogate the people who assisted to the fight in this tavern. Perhaps we’ll have a better idea of how he died then. In the meantime, keep examining him.”

Perwyn nodded. Trystane left him to his work and went to the Great Hall where the knights who accompanied Lord Ashford to the tavern and who were with him when he died were waiting for him. Trystane sat on the rough edges of the Iron Throne and looked at the seven men who stood before him.

“Sers, first, accept my regrets and those of our queen for what happened to Lord Ashford. This is a tragedy. The Grand Maester is conducting a thorough examination as we speak to determine the cause of his death, and I assure you we will do everything we can to find out who did this, but first, I wish to hear how this all started.”

Ser Andrew Courtney spoke. “Lord Asford went to this tavern with a few of us to drink. Not long after we took our drinks, a group of Dornishmen walked inside as well. They took place not far from us, and they began to insult us. We exchanged a few words with them, to defend our honor, and then, one of them hit Ser Wallys. We came to his defense, and the other Dornishmen joined as well, and the fight began. We mostly exchanged punches. No sword and no spear were drawn. Another group of Dornishmen, a patrol, came inside and separated us. They blamed us, my prince. They said we started the fight, and ordered us to leave the place. We almost had to carry our lord all the way to the Red Keep. He was hurt. Not long after we arrived, he began to cough, and to spit blood. He died a few minutes later.”

“So he didn’t die in the tavern? He died in he Red Keep.”

“Yes, but these Dornishmen had injured him. We demand justice, my prince. Lord Ashford died because of them. They killed him.”

“Did Lord Ashford have any health problem?”

“No, not that we know of.”

Trystane thought about it. The death seemed strange. “Did he show any sign of weakness, of injury on your way back to the Red Keep? Was something unusual?”

“Hell, we almost had to carry him to the Red Keep. We demand justice for our lord.”

Trystane heard the testimony of each one of them. They almost all said the same thing, with a few variances. They all accused the Dornishmen to have started the fight. Trystane had to be careful to
not show his skepticism. Dorne and the Reach had a very long history of war and blood, and he suspected the knights of Lord Ashford to not tell the entire truth. After he heard them, he sent them out and called the officers of the City Watch on patrol who interrupted the fight. These came from Dorne.

According to his countrymen, the fight was well started when they arrived, and they had to struggle to stop all this. They said the knights of the Reach were more difficult to comply. They said they sent the Ashfords away because they could only cause more trouble. Trystane had to admit that with the much larger amount of Dornishmen in the capital, it was better for any man from the Reach to remain inside the Red Keep and away from places where his people used to go.

According to the words of the Dornish who took part to this fight, it all began because a drunken knight from the Reach grabbed a girl who was with a Dornish, and the fight began after that. Each group went to defend the man from their homeland.

Trystane had two different versions of the story. He thought that the best way to get the truth was to ask other witnesses, the other patrons who were in the tavern back then, and perhaps the owner and the employees. Trystane took his horse and brought ten men of his personal guard with him. Criminals were many in the streets of the city right now, and precautions were required.

The owner of the tavern welcomed him with a profusion of compliments and bows, and offered him freely his best ale, but Trystane kindly refused.

“I have a few questions for you. There’s a fight that happened here yesterday. I’d like to know what happened exactly.” He placed a silver stag on the table to encourage the man. He was big, with an unkept beard, and he had a booming voice. This man was certainly used to shout. The owner took the coin without hesitation.

“I remember that day very well. We struggled to survive right now, with the winter, the damage the Mad Queen caused, not to mention robbers and killers that walk all around in the streets. It’s a miracle that I can still hold this place. Well, we had some chance, or so I thought yesterday, when a few knights from the Reach came in. These people always have a lot of money to spend. One of them was a lord, some lord Asher, or Ashor, I’m not sure. They asked for my best ale and my best food. I made good money with them. I hadn’t seen a silver coin for centuries. They kept drinking, and the money kept coming, so I encouraged them to keep drinking, until they asked for some of my girls. That allows to make good money as well. It was at this moment that the others came in. These guys from the south, your country. Without insulting you, they don’t pay as well as those from the Reach, and they were obviously not as rich. I didn’t want any trouble, so I tried to place them in a corner of the room, but they refused. The guy who was at their head decided to take place right next to the knights. They began to insult each other. A few of my girls went to the Dornish, to amuse them, and the knights said they were wasting their time on Dornishmen. The two groups kept talking against each other. And then, one of the Dornish stood up and grabbed one of my girls who sat on the legs of a knight. The knight pushed the Dornish, or perhaps it was the other way around, I’m not sure. Then the other spat at his face. I’m quite sure it was the Dornish who spat. Then they started to fight, and their friends joined them. It was a chance the City Watch wasn’t far. These idiots would have destroyed my place. I was lucky that it survived the flames and the battle with the dragons. I don’t want to lose it to some bastards who don’t like how the others smell.”

Now Trystane had a third version. The owner’s story wasn’t clear or clean cut like the two others, but he suspected she was probably closer to the reality. His father often noticed when he rendered justice that the most truthful testimonies were those where the witness wasn’t entirely sure of what happened.
“May I ask questions to your employees?” Trystane asked.

“Of course. But please, don’t bother them for too long. I have work to do.”

“I’ll be quick.”

Trystane first asked questions to the two men who worked there. The first wasn’t inside when the fight started, but he saw the two groups insulting each other before it came to fists. The second witnessed the whole scene. He said that it was a knight in red armor, the color of House Ashford, who tried to grab a girl away from a Dornishmen. He also claimed that the Dornishman was mistreating the girl, and that the knight was only trying to help her.

Then Trystane turned his inquiry to the girls. He knew well enough that this establishment had to be a tavern as much as a brothel. The only difference was that, unlike the specialized establishments made for the rich merchants of the capital, the knights and the lords, only customers who bought drinks could ask for the services of these girls, if they were ready to pay for them as well. Most of the girls who worked here were in the room when the brawl began. Some received fists in the altercation. They complained about it, but although Trystane showed concern and apologized for what they had to endure, he was mostly interested in what they had to tell him about the whole incident.

Sadly, many only realized there was a fight when it started. They didn’t see the events that led to it, occupied as they were with other customers. Still, one saw the whole action. Her friend was sitting on the knees of a knight with red colors. “Then one of these other men from Dorne grabbed her by the arm, bringing her close to him. The red knight was angry. He pushed the other man, and the other man, the one who grabbed my friend, he spat at his face. They began to fight. And then the fight broke. I was dropped on the floor by another man. They began to break everything.”

Trystane shook his head when she was done with her version. It seemed all this had been nothing but a stupid brawl between men from the Reach and from Dorne over whores. The last girl he interrogated was the one who found herself at the center of the commotion.

“I did nothing, I swear,” she said.

“No one is accusing you,” Trystane told her. “Just tell me what happened.”

“Well, I was just doing my job, amusing one of the knights, and then there was this Dornish who grabbed me by the arm. Then the knight tried to get me back, and the fight started. I barely managed to escape. I’m lucky I didn’t get any bruise in that.”

“So, that’s all?”

“Yes, though I wish the gold cloaks didn’t send the red knights away. I mean, without offense ser, but Dornishmen are really too strange sometimes. I can’t believe some of you have no balls.”

Trystane frowned. “No balls?”

“Yeah. There was this man among them. He seemed younger than the others, and smaller too. When I approached him and tried to grab his balls… there was nothing. I heard all sorts of rumors on Dornish, but I never thought this one could be true. I didn’t like this one. I even thought he was about to kill me at one moment.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I saw him holding a dagger in his hand. He hid it under his cloak right after I saw it.”
That caught Trystane’s attention. “Can you describe him? How did he look like?”

“It’s like I told you, ser. He was smaller than his companions. Perhaps paler too. I’m not sure. I didn’t see his face, but I’m sure of one thing, he didn’t have any balls. It’s really disgusting. They could tell us when it’s the case. It would be the least of courtesies. I know that I’m a tavern girl, but still.”

“Thank you.” Trystane hastily left her. He asked questions to the other people there. The owner, the male employees and the girls, none could confirm that they saw one of the Dornish with a knife during the fight, though a few admitted or complained that they couldn’t see many details in the general confusion.

Finally, Trystane had to content himself with what he had. He left the tavern and came back to the Red Keep. On his way, he saw the difficult efforts that were made to rebuild. Most people would spend the first year of winter in rudimentary shelters. The surviving buildings from Cersei’s madness were occupied for the most by the Dornish soldiers. They were a great source of income for those who didn’t lose everything, and a way to protect what they had left. Soldiers provided both money and protection to those who welcomed them as residents in their homes or shops. For those who didn’t have the chance to have a home, the situation was much more difficult, with criminality, sickness and cold to torture them at every hour of the day.

Trystane arrived to the Red Keep and went immediately to ask other questions to the knights who were present when Lord Ashford died. When he arrived, they were discussing one of the last decisions that Tommen Baratheon had taken before he died, which was to outlaw the trials by combat. Varys told Trystane that Myrcella’s brother did this in the hope that the Sparrows would release his mother and his wife in exchange. He asked the knights a few more questions on how the lord died, and when he had the answers he was seeking, he went to see the Grand Maester. He was still examining the body.

“Perwyn, something new?” Trystane asked.

“Perhaps, my lord.” He joined his hand and deeply exhaled. “I know the gravity of what I’m about to say, my lord, but I believe it might be possible that Lord Ashford was poisoned.”

“It is not only possible, Perwyn. This is what happened.”

“My lord?”

“I questioned the men who were present when he died. They said he began to bleed by the nose and to have difficulty to breathe about a few hours after the fight in the tavern. It wasn’t the fight that killed Lord Ashford. Someone poisoned him. You told me there was a cut on his body?”

“Yes, my lord, on the upper part of his right arm. There.” The Grand Maester indicated the little cut right under the elbow. “I am no expert in poison, my lord, but I know it is possible to inject some in the bloodstream by using a blade drenched into the said poison. However, when it happens, we should see an infection where the blade cut, which is not the case here. The cut is clean, without any sign of corruption.”

“Tell me, did the cut start to heal before he died?”

The Grand Maester leaned forward the look at the cut more closely. “I think… We’ve got something here, my lord. This injury should have started to cicatrize. If it was made during the brawl, there should be early signs of healing, but here, it seems like the cut was made only right before he died.”
“It wasn’t. It was made at the tavern, I’m quite sure of that.”

“If you say so, my lord,” Perwyn uncertainly said. “Halt to the cicatrisation process. Blood dripping from the nose. Struggle to breathe. And the effects start hours after the poison enters the bloodstream. I don’t know. I should write to my colleagues at the Citadel. They should be able to provide me with an answer.”

“Write to the Citadel, Perwyn, but I think I know what poison did this.”

“You know, my lord?”

“Yes.” And I know of only one person in the capital who uses it.

A few minutes later, Trystane gave the order to Lord Yronwood to gather his best men for an important mission.

“What mission is that, my prince?” he asked.

“You must arrest Tyene Sand, and bring her to the black cells, for the murder of Lord Edrik Ashford.”

At last, his cousin would face the consequences of her actions.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter : Jon
JON XIII

The gates opened and Jon rode into Winterfell. After weeks of traveling south, organizing the defenses in the castles along the way, and fighting back the dead who pursued them, he was home. The vanguard had already arrived, so the castle was filled with soldiers who were waiting for them. Jon had given responsibility of the main body of their army to Ser Davos, with their baggage train, while Jon commanded the rearguard who had to slow down the dead behind, giving time to the carts of weapons and provisions to reach Winterfell safely.

The first half of the journey had been horrible. They were being attacked every day, and they barely managed to keep the enemy away, and every time at high cost. Jon had placed three thousand men in the rearguard when they left Castle Black. Only five hundred were left, and Jon was sure that most of those who died were turned into wights. Of the large army they had at Castle Black, barely half were still alive. Five thousand men dead, and all that Jon managed to do was to delay the progress of the White Walkers. Tyrion had done the same, but he only lost two thousand men.

Ser Davos and Arya were waiting for him when he unhorsed. “Your Grace, we’re glad to see you made it. Are the wights close?” his main advisor asked.

“We haven’t seen them for a week.”

“That means you put some distance between you.”

“I don’t think I have much to earn from it. The Night King is probably increasing his numbers. There are hundreds of thousands of bodies all across the North, buried under the ground, and preserved by the cold. The White Walkers are probably awakening them as we speak, and the more they awake, the more they gain in strength.”

Davos’s eyes widened in fear. “Gods, I didn’t think about it.”

Jon steeled himself to give an order he gave to all the people he left in charge of a stronghold. “Ser Davos, we must burn the dead. All of them.”

The Onion Knight nodded, though it was obvious he relinquished the job. “That means we must burn Father’s body, and Rickon’s too?” Arya asked.

“We have no choice, Arya. If Father was alive, I think he would tell us to burn his body after he’s dead.”

Arya nodded. She understood. This wasn’t a pleasing notion to Jon either, to profane the tombs of his ancestors, but the situation required it. “Where are Tyrion and Sansa? Is everything ready for a siege?” He had to speak with them, and Jon had apologies to present to his friend.

Ser Davos and Arya seemed bothered by what he said. “Your Grace, you better follow us,” the knight said.

Jon did what he said, and they all went to the part of the castle where the rooms of the Lord of Winterfell were positioned. On their way, Jon saw Gared Tuttle discussing with Talia Forrester.
They found Bran in his old chambers. Meera Reed was with him. Ser Davos closed the door behind them.

“Bran, I’m glad to see you.”

“Me too, Jon.” His brother made a forced smile.

“Lady Meera.”

“Young Grace, is my father with you?”

Jon inhaled deeply before he answered. “My lady, your father was with me in the rearguard. I’m sorry to tell you this, but Howland Reed died in the surroundings of the Last Hearth. He gave his life so others could live.”

Her face broke down. “Meera,” Bran said in a low voice. She gripped his hand.

“I’m sorry, Meera. I know what it is to lose your father,” Arya said.

The Reed girl acknowledged Arya’s words. Jon placed a hand on the shoulder of the sister he always loved the most. He knew how hard it had been for her when she saw their father being executed in King’s Landing.

“I’m afraid Lord Reed’s death is not the only dire news we have,” Ser Davos said. “The Last Hearth and Karhold fell. The maesters there sent ravens not long before they were overwhelmed by the wights. The lands south of the Gift are falling.”

“Ned Umber,” Jon whispered. The boy had gone back to the Last Hearth. He and his uncle Mors had to be dead now. “What about the Dreadfort. Any news from Ser Brynden?”

“He answered our raven a few days ago. He’s preparing the defenses there. For now, they haven’t seen a single wight, but I’m afraid it won’t take long.”

Jon sighed. “How is Lady Karstark?” He hoped she wasn’t too affected by the loss of her home. It was a chance that she was at Winterfell when it happened, still.

“Young Grace, Alys Karstark is dead,” Ser Davos declared.

“Dead? How did this happen?”

Davos looked at Arya. Jon’s little sister started long explanations. “Jon, when I arrived in Winterfell two weeks ago, the castle was empty.”

“Empty?”

“Everyone was dead. There were bodies everywhere. The sentinels, the guards, the servants, Maester Wolkan, the knights, the lords, the women, the children, they were all dead.”

“Tyrion? Sansa?”

“We haven’t found their bodies,” Ser Davos said, “and we found no trace of their daughter either. But when me and my men approached Winterfell, we came across a spot on the Kingsroad. There were bodies everywhere. Most were wearing Lannister helmets, but there were a few of the Vale as well. We didn’t find Lord Tyrion’s body, but we found his squire, Podrick Payne. He had been dead for weeks.”
Sansa and Tyrion, gone? Dead? That was impossible. “What happened?”

Ser Davos pursed his lips. “When I looked through the reports and correspondence of the Lady Sansa, I found out that a group of Knights of the Vale stayed at Winterfell for quite some time. They were those who deserted the Wall last month, led by Ser Vance Corbray, the commander of Queensgate who defected. And according to your sister’s note, they were about two thousand men. We found a few bodies of men with sigils from the Vale on them, but not that much. More interesting, there were men with such sigils among the bodies we found on the Kingsroad. And finally, there are remnants of a recent camp outside, with no bodies to be seen. It is most likely the camp Lord Vance’s men raised when they stayed here.”

“The Knights of the Vale turned against us,” Bran declared. “They attacked us, taking us unaware. They slaughtered everyone. Meera and I escaped because one of our men hid us in the crypts. We stayed there for days before Arya arrived and found us.”

“The Vale betrayed us?” Jon asked.

“Not all of them,” Davos said. “I already questioned their men who are here, those who didn’t desert. They claim they knew nothing about it, though Lord Rolland Longthorpe said something strange. He remained at Queensgate when Ser Vance Corbray deserted. His son was Lord Vance’s squire, and he eavesdropped a discussion Ser Corbray had with one of his men not long before he left. He said he would only give his support to someone if he got his revenge for his brother’s death.”

“Ser Lyn.” Jon looked at Arya. She killed Ser Lyn Corbray back at the Eyrie. “Who was he supposed to support?”

“We don’t know, but whoever it was, it seems that Ser Vance wanted revenge for his brother’s death. Perhaps he saw killing the Lady Sansa and her daughter as revenge enough for the death of his brother. A sister for a brother.”

Jon looked away. *Tyron. Sansa. Their daughter.* The last time he saw the little man, they quarrelled about the wildfire that killed thousands of men. Now that the White Walkers were invading the North, Jon had come to accept the fact that Tyron’s actions had been necessary. Terrible, deadly, maybe cruel, but necessary. How many people were turned into wights as they spoke? How many of the men they left in castles along the Wall wouldn’t make it alive, now that the dead could strike them by behind?

“As we said, we found no body of the Lady Sansa and her daughter. Maybe they were taken as prisoners. The Lady of Casterly Rock and her only daughter can make valuable hostages. As for Lord Tyrion, I don’t give him much chance to survive. The snows covered most of the bodies on the road. His is probably buried somewhere. We couldn’t dig out most of the dead.”

Jon had wanted to reconcile with Tyrion when they met again, but they wouldn’t. He would never see his friend again, the one who saved his life once at Castle Black, who came to his help against the dead when no one would, and who took care of his sister when she was a prisoner in the south. Jon had never entirely liked the dwarf’s bitter sense of humor, but now he regretted it more than ever. And Sansa and Joanna, they were gone as well.

“Do you have any idea where my sister could be?” he asked.

“I already sent ravens everywhere in the North, warning them about the betrayal of Ser Vance and demanding that they give any information they might have on the Lady Sansa, to tell us if they saw any sign of her or her baby. I ordered Moat Cailin and White Harbor to search every person who would pass by. If they want to leave the North, they can only do it by the harbor or by the Neck. For
a group as large as theirs, these are their only options.”

Jon gripped his sword. “Do everything you can. And Ser Davos, I want you to find Tyrion’s body.”

“Your Grace, I understand, but I don’t believe it is wise. The White Walkers…”

“I will not leave him dead in the snows to be turned into a wight like everyone else!”

“Jon is right. We shouldn’t abandon him. What if it was your son, Ser Davos? Or your wife? You would want them to come back like this?” Arya asked.

His advisor was silent for a moment, but it was Bran who interrupted them. “Jon, Arya, I understand. I regret Tyrion’s death as well, but I don’t believe he would like us to risk our lives only to be sure he wouldn’t come back as an undead man. And we won’t make it better for Sansa or anyone if one of us, or anybody dies only to burn Tyrion’s body.”

“I agree with Lord Bran, your Grace. We must focus our attention on enhancing the defenses of Winterfell,” Ser Davos argued. “If this castle falls, then we are doomed.”

Jon looked straight into the knight’s eyes. “Ser Davos, do we truly have a chance to survive? We couldn’t hold them at the Wall, and it was where we were better positioned to fight them. They were over a hundred thousand after Hardhome. Now there might be even more. What are the odds for us? Have the odds ever been in our favor in this war? Tyrion is dead, and Sansa… she might be dead as well for what we know. Maybe they killed her outside Winterfell. Do you really think we can beat them?”

Ser Davos’s lips quivered. “We cannot, not alone. You are right. But we have to try, if only to delay the inevitable. We have to give these fuckers a fight, even if it’s useless. Even if we are doomed to all die in the end, at least we can bring as many of them in the grave with us.”

“I agree with Ser Davos, Jon. We cannot abandon, not now. Not after everything we’ve done. Not after so many people died for us,” Arya said.

“Even if the White Walkers defeat us, we may have provided enough time for the other kingdoms to prepare for their coming. Every wight, every White Walker we kill, it won’t be in vain,” Bran said.

Jon looked at all of them. They were determined to fight. He remembered a time when he wanted to abandon everything, when he came back from the dead. He needed the news of Rickon’s captivity to force him back into the fray. His only relatives still alive were all in this room, safe for Sansa, but she may be dead for all he knew. No, not all of them. He had another one somewhere, an aunt.

“Any news from Daenerys?”

“None,” Davos replied.

Jon sighed. “Well, like Ser Davos said, better to give these fuckers a fight. Send ravens everywhere. Tell every lord in the North to fight to the death, and warn the other kingdoms of the coming of the dead. King’s Landing, Casterly Rock, Highgarden, Horn Hill, Runestone, Duskendale, Harrenhal, everywhere. Even if it takes all the ravens we have. Did you announce Tyrion’s death to Casterly Rock?”

“Not yet.”

“Tell them. They have the right to know.”
“Yes, your Grace.”

Ser Davos nodded and left the room. Jon looked at his brother. “Bran, can you tell us where the army of the dead is right now?”

Bran looked ashamed. “Jon, I’m not sure this is possible any longer. My powers… I can’t control them. Not like before. I want to see something, and I see something else. There are times a vision starts all of a sudden, without warning, and others where I can’t manage to have one. And… I’m afraid that each time I start one, I may never come back. The Three-Eyed Raven warned me that if I remained too long, I could drown. I didn’t understand what he meant back then, but perhaps he was warning me about this.”

“He can’t warg like he could before,” Meera Reed added. “Every time he starts a vision or he wargs into a raven, he may never come back. He might end stuck into the vision, or into the mind of the raven.”

“I could try…”

“Out of the question!” The girl snapped immediately.

“Meera, we must know where the White Walkers are.”

“Have you forgotten the last time? You spent an entire day in some sort of trance back in the crypts, and after we managed to get you out, you could barely move or speak.”

“That won’t happen again.”

“We know very well this is a promise you can’t hold.”

Bran looked at him. “Jon.” He begged him to intervene.

Jon didn’t know what to do. He didn’t want to lose Bran, not when he just lost Sansa and Tyrion. On the other hand, Bran was one of their main assets against the White Walkers.

“We know the dead are coming,” Arya intervened. “They will be here one day or another. Whether it’s today, tomorrow or the next week, we know they will be here. We don’t need visions to know that. I say we leave Bran alone and prepare for their assault. Three-Eyed Raven or not, they will come anyway.”

“I have to try anyway,” Bran insisted. “We know the dead are coming, but knowing when, how and how many might help us.”

“Bran, do you really think that you could help us, and that you can come back from these dreams you have?” Jon asked.

“I can.”

A heavy silence settled into the room. “I will not forbid you to go back into your visions,” Jon said, resigned.

“Jon!” Arya shouted.

“I just hope you know what you’re doing.”

“You once died for people who were your enemies not long ago, Jon,” Bran said. He looked at him, then at Arya, then at Meera. “Tell me you’re not ready to die for the people you love, and I give up
on being the Three-Eyed Raven, I give up on the visions, I give up on warging, and I go back to being the crippled boy everyone pities.”

“Bran, you’re not a cripple,” Arya said.

“Then Tyrion wasn’t a dwarf, and you’re not a girl.”

“Bran, don’t do it because you want to prove that you’re not useless,” Jon told him.

“This isn’t why I’m doing it. I’m doing because I must. We all have different destinies, Jon. Each one of us. When I was a boy, I thought I would be a knight later, but I was wrong. I will never be a knight. I will never wield a sword, I will never mount a horse, or bend a bow. I will never save people the way you and Arya do with your sword, or the way Meera does it with her spear, but I can save many more with my powers. That’s my duty, and you know that if Father was in my place, he would do the same.”

Jon looked at his brother. He visited him before he left Winterfell. He talked to him, despite the fact Bran couldn’t hear him. He was always full of life when he was a boy. Now, he was a broken man, stuck to a wheelchair. He couldn’t do anything without help.

“I suppose the time when we climbed walls and played with wooden swords is over,” Jon said with regret.

Bran nodded with a sad expression. “Yes, it is over.”

“Just promise us to be careful.”

“I will be.”

“Meera, can you keep an eye on him?”

“All right,” she said after a moment, bitterness plain in her tone.

Bran shot a last glance at her, then let his head fall and closed his eyes. When they opened again, they were white like the sky.

Jon and Arya both exchanged a look with Meera, who assured them with her eyes that she wouldn’t leave their brother, and they left. They didn’t say a word for quite some time. They arrived on the battlements, where men were busy organizing the castle’s defenses.

“Jon,” Arya said.

“Aye.”

“If I die, promise me you’ll burn my body.” She was looking straight into his eyes. “I don’t want to come back like one of these things.”

“At one condition. You burn my body if I’m the one to die.”

She nodded. “I’ll make sure your ashes are next to Father’s and aunt Lyanna’s.”

Jon looked towards the crypts. “I’m sorry we have to do this.”

“It’s not your fault. You’re right. I don’t want to see Father or anyone I love as a wight.”

“Do you think Sansa is still alive?”
“I know she still lives,” Arya replied after a moment of hesitation.

“How can you be sure?”

“Sansa survived King’s Landing, Joffrey, Cersei, Tywin. She’s not… she’s not like me, but she’s a survivor, just like me. Just like us. Even death couldn’t kill you.”

Jon smiled. “Right. I hope she’s alive. I was never close to her, but… When I was at the Wall, when I thought that all my family was dead, she wrote to me. And then I knew I wasn’t alone anymore. And then we found you, and Bran.”

“Well, I found Sansa, much more than she found me.”

“Aye, but the next time you find one of us, please try not to kill him.”

They laughed very shortly. “Ser Davos seems to believe that Tyrion is dead, but if his body was never found… Do you think he could still be out there, somewhere?”

Arya shrugged. “He survived the sky cells of aunt Lysa, two trials, the mountains of the Vale and its hill tribes, months in the Neck, and me. He’s not easy to kill. And he also survived a marriage with Sansa. I don’t know how he did.”

He couldn’t stop laughing either. He wanted to hang on the hope that his friend and his other sister were still alive, even though the odds were slim.

“All right, we’re all hard to kill, I agree.” That didn’t make them immortal. “Did you and Ser Davos take care of everything while I was out there, fighting the dead?”

“Everything is ready. We have fires everywhere on the battlements, so we can shoot as many flaming arrows as we want. We have barrels of oil to spill on the outer walls and the grounds outside. We thought about placing scorpions, but they wouldn’t do much damage, so instead we placed catapults with flaming boulders in the courtyard. I regret we don’t have some wildfire to throw at them. The castle is full, so everyone is stuck against each other, but they’re all sleeping under a roof. We have enough provisions to last a year of siege. As for water, with all this snow, that won’t be a problem.”

“What about the Knights of the Vale? They could turn on us again.”

“Well, they’re not many compared to the others, but Ser Davos had some of their lords and knights put into the cells. He promised their men that nothing would come to them if they fought against the dead and never betrayed us.”

Jon nodded. “I will go and talk with them later.”

“However, I must say it’s not the men of the Vale who worry me. It’s the Lannisters. Now that Tyrion and Sansa are gone… I don’t know what they might do.”

“I’ll talk to their commanders later. They must fight with us, they have no other choice. How many men do we have overall to defend Winterfell?”

“About seven thousand. We called some from minor strongholds. Ser Davos believes they wouldn’t hold on their own anyway, and they brought all the provisions they had with them.”

“Good. Let’ hope that will be enough.”
“Jon, I want you to know that, whatever happens, you’ll always be my brother. I mean it.”

Jon smiled and ruffled her hair, like he used to do before. “I know. And you’ll always be my little sister.”

They continued to inspect the battlements. A thick snow was falling, which greatly reduced the visibility, but Jon knew that they would never miss the coming of the White Walkers. Many times at the Wall, a thick snowfall like this one was going on when a huge storm arrived, and each time it was right when the dead attacked them. They might not see them coming, but they would know it.

Jon was inspecting the trebuchets in the courtyard when Ser Davos came in his direction. “Your Grace, we just received it. We might have a chance after all.”

The Onion Knight was holding a small piece of paper, like the ones they used for ravens, in his hand. Jon opened it and read the content.

*Daenerys Targaryen is at Barrowton. She has an army of forty thousand men with her, and three dragons. There are also a few people with special powers with her, powers that could help us against the dead, and her army has weapons made of dragonglass. I saw them. We are riding for Winterfell as quickly as we can.*

*I told her about Jon Snow’s plan to join the Night’s Watch, and I think she will let him live. She only asks him to bend the knee, but it was already in our plans.*

*No matter what happens, make sure that Winterfell doesn’t fall. There seem to be problems with ravens because of the weather, so we may only be a few days away from you when you receive this message. We’re coming.*

*Tyrion Lannister*

Jon couldn’t believe it. The seal was that of the Lord of Casterly Rock, and it was Tyrion’s writing. Jon looked up at Ser Davos.

“Only a few days?” he asked.

“Possibly. If that’s the case…”

A horn was blown. The first bow was followed by a second, then a third. Jon, Arya and Ser Davos froze for a second, and looked at each other. For one little second, it was as if the world had stopped. Then everything turned into a blur of activities. Jon shouted orders, and so did Ser Davos. Arya followed him to the battlements, where archers took position and lit their arrows with fire. Jon looked, and far away, at the horizon, a huge storm was coming. Even with the limited visibility, they could see it coming from afar. Jon unsheathed his sword, and Arya did the same next to him.

Ser Davos appeared close to him. “Only a few days, he said.”

“Aye,” Jon replied. “Only a few days.”

They only had to hold them off a few days, and then, his aunt would come with her dragons, and they could survive. They *actually* could survive. So many things could happen. They might not be able to hold the Night King at distance before the reinforcements arrived. They might all die before the dragons arrived. But there was a chance. No matter how small it was, they had a chance. They thought Tyrion was dead only a few hours ago, and now he was alive. Everything was possible.

As the storm approached them, Jon prepared himself for the battle of his life, the battle that would
decide the fate of the entire North. The Third Battle of Winterfell was about to begin, and for better or worse, he felt this would be the last one.

Chapter End Notes

And so the battle begins.

Please review

Next chapter : Sansa
We finally get to know what happened to Sansa, and where she is.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The ship rocked back and forth. The wood planks creaked against each other. Sansa felt something coming in her mouth, up from her stomach. She rushed to the bucket and spit out what was left of her breakfast. The sea definitely didn’t suit her. How she would have complained if her father managed to get her on that boat before Cersei arrested her.

One month on rough paths across the North, then two weeks aboard a ship heading for an unknown destination, being watched at every turn, forbidden to speak. Away from her daughter.

She didn’t see Joanna since she climbed into that boat on the eastern shore of the North. After the Knights of the Vale, led by Ser Vance Corbray, took them by surprise and killed almost everybody in Winterfell, Sansa was forced into riding east with his men, always east. She could have escaped through one the secret passages or hid in the crypts like she ordered Bran to, but that would have meant abandoning one of the people who mattered more in her life than everything. She was in the courtyard when it all began. Ser Vance had welcomed knights and lords who were forced to sleep outside the walls, in the camp the men of the Vale erected. Sansa had noticed that they were more than usual. She should have guessed something was amiss at this moment. Ser Corbray shouted, and the next moment any man who came from the Vale started to kill everyone who wasn’t from his kingdom inside the walls. The guards Tyrion left behind helped her leave the courtyard, using the confusion all around to escape notice. The Knights of the Vale didn’t know she would be there when they started it.

Her guards knew of the secret passages that led into the crypts, and of those that led outside the castle. She had sent two of them to bring Bran to safety, while she decided she would take her chance with leaving Winterfell. However, there was one thing she had to do before she left. She had to bring Joanna with her. She couldn’t leave without her. That was her doom. They came across a dozen of Ser Vance’s men in the corridor where her nursery was. Her own guards were no match. They were all killed, and Sansa was captured as she put her hand on the handle of the door. She watched, powerless, as the men forced the wetnurse to come out with her baby in her arms. They were prisoners now.

On their way east, Sansa was separated from her daughter. One group escorted her, while another brought Joanna and her wetnurse somewhere else. Sansa had cried, screamed, begged, but nothing would move her captors, men with sigils from the Vale, but although some were knights, she knew they had nothing to do with the knights she admired in her childhood. They reminded her of Ser Meryn Trant and Ser Boros Blount. Each question she asked was answered by a cold gaze at best, a slap in the face at worst. She learned again to shut her mouth, like she did before. She turned back to her former self, the little bird who did as she was told. Well, not exactly. She didn’t care to say empty courtesies. These would be useless with such men, and they didn’t care for them like Joffrey did. In that sense, they were better than her first betrothed. They left her quiet as long as she said nothing.
She didn’t have to say anything.

At night, she would cry in silence. She would cry for the loss of her daughter, and pray to all gods to bring Joanna back to her. She prayed that Tyrion would save her. Only he could help her. That didn’t last. A fortnight after they left Winterfell, two men joined their group, and they showed them a head. Sansa had screamed when she realized that the head with an arrow going through was that of Ser Bronn of the Blackwater, the former sellsword, Tyrion’s friend. She feared the worst, and a few minutes after the head arrived, men started to taunt her about the fact that her imp of a husband was dead.

She couldn’t believe it. Tyrion couldn’t be dead. He was still alive, somewhere, she knew it. Now at night, she would clamp the tissue of her cloak near her neck, where her golden necklace would normally be. She had lost it in the struggle at Winterfell. She felt its absence keenly. When Tyrion was away, she would touch it, and it was as if her husband wasn’t that far away from her. She had the impression that Tyrion was slipping away from her, and yet she felt that he was still alive. No, these men couldn’t be right. They told horrible stories day and night about how Tyrion supposedly died, all more horrible than the other. One said that they cut his body to pieces, another said they impaled him on a spear, and others said they buried him alive in the snow and left him to suffocate. There was one who said he escaped, but that he had no chance to survive alone in the wilderness, until another pretended they found his body cold in the snow, after the battle was over.

Sansa looked up to see the man who was watching her. He kept a close eye on her, and his eyes seldom wandered elsewhere. Being watched was something but seeing someone watch her constantly was worse. She always had someone watching her closely since they left Winterfell, day and night, whether she slept or was awaken, and even when she made water. Sansa could feel their gaze on her at every hour of the day. There were so many questions she asked herself, but she knew she wouldn’t get any answer from her captors. They kept telling her to be silent, and if she didn’t comply with their orders, then it meant bruises. She was back at the time when she was Joffrey’s toy. Sansa was afraid for Joanna, for Jon, for Arya, for Bran, for Tyrion. *Is he still alive?* She tried to chase that question from her mind, but it didn’t work. She was haunted by her worries about the people she loved.

She took back her seat and looked through the window of her cabin. There was only the sea to be seen. It was always only the sea. Since that day when they forced her into a boat and brought her on this ship that was anchored near the eastern shores of the North, all she could see was the sea. She looked away, but there was nothing interesting to look at in the cabin, and if she couldn’t find something to focus on, then her thoughts would go to the people whose fate she didn’t know. She looked back to the sea. The waves were all alike, limitless lines that moved in order one after another. They had no beginning and no end. The sky was grey, and Sansa wouldn’t be surprised if the snows started to fall again. They spent more than half the journey under snowfall, and there wasn’t a single day without a single snowflake. She could hear the waves crashing on the hull of the ship, though she couldn’t see them. The angle of the window didn’t allow her this view. Instead, everything she saw was uniform. The world seemed so simple like this. Only a few birds came to disturb this perfection from time to time. Looking to the sky, Sansa saw a dozen of them. When she set her eyes again on the sea, she saw the hull of another ship. Her heart started pounding. Perhaps she had a chance. Perhaps these people… Her hopes vanished as quickly as they appeared. She couldn’t expect another ship to save her. They had no one loyal to them on this side of Westeros. The seas were either controlled by Harrold Arryn, who betrayed them, or by Daenerys Targaryen. Their coalition had no ship in this area since the Vale betrayed them.

A few minutes later, Sansa saw another ship appearing from her point of view. Then a third came
into sight. They bore no sigil on their mast, so that was no armada. They were trade vessels. That could only mean one thing. They were approaching a major harbor. Soon, Sansa heard someone shout orders on the deck to the sailors, and about half a dozen ships were visible from her window. Sansa knew of only two places where there could be such an amount of traffic.

The ship rocked, this time not back and forth, by side to side. They touched something on the starboard side. Sansa’s window gave on the port side. She heard a great sound of something plunging into water. The guard stood up and stirred himself. A moment later, four other men entered her cabin. One of them, their leader most likely, spoke to her.

“You come with us. Cover your face with your hood. Let no one see your face. Don’t talk to anybody.”

Reluctantly, not hastily, but without hesitation either, Sansa obeyed the orders. She had been used to it long ago, and long habits died hard. One man grabbed her by the arm and forced her out. That was unnecessary since she would have come without protest anyway. They walked through the main deck, and used a catwalk to leave the ship. The docks were busy with men loading and unloading ships. Sansa didn’t recognize the place. It was not King’s Landing, for sure. She would recognize its harbor any time. After all, it was there that she assisted to the departure of Princess Myrcella for Dorne, right before she was almost raped by the angry mob. Sandor Clegane saved her on that day.

She followed obediently. She didn’t know where her captors were leading her, but she supposed she would know soon enough. There was no point in asking them. She knew better than to try her luck. They led her through the docks and into narrow alleys, where only few people were to be seen. Sansa noticed the mountains around them. They had to be in Gulltown, the fourth harbor in importance of Westeros.

They stopped before a place that looked like a tavern. The men guarding her led her inside without a word. A placard said it was close. Once they were in, she could only note that there was no one inside. Three of the men who accompanied her here remained in the room where patrons should have been drinking and eating, and their leader led her up by stairs. The corridor up had about six doors, and she was led to the one completely at the end of the said corridor.

“Go in,” the man roughly said.

“What’s waiting for me on the other side?” she asked.

“You’ll see.” Again, she had asked a question in vain. She took a deep breathe, seized the handle, turned it, and opened the door.

From the doorstep, all she could see was a table with two chairs, two glasses, and a flagon of wine. Nothing else to see. She stepped in, and the door closed behind her. She looked at it, then back to the table, and approached it. When she was only a few feet away from it, a voice she never thought to hear again came from behind.

“It is a relief to finally see you again, my lady.”

She turned swiftly on her to see Littlefinger staring at her, a smirk on his lips like always, his hands clasped. “You?”

“Me,” he confirmed.

“You should be dead.”

“I should be, after you sent me to King’s Landing, but your friend Margaery was no longer in any
position to execute me when I arrived, and Cersei saw me more useful alive than dead.”

Cersei. That bitch let this man live. “If she trusted you, then that proves without any doubt she was an utter fool.”

His smile didn’t fade. “I regret what happened between us. I’m afraid there was a misunderstanding at White Harbor, the last time we saw each other. You were angry, I understand.”

“Yes, angry because you killed my family,” she shot back.

Still smirking, Littlefinger walked past her, not without brushing her arm on his way. Sansa was glad that her arms were fully covered. He sat at the table and poured himself some wine. Then he filled the other glass and made a sign to invite her to sit. Sansa answered by casting an icy glare, but his smile only grew wider. His eyes didn’t leave her as he took a sip. Her eyes didn’t leave him either, but for very different reasons.

“I had no part in your family’s death, Sansa. Joffrey tried to murder your brother Bran when he visited Winterfell. Cersei arrested your father and charged him with treason, and she put you under arrest as well, turning you into Joffrey’s toy. Tywin arranged the slaughter of your family at the Twins. He gave your mother’s home to the Freys after they murdered her, and he gave Winterfell to Roose Bolton, and it was his son who murdered Rickon. I did no harm to your family. Every Stark who died during this war, it was because of the Lannisters.”

“You’re lying. You started all this with your lies. You convinced my aunt to poison Jon Arryn, then you lied to my mother when you told her Tyrion tried to kill Bran.”

“And you think Tyrion Lannister wouldn’t have killed Brandon Stark, had the boy remembered who pushed him out of the window?”

“Tyrion would never do that.”

“Are you sure? Do you really think you know your husband as much as I do?”

“I know him better than anyone, and he has been more a friend to me before we even met than you ever were.”

“I observed him while he lived in King’s Landing. I could study him for years, my lady, and let me tell you that your husband is not the man you believe. I can understand that you came to appreciate him, even that you convinced yourself to be in love with him, after everything that befell you. His presence was reassuring for you, but that doesn’t make him your friend, or even your ally. If he was given the choice between your family and his, make no mistake, he would choose the Lannisters without hesitation.”

Sansa scoffed. “That proves you don’t know him at all.”

He laid down his cup. “You will come to understand that everything I did was for your own good. You are safe now. Tyrion Lannister is dead.”

“You’re lying.”

“Am I?”

“You lie so often that I wouldn’t be surprised if you lied to yourself as well.”

“Say what you want, and believe what you want, my lady, but on this point, I’m telling you no lie.
The Imp is dead, and nothing can change that. It was my plan to get rid of him sooner, but the events didn’t unfold as I predicted. If Lord Tywin hadn’t died the night before the wedding, Tyrion Lannister would be dead long before, but that doesn’t matter now. He’s gone, and that means you can marry again.”

“I will never marry someone else,” she almost spat.

“Oh, you will. Lord Arryn is very eager. He’s been waiting for this moment a very long time.”

“So that’s it? You conspired with him to bring me back here.”

“No. Harrold is a knight, and he is too proud to stoop himself to dirty tricks like these. He doesn’t want to sully his hands. I organized everything. Ser Vance wanted revenge for his dead brother that your sister sent to another world, and I promised him what he wanted.”

“I defend you to touch Arya.”

“Don’t worry. I think she will get herself killed without my intervention,” he explained without much caring. “What matters is that you are here. You will marry Harrold Arryn and become the Lady of the Vale.”

“I will not.”

The time when she was forced to marry men she despised, men who had no respect for her, was over. And even Petyr Baelish couldn’t force her to do it, no matter what tools he had for it.

“You will,” he calmly replied. “If you know what’s good for a certain baby, you will.”

She felt blood leaving her face. “Where is she? Where did you send her?” He only kept smiling, giving no answer. She seized the corners of the table and leaned forward. “WHERE IS MY DAUGHTER?”

“Don’t worry. She is safe. She is a valuable piece in my plan.”

“What plan?”

“I want everything,” he cryptically answered. “You have claims, directly or indirectly, on four kingdoms, my lady. Since the Imp died, his daughter is the Lady of Casterly Rock, and in time I will marry her to someone that is fit. As for you, when you marry Lord Harrold, this will place the North, the Riverlands and the Vale in the same ship. Daenerys Targaryen and Jon Snow will waste their forces in the North, fighting each other or whatever it is that attacked the Wall. Whoever wins will not have enough strength to oppose you. The Stormlands are spent, and Dorne and the Reach will be at each other throat before long. I told you, Sansa. I can help you to rule all Westeros.”

“You only want Westeros for yourself.”

He leaned towards her, approaching her face. “I want it for us both.”

She withdrew. “You will never have it. I will never help you. I’m not my mother who was foolish enough to trust you, and I’m not Cersei who thought she could use you. You won’t get anything from me.”

“I’m doing all this for your own good, my lady. It saddens me that you don’t understand that yet, but you will understand one day, I’m sure. The wedding will take place in a few days, as soon as we arrive in Runestone.”
“There will be no wedding. You’ll have to shackle me to the altar to make me say the vows.”

“Perhaps we will. It wouldn’t be the first time it happens.”

“It won’t work. Perhaps you think you have the upper hand, but you don’t. You said it yourself. Harrold Arryn doesn’t want to sully his hands. I wonder how much he knows about your devious plans. If I tell him even one of the horrible things you did, he will kill you. I may be forced to marry him all the same, but you will be dead. And being forced into a marriage I didn’t want is almost a reasonable price to see you die the way my father did.”

His smirk was gone. He stood up and slowly walked to stand right before her, and he stared right into her eyes. “I see you learned well, my lady. I can see it. You’re no longer the sweet girl I met at the Hand’s Tourney. I regret it. Though at the same time…” He wandered a finger on her cheek. His smile returned. “You may be willing to die instead of marrying Lord Arryn. Your father was ready to die for Stannis, after all. You are more like him that I thought. But you know why Lord Stark accepted to acknowledge Joffrey as the true king and to proclaim that he betrayed him? It was for his daughter.”

A long moment went in a heavy silence. The man she hated the most in the world approached his lips from her ear, and they caressed it as they moved. “This little monster you had with the Imp is only valuable to me if you marry Harrold Arryn. Without this marriage, my plan will never bear fruits. And if it doesn’t bear fruit, then this girl is of no use to me. If you don’t wed Lord Arryn, the little Joanna is dead.”

The next moment, Petyr Baelish was tackled to the floor, and two hands were gripping his throat, trying to choke the life out of it. Sansa released a bestial scream as she used all her forces to kill the man who made her family suffer so much.

“YOU WILL NOT KILL HER!”

She pressed his throat as hard as she could, and she saw his face turning red, his eyes panicking like they never did before. I will kill him. Nothing else mattered. She would kill him, no matter what it cost.

The door slammed open behind her and she felt arms grabbing her. She struggled to keep her hold on Littlefinger’s throat, but the strong arms that seized her by the waist and then her arms were too strong. The throat slipped away from her fingers.

She struggled like a fury, clawing, punching, kicking, doing everything she could imagine to hurt the people around her, the people who destroyed her life. Until she was thrown against a hard surface and lost consciousness. The last thing she saw was Littlefinger massaging his throat.

Chapter End Notes

Originally, I was planning for one more Sansa chapter before this one, to show with more details how she left Winterfell and was separated from her daughter, but after thinking about it, I decided it wouldn't add much to the story and mostly delay the most interesting parts. We don't need an entire chapter only to describe the conditions of the roads between Winterfell and the shore, and depicting the scene where Sansa is separated from Joanna wouldn't be very necessary since we've got her own very emotional reaction in this chapter, along with her discussion with Baelish, which is far
more interesting, I think. I also believe you are eager to see the battle(s) against the
White Walkers.

So, Sansa is back to her former situation. She is again a pawn in the game of thrones,
and Baelish holds a master card in his hand to control her. Manipulators in Game of
Thrones are very good at using the love mothers have for their children to force them
into actions they wouldn't undertake under normal circumstances. Not only Baelish, but
also Varys while in Meereen, use this tactic, and noble houses use it as well through
fostering and wards. We can also cite Daenerys when she takes Margaery's son away
from her.

Please review

Next chapter : Trystane
Okay, a big chapter for Trystane. You'll see that things are far from being dull in King's Landing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“So, that’s all?” he asked.

“Yes, my prince. Be careful,” the woman standing before him said.

“Very well. I will be careful. You may leave.”

The priestess left. She was the only one to remain in King’s Landing, the second having left to join Daenerys’s army a long time ago. She told him his life would be in danger today, before he got what he wanted, and that getting this wish would cost him a lot. Trystane emptied his cup, swallowing the last drop of wine at the bottom of it. This was no longer the time to step back. He could only go forward.

He left his chambers and walked to the Great Hall. Two guards followed him. As he approached his destination, he heard the rumbling of voices. The Red Keep had not been so full of people since he arrived, and from what Varys and Margaery told him, the place had been quite empty for a long time before. This was no longer the case. When Trystane entered the Hall, the floor and the galleries were full of people from four kingdoms. Only the dais and a section near it allowed some free space.

The two other judges had already arrived. Lord Anders Yronwood and Lord Mace Tyrell sat on each side of the Iron Throne, while a line of gold cloaks were positioned at the feet of the dais. Trystane sat in the throne, feeling as uncomfortable in it as he always felt. Trystane knew that Lord Anders’s gaze was wandering over the crowd, searching for any slight detail that wasn’t fitting. He was observing everybody. Lord Tyrell, on the other side, seemed nervous. He had arrived only two days ago and was rushed into this after learning that his ambassador was murdered. He was shocked when he heard of this, and his shock quickly turned to anger. He asked for immediate retribution against those who murdered his bannerman. And the thousands of soldiers he brought with him were of no different mind.

Margaery was right. It would take a lot to calm the Tyrells. For now, they were kept at bay, but the tension was rising into the city, and Trystane had to admit that it would take only a spark to set fire on the whole thing. People were already calling the situation an armed peace. No one fought, but everyone was ready to draw the sword at the first signal. It wouldn’t last, and strangely, Trystane wasn’t afraid of it. He had the impression it would be a release, to finally face his enemies, instead of faking agreement and friendship with them. He noticed the presence of two in the crowd.

The doors were opened and another enemy walked in. She was shackled, and her links clinked as she walked. Trystane could hear them despite the roars and the shouts of the crowd all around. Some insulted and cursed her, others praised and encouraged her. The gold cloaks, Dornishmen that Trystane carefully chose for the occasion and men native from the Crownlands, made a way through
the sea of people to the box standing right below the dais. They formed a semicircle around the box,
keeping the crowd away, which was no small task, while two men attached the enemy’s shackles to
the box. All this time, the enemy didn’t stop watching him, smiling wickedly, as if nothing was
amiss. Trystane would remove the smile from her face. Justice would be made, the real justice his
father and uncle lived and fought for. The two other Sand Snakes weren’t far behind, among the
crowd, separated from their sister by the semicircle.

It took a long time to quiet down the crowd, and when it did, people were still whispering among
themselves. It was a good thing that he forbade weapons to those who wanted to attend the trial.
Trystane decided it was time for it to begin. *Let it end.*

“Tyene Sand, you stand accused by the crown of the murder of Lord Edrik Ashford. Did you kill
him?”

“What if I did?” she replied with an evil smile, mocking him. The whispers increased. The herald hit
the floor twice with his stick, and relative silence came back.

“Answer the question. Did you kill Edrik Ashford?”

“If that can please you, then no.”

Trystane leaned back into the throne, without touching its back. “Call the first witness.”

Ser Andrew Courtney, one of the knights who was with Lord Edrik Ashford during the incident and
who was present when he died was the first to testify. Mostly, he repeated what he already told
Trystane days ago. However, the most important elements he had to bring were the details about
Lord Edrik’s death.

“We had just returned to the Red Keep. My lord was resting after everything that happened, when he
began to cough. I had my back turned on him at this moment, but he called me. When I looked, he
had blood on his hand. I realized that blood was beginning to drip from his nose. I’m not sure if he
realized it as well, but he began to breathe more quickly. I called for help, and we laid him on his
bed, but a few seconds later, he was dead. There was nothing we could do. He died, right there in
front of us. He was murdered.”

He shot an assassin glare at Tyene, who didn’t look bothered by it. Two more witnesses, another
knight and Lord Ashford’s personal squire came to testify on the circumstances of his death. They
weren’t present when he began to bleed, but they could attest the suddenness of the death. The squire
said he wasn’t even sure if Lord Ashford was still alive when he came in his room. What he
remembered the most was the stream of blood on the part of his face down his nose.

The Grand Maester Perwyn came next to give the results of his autopsy. “There was no internal
damage. No artery, no vein, no organ was damaged, at least not by any physical force. The only
plausible explanation to Lord Edrik’s death is that he was poisoned.”

“How can you be so sure of that?” Lord Yronwood asked.

“I couldn’t find traces of poison in his blood, but I wrote to my colleagues in Oldtown. I described
the symptoms and they were able to identify it. It is called the Long Farewell. It is a very rare poison,
originating from Asshai. A single drop making contact with the skin, and the victim dies. It takes
time for its effects to manifest. Depending on the constitution of the person who is infected, she may
die within hours or within days, but she will die. The death is sudden, without side effects to be seen
before it comes. In the minute before the person dies, she will feel nauseous, his vision will get
blurred, and she will bleed by the nose and have difficulty to breathe.”
“Do the symptoms include coughing?”

“For some individuals, yes. The two symptoms that come in every case are the bleeding from the nose and the difficulty to breathe. The other symptoms vary depending on the people who are infected.”

“So you say that Lord Edrik Ashford was poisoned with something from across the Narrow Sea?” Lord Tyrell asked.

“To me, it seems to be the only likely explanation. The poison doesn’t leave traces on the organs or in the blood, so it was impossible for me to detect it, but Lord Ashford had a small cut on his right arm, probably the result of a knife or a dagger. What is strange is that the injury didn’t cicatrize at all. Normally, it should have started to heal a few minutes after it was made, so if the cut happened a few hours before his death, then that means something stopped the cicatrisation. And it happens to be another property of the Long Farewell, according to my colleagues.”

“You say that a cut starts to heal a few minutes after it is made. Is it possible that the injury was actually made a few minutes before Lord Ashford’s death?” Lord Anders Yronwood asked.

“It is very unlikely, my lord, for if it was the case, then we would see traces of blood dripping from the cut, and such wasn’t the case. The injury was made at least half an hour before the death occurred, whoever made it.”

“Grand Maester, do you think there could be another possible explanation to Lord Ashford’s death? Do you think he could have died of another cause, whatever it may be?” Trystane asked.

“No, my prince.” He called him in the appropriate way for the first time. “Lord Ashford was poisoned. It is a murder.”

People in the room mumbled louder. Someone shouted good riddance, probably a Dornish, and order had to be brought again. Trystane felt it wouldn’t be the last time. They called Frenken, the maester of House Stokeworth, who happened to have a greater expertise in poisons.

His conclusions were the same than Perwyn. He wasn’t the best expert in poisons, and never witnessed the effects of the Long Farewell, but he agreed with everything his colleagues from Oldtown wrote. He examined the body as well, and verified every element of Perwyn’s conclusions. When asked if he thought that Lord Ashford could have died of something else, he answered, “Whether Lord Ashford was poisoned, or he died by sorcery, and this I cannot explain how it could kill him, nor why.”

“One last thing, Frenken,” Trystane asked before he left. “Since you studied poisons further than the Grand Maester, do you have any knowledge of how these poisons can be made, and who can?”

The maester seemed troubled. “Well, when I verified about this poison in my books, it seems the ingredients that are necessary to make it cannot be found in this country. Maester Snape’s works, who are the authority about foreign poisons, even claim that some ingredients cannot be found in the known world. So it can only be brought from outside Westeros. This is no common poison at all. It must be bought, or the ingredients necessary to make it must be bought. There are certainly some apothecaries who can sell it, but they are very few. And I suspect that this poison must be very costly.”

“So, it cannot be bought by anybody?”

“No. I would say, though I cannot be entirely sure, that only people with generous means could get
their hands on the poison. So it can only be someone rich.”

Next came the witnesses of the brawl that took place in the tavern a few hours before the lord’s death. They had the people who accompanied Lord Ashford testify first. Andrew Courtney, another knight and Lord Ashford’s squire had already given their version of the story, and the other men of the Reach gave a similar story, blaming the Dornish by the way. Next came the men of the City Watch, who gave a slightly different version. They were Dornish, but not completely sold to their countrymen, so they gave a more impartial version. And then there was the owner of the tavern and his employees, including the girls. Since the knights of the Reach paid better, the owner’s point of view favored them. The girls did the same, though they seemed somewhat hesitant, and more restrained in their accusations against the Dornishmen. Trystane suspected their employer to force them to talk ill of the Dornish.

Tyene showed no interest to what was going on the whole time. She yawned, tapped the bar of her box with her fingers, sighed to show her boredom. However, what annoyed Trystane the most were her constant smirks in his direction. He struggled to keep his calm under her constant glares. Sometimes, he gripped the arms of the thrones so tight that he could feel his hands about to bleed.

The determining testimony was the one from the girl over which the brawl was started. She told them what she already told Trystane before, though strangely the first time she seemed to have forgotten the detail that the Dornish who grabbed her also slapped her in the face, right after he kicked Lord Ashford’s knight in the guts. The owner of the tavern clearly ordered the girls to distort the truth. The details about the knife this man hid made the Great Hall silent, but it was the question that Trystane asked her at the end that was the most important.

“Now, I would ask you to look at the accused. Can you say if Tyene Sand looks like the man who grabbed you on that day?”

The girl looked at Tyene for a moment. “She doesn’t look like him. She is exactly like him. It was her, I’m sure of that.”

Shouts erupted in the Great Hall. *Liar*, some called her, certainly Dornishmen. *Murderer*, others called Tyene, probably people from the Reach.

“Silence. I will tolerate no interruption from the public, or the hall will be evacuated,” Trystane loudly stated.

“Order!” Lord Yronwood shouted, to support him.

“Calm down, my countrymen. This is a trial,” Lord Tyrell added.

When the calm had returned, Tyene spoke for the first time. “May I ask the witness one question, my prince?” she sweetly asked.

“One,” Trystane replied, granting this to her, which was more than she deserved.

“Tell me, sweetheart, did you feel any excitement when you found out I was a woman?”

There were some laughs in the hall, but before the shocked expression of the girl, Trystane stopped this comedy. “You’re not forced to answer. You may leave. We will adjourn for now. Toll the bells in an hour’s time.”

Trystane thought it was a good moment to relieve the tension. He left the Great Hall as everyone did the same, safe for Tyene who remained in her box over heavy guard. Trystane walked out of the room, his heart pounding in his chest. He was excited and tired at the same time. Tyene tired him,
and he was excited to see her dead. All the elements they collected were against her. Trystane knew
she did it. She would die for the murder of Lord Edrik Ashford. He only regretted she wouldn’t die
for Myrcella’s murder.

It was while he walked down a corridor that he heard the soft voice behind him. “I know what
you’re thinking about.”

Trystane turned to look at the Spider. “Then tell me, since you seem to know me so well.”

Lord Varys had a sad expression on his face. “I know you want Tyene’s head, and I know why, my
prince. People say that love is a beautiful feeling, but I saw it driving men and women to madness
more often than happiness.”

“I’m not after happiness,” Trystane rudely replied.

“My prince, I want you to think about the consequences of your actions. Tyene Sand is the daughter
of your uncle. You share the same blood. If you kill her, that will make you a kinslayer.”

“Is it kinslaying to execute someone for murder? My father says this is justice.”

“Perhaps it is both justice and kinslaying,” the Spider suggested.

“The Reach is at our throat. Tyene killed the Lord of Ashford. If I am to maintain peace with the
Reach, then I need to give them justice.”

“And what if this justice breaks the peace you have with Dorne? The Sand Snakes are well loved
among your people. Killing one of them will alienate you all the Sand Snakes, and more than one
Dornishman.”

“I have the support of the Yronwoods.”

“Lord Anders is not all Dorne.”

“No, but he’s more powerful than the Sand Snakes.”

“My prince…”

“Lord Varys, this is a trial. If Tyene is found guilty, then she will be punished accordingly.”

“She will be found guilty.”

“Then we will punish her accordingly.”

On that last sentence, Trystane walked away from Varys. The eunuch advised him to be cautious,
but Trystane had no use of his councils. Varys didn’t understand what was at stake. Trystane
continued his way to the only person he wanted to talk with right now.

Margaery Tyrell was reading when he entered her rooms. “Interesting?” he asked to start the
conversation.

“It keeps me occupied.” She set the book aside while Trystane sat before her. “So, is it done?”

“I adjourned the trial for an hour. You don’t want to assist it?”

“I think it would be better that everyone sees me the least.”
“You’re probably right. Everyone is on the edge down there.”

“What are the prospects?”

“Tyene is guilty. I know it. Soon, everyone will know as well.”

“They may not want to believe it, or they may not care about it,” she said. Her face was hollow, devoid of any emotion.

“It doesn’t matter. Tyene murdered Lord Ashford. She is a cold-blooded killer. Even my father couldn’t close his eyes on it.”

“You want her dead, don’t deny it.”

“No, I won’t deny it. I won’t shed a tear when she dies.”

“Is that really what you want?”

“This is only justice.”

“And once you’ll have it, what next? You’ll kill her sisters as well?”

He didn’t reply. To be honest, he only cared about Tyene right now. He wished Obara and Nymeria would die as well, but would he actually start looking for a way to kill them? He didn’t look for a way to kill Tyene. He was only rendering justice for the murder of Edrik Ashford.

“Trystane,” Margaery began, “I understand what you’re going through. If Cersei was alive, I would do everything to have her head. I would have no rest until she was dead.”

“I’m not after revenge. I’m only doing justice.”

“Revenge, justice. I’m not sure if there’s a difference any longer, or if we can make the difference. Listen, Trystane. We must consider the consequences of our actions before doing something rash. Robb Stark thought he was making justice when he beheaded Rickard Karstark, but all he got from that was to be killed with his mother, his wife and their child, and he lost the war. I think even Cersei thought it was justice when she set the city on fire. It wouldn’t surprise me. Before you give justice, consider the price that will come with it.”

Trystane nodded. “Thank you, my lady. I must go.”

He left and thought about what the heir to Highgarden just told him on his way back to the Great Hall. There would be consequences to what he would do, for sure. His father didn’t go to war against Robert and the Lannisters because he knew this would only make his people suffer. His father taught him that the well-being of the people of Dorne was more important than personal grudges, or even justice in some cases. However, Trystane also knew that being merciful with Tyene would bring its own lot of consequences. The Tyrells were asking for blood, implicitly if not explicitly. He knew what he had to do, for the sake of justice and for the sake of the alliance between Dorne and the Reach.

The crowd had gathered again in the Great Hall. The Red Priestess was standing in retreat behind the dais. Tyene hadn’t moved, and nor did the guards. Trystane sat back in the Iron Throne. Tyene stared at him with her playing devilish smirk. Trystane held her stare and sent her a message as well with his own eyes. You won’t get away this time.

Lord Yronwood came back, then Lord Tyrell. Trystane asked for silence, and when he almost had it,
he spoke. “The crown calls a last witness.”

The last witness of the accusation was no one but one of the Dornish who fought Lord Ashford’s men in the tavern. The Red Priestess had found him and convinced him to testify. He said his name and told everything he knew.

“Tyene Sand was with us when we entered that tavern. She was present during the fight.”

The crowd reacted, and they had to calm it down again. “Do you know if Tyene had a dagger on her?” Trystane asked him.

“She always has one on her, my prince.”

“Do you know if the dagger was poisoned?”

“No, my lord. Though she often speaks of her knowledge of poisons. She said her father taught him.”

“Did you see her use her dagger during the brawl in the tavern?”

“No, my prince, but… I saw her hiding it again in her clothes at the end of the brawl. And I think there was a thin line of blood on it.”

The room roared so much that Trystane thought for a moment it would explode. Some accused him of lying and betraying Dorne, while others accused Tyene of murder like they did during the whole trial.

“This was the last witness of the crown,” Trystane stated. “Tyene Sand, do you have any witness to call?”

“No.” That was all she said. She didn’t seem to realize that her situation was very dire. Trystane was more than exasperated by her defying attitude.

“Very well. What do you have to say in your defense?”

She laughed. “My defense? I know you want me dead, cousin. You are pathetic. Hiding behind justice because you don’t want to sully your hands. You are weak, just like your father, and weak men are not made to rule Dorne. I should have killed you along with your princess.”

Trystane hardened himself to not counter her words. “Is that all you have to say?”

She seemed to think about it for a time. “You’re a coward too.”

Trystane feigned to ignore what she just said. “Lord Anders Yronwood, what is your verdict?”

“Guilty.” Shouts followed, mostly from Dornish, though this time it was obvious not all of them were on Tyene’s side. Dorne was divided in this room.

“Lord Tyrell?” Trystane continued, as if nothing was happening.

“Guilty,” the Lord of Highgarden declared.

“Guilty,” Trystane declared. He stood up. “The three judges declare Tyene Sand guilty of the murder of Lord Edrik Ashford. Tyene Sand, in the name of Daenerys Targaryen the First of Her Name, Queen of the Andals the First Men and the Rhoynar, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm, I hereby sentence you to death.”
The uproar only grew, and chaos was about to truly break into the hall when Tyene shouted. “I demand a trial by combat.”

The silence that followed was complete. No one spoke. Tyene looked at him, her smirk wider than ever. Trystane looked straight in her eyes. “Your demand is denied. The trials by combat are illegal.”

She scoffed. “You’re really pitiful. What would your uncle think of you?”

“Better than he would think of you, cousin. When Daenerys Targaryen freed King’s Landing, she decided that every decree made by the Baratheon kings, that is, Robert, Joffrey and Tommen, would be considered as laws unless she told otherwise. Not long before he died, the king Tommen outlawed trials by combat, and our queen never made any decision denying this decree. That means that for now, trials by combat are forbidden through all Westeros.”

He stared at her, and for once her expression wasn’t playful. Instead, it was anger, hatred that he saw in her eyes. “I will not give you the opportunity to murder someone else,” he continued. “My father gave you a second chance. You should have seized it. Only fools believe in third chances. You will be executed tomorrow, at dawn. Bring her back to her cell.”

Trystane turned his back on her and went to sit back, relieved that it was done, relieved that soon Myrcella would be avenged, when he heard multiple screams behind him. He looked back at Tyene, but it didn’t come from her. It came from the crowd. He saw a black shape moving on the floor, and before he could think of anything, it climbed on someone. This someone was Obara Sand. Trystane noticed she had a knife in her hand. One moment she was standing among the crowd, the next the black shape was covering her, and the next she was falling on the ground. A large pool of blood appeared very quickly.

The black shape was gone as quickly as it appeared. Everything was silent after the many screams, and everyone was looking at the mess that once was Obara Sand. It only lasted a moment, for the next everyone in the crowd started screaming and accusing each other.

“What was that?”

“Obara Sand is dead.”

“Who killed her?”

“She pulled a dagger from her robe.”

“You murdered her!”

“Traitors!”

“Damn Dornishmen!”

Before the gold cloaks and the other guards could do anything, because of how quickly it happened and the shock that followed Obara’s unexpected death, everyone was at each other’s throat. It was Dornish against Reach men, but also Dornish against Dornish.

“Separate them!” Trystane shouted to his men.

They obeyed his orders, but the people in the crowd stroke back. These people were lords and knights, and they fought each other with fists and foot, while the gold cloaks tried to not use their spears and swords. As a result, some were pulled by the crowd and brought down.
Trystane could only look at the chaos that unfurled before him. The great doors of the hall opened, allowing for more guards to pour inside, along with more lords and knights, and some joined the fray, adding more chaos to the one that already existed than helping to bring back order.

In this chaos, Trystane looked at Tyene, still alone, shackled to her box. And then he saw the other Sand Snake, Nymeria, coming to her help. Trystane knew what she going to do. He couldn’t let Tyene escape. Not again.

There was a spear, abandoned by a gold cloak nearby, right down the steps of the dais. Trystane rushed to it, seized, aimed, and threw. He wasn’t the best spearmen in history, but he was taught well, and had Oberyn Martell for an uncle. The spear went precisely where he directed it. It pierced the heart, and Nymeria Sand fell on the floor, her eyes empty of all life.

Trystane looked at her lifeless body. A second pool of blood formed under her belly, smaller than Obara’s pool, but it was a pool of blood nonetheless, and this time it was Trystane who made it. He looked at Tyene, and for the first time she stared at him in horror and utter shock. Trystane immediately knew what was going on through her mind. She never thought he would actually do it, and neither did he. She was right. He could sentence a family member to death, but he never thought of actually killing him or her himself. But he did it. They were both wrong.

Slowly, Trystane walked to Nymeria’s body. There was only him, the spear, Nymeria’s body, a faint conscience of Obara’s body being not far away, and Tyene. Trystane looked at his cousin’s body for a moment, then he pulled out the spear. The point was covered with blood. A long time ago, he asked his uncle Oberyn how it felt when you killed someone. He told him that it depended. The first kill was always harder, but after that you got used to it, and you didn’t feel anything when you killed afterwards. His uncle told him that he enjoyed killing, but mostly when he felt the person deserved it. Otherwise, there was little joy in killing, no pride to feel from it, and you only felt empty when you took someone else’s life.

Trystane had kill on the battlefield before, but this time was different. It was as if this was his first real kill. He looked at Tyene. And then he saw her, Myrcella, and he remembered all the good times he had with her, all these moments of joy that would never return and that could have lasted forever. And it was the woman who stood before him who stole it from him, who took the woman he loved away. She was the one who killed her. He didn’t hesitate.

With a roar, he plunged the spear right through Tyene’s heart, and for the first and last time, Trystane Martell saw fear on the face of his cousin. She collapsed in the box, and the spear remained in her heart this time. Trystane was surprised that she had one. A third pool of blood was made, and at last, justice was made and Myrcella was avenged. Strangely, Trystane didn’t feel any better.

Chapter End Notes

Every character of Game of Thrones has a dark side. In this chapter, we just saw Trystane’s dark side.

Concerning the black shape, remember the Red Priestess at the beginning of the chapter.

Please review

Next chapter : Tyrion
While Winterfell is being attacked by dead men, Sansa kept prisoner by a sociopath and Trystane murdering half his family (nothing unusual for GOT universe), Tyrion spends time in the midst of an army composed of lords that have been alternatively allies and foes for the last few years, of men who spend their lives on horses and of people with red robes who chant before a fire every night. Not to mention with a queen who has three very big children. (I'm making an attempt at humor. Please don't hold a grudge against me if it's failed.)

“These nights are getting darker and colder every day.”

Daven warmed his hands over the fire before he took the cup of spiced wine Tyrion kindly offered him. He and his cousin had never been very close. Not that Daven despised him or thought little of him, but they never had the opportunity to truly spend time together. Daven was a knight from the day he was born, just like Jaime, while Tyrion would have been fitted to be a maester. While Daven sparred in the courtyard with Ser Benedict, Tyrion read or wrote. They almost had nothing in common. It was Jaime that Daven was closer to. Still, Tyrion never had any ill thought against his cousin. He was always kind with him. Now that everyone around him was gone, and since they were both in the midst of an army they were more or less forced to join, Daven had become Tyrion’s closest advisor, confident, and even friend. It was strange that they needed Jaime to be in prison, Bronn and Podrick to be dead, and to be separated from everyone they loved to finally get to know each other.

“If we rely on what happened in the past months, I doubt it will get any better,” Tyrion replied.

“You’re not good at lightening things up, coz.”

“It’s your specialty, not mine.” Tyrion took some wine as well. He immediately felt better. *Everything is always better with some wine in the belly.*

“Do you always drink this early in the morning?”

“When it’s cold like this out there, yes.” Truth be told, it was spiced wine that he drank. Daenerys Targaryen had brought a lot of it to warm her troops on their way north. It helped Tyrion to go through the day, for it wasn’t only the cold he tried to escape with the wine. Thinking of anything that could happen to Sansa and Joanna was unbearable for him.

“Well, I welcome every way to fight the cold right now, let it be furs, wine, hair, beard, or camp follower.”

“Don’t tell me you call one at night,” Tyrion said.

“I only did it a few times. Don’t start giving me lessons, coz. You were not an example to follow in
Tyrion knew how difficult it was to be far away from the woman you loved. Daven was married, but unlike Tyrion, his marriage couldn’t be described as a fulfilling bliss. Amerei Frey was known for her adventures, and Daven was quite certain that, although he might be the only man to share her bed, he wasn’t the only man to fuck her. Tyrion missed Sansa dearly, but although he felt the need for a woman from time to time, he never gave in. He was married now, and he would never shame the wife he loved. He said vows before the altar, and they meant something. He couldn’t imagine himself betraying his wife.

Anyway, that had been before he died. Since he came back, the thought of bedding a woman never came to his mind. His mind was entirely occupied by his worries for Sansa and Joanna. They had no news from them. His escort was attacked very close to Winterfell. What if something happened to them? He thought about it day and night, and for the first time since his first marriage, Tyrion genuinely prayed. Perhaps it was useless, but if there were gods, as unlikely as it seemed, then there was a small chance that they may be listening. If gods didn’t exist, then he lost nothing by trying. If there was a little chance that it might save his wife and daughter, then he was ready to put aside some of his skepticism towards superior powers, even though he knew there was nothing after death. Perhaps he should start to pray to the Old Gods and the Lord of Light as well, though he wondered how the gods, if they existed, would feel if he worshipped their competitors. Kings and queens didn’t like it when people swore oaths to them and another one at the same time, and Tyrion doubted the gods were any different. One and only realm. One and only god. One and only king. Strange that they had seven gods to represent a sole one. The word transubstantiation came to his mind. Did he really need his wife and daughter to be in danger for stupid debates of the past to find their way into his head?

“Please coz, don’t tell my wife,” Daven asked. “Though I doubt it would really bother her if she heard.”

“Don’t be so certain, Daven. Most of the time, people feel more betrayed by the infidelities of the other than guilty about their own.” He thought of Cersei, Robert, and most of the people he came across through his life. “Did you see her since your wedding?”

“No. I wrote to her a few times, but she never returned my messages. I wonder if she will remember me when I come back to Darry.”

“Do you think she’s pregnant?”

“If she is, I have no way to be sure the child is mine.” Daven shrugged. “Well, from this day, until the end of my days. I’m wondering if the gods wanted to punish us when they decided that marriage was for life. Marriage with a woman you can’t suffer must be way worse than being burned alive by a dragon.”

“I don’t know.” Tyrion couldn’t tell. Daenerys Targaryen didn’t order her dragons to burn him yet, and he was never married to someone he hated.

“Well, we must do with what life granted us,” Daven concluded, trying to maintain his light mood. “So, how is she? You spent more time with her than most people here already. What’s your opinion of our new queen?”

Tyrion mused about it for a moment. He spent quite a lot of time with Daenerys Targaryen since his return, indeed. He had no illusion, one of the reasons why she often asked for him was that she
needed him. He knew more about the North than anyone else in her army, safe for Malcolm Branfield, but if it ever came to negotiations, like it happened in Moat Cailin Barrowton and Castle Cerwyn, his voice had more weigh than anyone else. Most of the strongholds still had some of his men inside their walls. Tyrion had become the closest advisor of Daenerys Targaryen, something he and the queen both didn’t expect.

“I would say she is dangerous to have as an enemy, demanding towards the people who serve her but generous with them as well, she remains loyal to her bannermen if they remain loyal to her, expects people to obey her and rules for the people, she’s probably a better queen than all the fools we had for the last fifty years, and if we ever try to overthrow her, we better be sure that we will succeed.”

Daven laughed. “For sure. I wouldn’t want to end as cooked meat for her dragons. They say she calls them her children.”

“Drogon, named after her first husband, Rhaegal, named after Prince Rhaegar, and Viserion, named after her dead brother Viserys.”

“You know their names?”

“She told me.”

“She’s telling you a lot.”

“Recently, I started to tell her something if she promised to tell me something in return. As a result, I probably know more about her dragons and her time in Essos than anyone else here.”

“What can you tell her so that she is willing to confide in you?”

“She wants me to tell her more about dragonlore, and about her nephew.”

“You think she will kill Jon Snow?”

Tyrion hesitated. “I’m not sure. So far, she always respected her promises, and she promised that as long as Jon Snow bends the knee, she won’t kill him. I suppose we can hope, or at least I can say it is not certain that she will kill him.”

“Do we have the same guarantees for Jaime?”

Tyrion sighed. “I don’t know.” He feared to openly admit it, but Jaime’s chances to live were very limited. No matter the reason, kingslaying was kingslaying, and if Tyrion had to advise this queen about a similar case, someone who wasn’t his brother, he wasn’t sure he would advise her to spare him.

“Seeing how she respects the sacred laws around parleys… I don’t give much longer to live to your brother, coz. I’m sorry.”

“Before you accuse her of violating sacred laws, remember the Red Wedding, Daven.”

“The Freys did this,” he protested, but without raising the voice. He said it on a very calm tone, almost regretful.

“And everyone knows who told the Freys to do this, and who gave them money, lands and guarantees of protection for it. If I pay an assassin to kill a boy of ten in his bed, does that make me less a murderer?” He found it strange that he took the defense of a queen who could order his
brother’s death at any time. “Anyway, she exiled the priest who did this.”

“Good riddance. He sent chills upon my spine, this one. And it’s probably better that the other one, the High Priestess left as well. If only Melisandre was gone too. These people annoy me. There’s only one that I have come to appreciate a little, and he always wears a mask. I would be surprised if he removed it to sleep.”

“Well, we cannot send away all the Red Priests. They support the queen, and she allows every religion to have a place in her army. Anyway, with Kinvara gone, only Revan is at the war councils, and truth be told, I think even my father would love him.”

Daven snorted. “I never thought I would say that of a religious man, but I think you’re right. Lord Tywin would like him. Revan speaks of military matters, supplies, roads to travel, the organization of the army, of weapons, of strategy. It gives us a change from the great war yet to come that all the others talk about. I have the impression to listen to a general when he speaks, not a priest. Perhaps we should train our septons to fight as well. They could defend themselves against angry soldiers when they want to plunder their septs.”

“Considering what happened when Cersei gave weapons to the Faith, I must disagree.”

“Well, let’s hope these red robes will be of some help when we face the White Walkers.” Daven drank some more wine. He then looked at Tyrion with a softened expression. “We’ll find Sansa and Joanna, coz. You have my word. No man, living or dead, will touch them.”

“Thank you, Daven. You’re a better cousin than I thought. Though you were already better than most.”

Daven laughed good-hearted. A young man came through the flap of their tent as he did so. “The queen is summoning you for her war council, my lords.”

Without a word, Tyrion and Daven obeyed. As they walked to their destination, Daven asked him, “So, still getting used to obey a Targaryen?”

“Don’t forget that our previous king was a Targaryen too.”

Daven conceded with a nod. “Yes, true. Can you believe that within a few years, we’ve served half a dozen different kings and queens? I’m not sure anymore who we fight for. And our actual queen, I don’t know what to make of her.”

“Well, since the last Targaryen monarch, we had a drunken incompetent who spent his days fucking every girl he came across, then an vicious idiot, a sweet and good-intentioned boy who was easily manipulated by everyone, and finally the Mad Queen. And I don’t mention the other contenders, who included a soldier burning everyone who dared to oppose him, a man who thought that nice clothes and good manners were enough to make a good king, and another who believed that being king meant you could plunder every land and every castle in the world you desired. It’s strange, but the two Targaryens we have now seem better.”

“You seem to forget that the father of the woman we actually serve was known as the Mad King, coz.”

“Just as he was Jon Snow’s grandfather. You remember your father, Daven?”

“Yes, I do,” his cousin replied, a certain sadness in his voice.

“People used to say that he was given command of an army only because his sister was married to
the great Tywin Lannister.”

“I know that.”

“Were they wrong?” Tyrion inquired.

“No,” Daven replied shortly.

“That didn’t stop you from being one of the most competent commanders the Lannisters had during this war.”

“No, coz. Thank you.”

“We are not defined by our fathers. Neither you, neither me, and neither is Daenerys Targaryen or Jon Snow or anyone in this land. Perhaps we should give her a chance. She gave us one, after all.”

Daven nodded, though he didn’t look quite convinced. Tyrion didn’t blame him. He wasn’t sure of what he was saying either. He knew better than anyone how who he was depended on who his father was. He thought of Moat Cailin. *You surely are proud of me, Father.*

The tent where the war council took place was already filled with military leaders from both sides of the Narrow Sea when they arrived. Tyrion never thought he would see such different people fight together in the same war, and he certainly never expected to be at the same table than Dothrakis. The queen, an image of beauty among all the hard men who were present, presided, though she displayed an authority that no one could deny.

“Now that everyone’s here, we must talk about a serious situation.” She took a pause. “During the last two days, we sent no less than ten scouting parties ahead of us. None have returned.” She looked at Tyrion. “Do you have an explanation for that?”

“Well, something, or someone, prevented them from coming back,” he began.

“That’s quite obvious,” Dickon Tarly sharply commented. Tyrion ignored him.

“I don’t think this is the weather, despite the snow that is falling outside. Furthermore, the last groups all had at least one Northerner with them. It’s not as if we sent Dornishmen who never saw a snowflake of their life. The weather couldn’t have lost them all. They cannot have been taken captives either and not all of them were sent to Winterfell. So, there’s only one possibility left.”

“White Walkers.” The only Red Priest who was present resumed what Tyrion was trying to say.

“So, the dead would be here. Is that likely?” Daenerys asked.

“I don’t know at what speed they progress,” Tyrion explained, “but I doubt they need to rest, to eat, or to shit. And the cold certainly doesn’t slow them down. The Wall has fallen for over a month ago, and Lord Cerwyn confirmed that the Last Hearth and Karhold have fallen. They’re certainly close to Winterfell, if they haven’t reached it already.”

“We are only a few hours away from the castle,” Malcolm Branfield said.

“Your Grace, Winterfell mustn’t fall,” Revan said. “If it falls, the entire North will follow, and the rest of Westeros with it too.”

“I know that Winterfell is important,” Tarly said, “but I fail to see how vital it can be in this situation. No matter how strong the castle is, it is still only a castle. If our scout units didn’t come back because
of these dead men, then we will come across them soon enough. Lord Lannister told us that they slaughtered tens of thousand men in one single battle north of the Wall, and that they easily breached the Wall, and were able to get through it. And if we can only kill them with dragonglass, Valyrian steel and fire, and we don’t have enough to destroy an army of a hundred thousand, it might not be a good idea to fight them in open field. The best choice might be to entrench our forces into a strong position and wait for the enemy. Marching against them like that with blind eyes is unwise. We should head back the way we came.”

“We are talking about Winterfell, Lord Tarly,” Tyrion objected.

“True, but a castle is still only a castle. I’m not willing to endanger my men for a pile of stones that we may have already lost.”

“I don’t like to say it, but Lord Tarly may be right. We are in no condition to fight in this snow,” Ser Garlan Hightower said.

“Your Grace, I know more about these creatures than everyone else in this room,” Revan said. “If you can’t defeat them at Winterfell, you won’t be able to defeat them anywhere.”

The queen pondered what she heard, then she spoke. “We continue on our way north. We will reach Winterfell very soon. It is only a matter of hours. In the meantime, I will scout our path myself.”

Before the looks of shock of all her advisors, she kept explaining without showing any sign of surprise. “I will fly Drogon over the area surrounding Winterfell.”

“Your Grace, you cannot take such a risk. You’re too valuable to put your life into danger in a scouting mission,” Branfield opposed.

“I thank you for your concern, but we must know what’s ahead of us, and it seems no one can do it on the ground. I will do it from the sky.”

“Your Grace, it only takes one arrow or one spear at the right place, and you will be dead.”

“Do the White Walkers have arrows?” That question was for Tyrion.

“I never saw them use any. The wights don’t seem to have the capacity to bend a bow. As for the White Walkers themselves… as I told you, I never saw one of them using a bow and an arrow.”

“Then that settles it. We break camp and ride for Winterfell immediately. I don’t want to waste any more time. We’re heading at forced march. Lord Tyrion, Revan, I’d like a word with you.”

All the others left, and Tyrion found himself alone with a Red Priest and a Targaryen queen. She addressed Revan. “Why did you say that if I didn’t defeat the White Walkers here, then I couldn’t defeat them anywhere else?”

Revan sighed. “Because there is something inside Winterfell, something that mustn’t fall to the enemy’s hands.”

“What is it?”

“It has several names, but most know him as the Three-Eyed Raven.”

That rang a bell in Tyrion’s mind. “Brandon Stark said he was the Three-Eyed Raven.”

Revan looked at him. “What can he do?”
“Well, he can see events that happened many years ago, before he was even born. He can also enter the minds of animals and control them, or so he claims. Apparently, he could also enter a human’s mind, though I never saw him do it. But I think he is honest in his claim, considering that he was able to tell me things he could never have known otherwise.”

Although they couldn’t see his face, Revan looked very concerned. “The Three-Eyed Raven has all the knowledge and the powers of the Children of the Forest in him, and the Children of the Forest created the White Walkers. If the Others get their hands on him, then all is lost. And there’s also something else inside Winterfell.”

“What else?” the queen asked.

“Let’s just say that if they seize the castle, this winter will never end, no matter what we do afterwards.”

“Well, it is time to stop the White Walkers anyway. Do you have any idea where Jon Snow is?” she asked Tyrion.

“I don’t know, your Grace. He might be dead for what we know, but if he’s still alive, I would bet he retreated to Winterfell. It is the best defended castle in the North, and where he has the best chance to hold against the dead.”

Daenerys nodded. “I need Jon Snow to bend the knee, and he is my nephew, my last family in this world. I’m not going to abandon someone of my own blood. You may leave, Revan.”

The Red Priest left. When he was gone, the queen turned again her gaze toward him. “Walk with me.”

They headed out of the tent. Everyone was preparing to march and make the last few miles to Winterfell. The snow seemed thicker than when Tyrion entered the war command tent. Snow fell more heavily than before.

“What do you suggest I do when I meet Jon Snow?” she asked him.

In the previous weeks, Tyrion advised Daenerys Targaryen on how to deal with Northerners. She trusted him enough to listen to his advice after Moat Cailin. The first situation where she followed his opinion was in the matter of the priest who killed the northern commander Duncan at Moat Cailin. Her first intent was to execute the man for violating a sacred law of Westeros, but the High Priestess Kinvara argued to exile the priest who acted as her personal guard instead. Tyrion was present during this discussion, and the queen asked him his opinion on the matter. Tyrion knew that killing the Red Priest would only strengthen the strife between the followers of different religions in this army, and make the incident during the discussions more public, so he supported the High Priestess’ decision. She and the priest they called Geralt left the next day.

After that, Tyrion tried to give her advice about how to make sure the Lords of the North they came across would let them pass at least, or even better swear fealty to her immediately. He managed to have her authorization to discuss with Lady Dustin at Barrowton, and he convinced the lady to bend the knee, not without using her long grudge against Ned Stark for her husband’s death during Robert’s Rebellion. He suspected that she hoped Daenerys would kill all the Starks. After the success in Barrowton, where he wrote to Winterfell to warn them of their coming, Daenerys often asked for his council. He gained even more her trust after he convinced Lord Cerwyn, a staunch supporter of Jon Snow, to bend the knee as well. The fact a strong garrison of Lannister soldiers was inside his walls helped.
“I suggest you don’t come high and mighty and demand immediately that he bends the knee. Even though he might accept, his bannermen may not. The Northerners are not that different from the Dornish. When Torrhen Stark surrendered before Aegon, there are some who say that his sons plotted to overthrow him and resist the new king. I think the best way is to show the Northerners that you are worthy to be their queen,” Tyrion told her.

“And how would I do that?”

“Robb Stark was hailed King in the North after the Whispering Wood, and Jon Snow after the Second Battle of Winterfell.”

“So I must win a battle?”

“I think you will need more. Robb Stark and Jon Snow were from the North, or believed to be from the North for the second. You have no ties with the North, your Grace. I think you’ll need to win a war for the North if you want them to declare you their queen on their own initiative.”

“I would rather not wait the end of this war.”

“I understand, but Jon Snow wants to bend the knee. He’s a man of honor, just like Ned Stark, and Ned Stark was the only one to talk against your murder when Robert sent assassins after you. It would be better to wait for the oath of the North than to push it and risk rebellions that will weaken us against the dead.”

“Very well. I shall go now. Follow the rest of the army.”

“Your Grace.” She stopped and looked at him. “I know that I advised you to be merciful, but you also promised against my fealty that whoever it was who tried to kill me would answer for his crimes.”

She smiled. “Don’t worry. I don’t intend to keep traitors among my bannermen.”

She resumed her way to her dragons. Tyrion was forbidden from approaching them since the day he caressed Viserion’s nose. Some maesters said that dragons were so intelligent that they could detect whether someone was their friend or their foe. Tyrion supposed this was why the dragon allowed him to come so close. He wished no ill to the dragon and was quite intrigued by him. He wished he had been able to spend more time with him. Tyrion could feel an affinity, something that felt like a bond, between him and the dragon. He didn’t know how to describe it. He supposed it was only his fascination for dragons and the fact they were misunderstood beasts just like him, but words that Melisandre told him a few days ago came to his mind from time to time. You have a bigger role than you think, Tyrion Lannister. A very small man can cast a very large shadow, and the shadow comes with fire.

A short time later, Tyrion was riding with the long column to Winterfell, and he saw the huge black dragon, alone, with a young blond-haired woman on his back, flying north ahead of them. He only had one guard assigned by the queen now to watch him, and he rode with the rest of the Lannister troops.

“Lord Lannister.” Tyrion turned his head to see Malcolm Branfield riding to his left.

“Branfield,” he replied. “It must be strange for you, to come back in the North after all this time, serving another queen.”

“It seems we have a lot in common, my lord.” A quick smile, a smile without much joy, crossed his lips under the moustache. “When I left, my brother-in-law just died, and I travelled through half of
the world to find my nephew. Now I come back to find out that he’s dead along with his mother and
two of his brothers, that a sweet boy of six has been forced into the lordship of Ironrath after being a
hostage to the Whitehills, and that my niece was abandoned with a child by her husband.”

“I’m sorry. For what it’s worth, your nephew Asher died bravely.” *Falling from the Wall when the
Night King brought it down.* “And he died fighting for something worth fighting for.”

“I’m not surprised. Asher was never afraid of anything. He would have died for anyone of his
family.”

“And he did.”

They fell into a deep silence. For some time, they just throttled ahead. Tyrion felt his back aching.
The saddle wasn’t designed for him. Then a man from the fiery Hand, the private army of the Red
Priests, came and told him he was needed immediately. Tyrion followed him and found all the main
commanders of the army, the leaders of the Stormlands, the Reach, the Riverlands, the Westerlands,
the Crownlands, the Dothrakis, the Northerners and the Fiery Hand, together. Dickon Tarly,
Malcolm Branfield, Clement Piper, Dickon Cole, Cley Cerwyn, Revan, Daven, and many more. It
looked like a war summit, but this time without anything over their heads, and without the queen.

“Tell them what you saw,” Revan said. He was addressing a young man who served in the Fiery
Hand. This one had to be in the twenties, had a tattoo of slave from Volantis on his face, and he was
shaking uncontrollably. Tyron saw the fear in his eyes before he spoke, and he guessed what the
poor fellow saw before he talked.

“We were on scouting patrol. We managed to reach Winterfell, and then… They were everywhere. I
saw one of them. An Other. His skin was like ice, and his eyes were blue like I never saw before.
There were dead men everywhere. His servants. Thousands of them. They were everywhere. We
saw flaming arrows being shot from the castle. We tried to run away, but the others… I was the only
one to escape.”

Tyrion’s heart was beating fast. Sansa. Joanna. “Winterfell is under attack,” he whispered. “We are
too late.”

“Not yet,” Revan said. “There’s only a short distance left. We could be there in less than half an hour
if we keep forcing our march. Order your men to ride for Winterfell at full speed.”

“Wait, why should we listen to you?” Lord Piper asked.

“Because the queen made him commander of the whole army before she left.” Tyrion talked before
he could think about it. “I was present. She said that she entrusted him with every decision
concerning the army in her absence.” It was a lie, but they needed to rescue Winterfell immediately,
and if he needed to lie for this, then so be it, he would tell all the lies that were necessary. His wife
and his daughter were in danger.

“And we should believe you, Imp?” Lord Cole said.

“The queen left for Winterfell. If the White Walkers are there, then she is in danger. You want to
abandon her?” Tyrion asked him.

“We will be putting all our men in danger,” Dickon Tarly said.

“There’s no time for discussion,” Revan stated. He talked in a language Tyrion didn’t understand,
but he suspected it was Dothraki, since their commanders eagerly rode back to their troops, shouting
war cries. “The Dothrakis are riding into battle, and the Fiery Hand is too. Whether you follow us or
not is up to you but be sure the queen won’t forget it when she hears you stayed away from the fight when she needed you the most. Prepare the Fiery Hand,” he ordered one of his men in Valyrian, and he rode away.

Only the Westerosi remained. Tyrion decided it would take too long to convince them all, and the Dothrakis were already a large part of the army. He was about to ride away when Garlan Hightower spoke.

“I’m sending my men into the fray. If the dead are attacking Winterfell as we speak, then we have a chance to surprise them. That’s an opportunity we cannot miss.”

“Daven, tell our men to ride for battle,” Tyrion said.

“Yes, my lord.”

Tyrion rode away, and he thought he saw a few more commanders joining their men. However, Tyrion didn’t join his own men. He didn’t take the same direction than Daven.

Chapter End Notes

I want to apologize for not uploading this chapter on Wednesday like I usually do, but the reason is that the next four chapters are about the Third Battle of Winterfell. So I delayed this chapter, and the next four chapters will be published next Friday together. Expect a huge battle.

Please review

Next chapter : The battle will start from Arya's perspective.

Spoiler : We will welcome a new POV during the battle.
Arya VIII

Chapter Notes

Here come the four chapters of the Third Battle of Winterfell, beginning with Arya. I hope you'll enjoy it.

There are a lot of songs at the beginning, maybe too many, you'll tell me. It is before the battle begins and they're here to show the state of mind the soldiers might be in. If you want to listen to them, these songs can be found, in their order of appearance, at the following addresses on Youtube:
- "Riversong" by Brunuhville, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKJqMnuZhFU
- "The Road to Freedom" by Chris de Burgh, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzWLI4aUuo0
- "Hands of Gold", version by Peter Hollens, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bdmh9eRUz8g
- "Snow is falling" by Chris de Burgh, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Wtg_ppU2Mw

ARYA VIII

Far above, into the sky
The Gods' tears,
Fall from their eyes
The Angels fall
Demons crawl

For in the night we fight for you
And in our hearts we follow the truth
As the battle rages on and on
Our warcries echo far and strong

The old war calls a somber song,
With shield and sword you must go on
Ravens soar
Dragons roar

For in the night we fight for you
And in our hearts we follow the truth
As the battle rages on and on
Our war cries echo far and strong

A song is enough
To change the world
And make it alright in the end

I'll sing it for you
To mend your lost soul
And make it alright in the end

She had to listen to the bard singing something that was supposed to encourage them to fight for the Old and the New Gods, but Arya didn’t find it very successful. The song was slow and more appropriate to mourning than to motivation. And the end, how could someone say that a song was enough to change the world. Truth be told, Arya didn’t think a cheering song would succeed to lift their spirits up either. They should tell the people to stop singing and to eat in silence. It would be better for the moral.

Arya hurried to finish the stew in her bowl and left the Great Hall of Winterfell before another song began. She went outside and had the bad luck to fall upon a soldier from the Westerlands who sang for his comrades as they warmed their hands around a fire.

I feel the wind blowing through my doorway,

It's telling me that the summer's gone,

And the winter waits in shadow, waiting with the storm;

I am old and my bones are weary,

And my son he is all I have,

But he has gone to fight for freedom,

Leaving with my heart;

All my life I have loved this land, worked it with my hands,

But can this freedom send the rain, when seed is in the ground,

Can this freedom heal the pain and bring my boy back to me again?

Oh oh oh

I watched them sail from the rocks below me,

't was like the sea in its endless rage,

Many fall on the road to freedom,

Dying on the stones;
All my life I have loved this land, worked it with my hands,

But can your freedom send the rain, when seed is in the ground,

Can your freedom heal the pain and bring my boy back to me again?

Oh oh oh

Late last night, as the world was sleeping,

I dreamed my boy, he was calling out,

'cause he was lost in some dark forest,

And snow was falling down, falling on the ground,

Oh oh oh

Another sad song. What would she hear next? Hands of gold? As if the gods wanted to torture her furthermore, she heard a few other Lannister soldiers singing it into another corner of the courtyard. The soldiers looked very much like each other. Men were bored and had nothing to do, cramped as they were in the castle, so they spent their time singing, as if a song would change anything. Arya sighed and hastened her pace. She decided to go into the crypts. She supposed there would be no song there at least.

She was right. The crypts were dead and silent as a… crypt. Couldn’t she find a more appropriate word? Well, she was no poet. It was Sansa who loved songs and wrote poetry, not her. Arya used to resent Sansa for this, but now she would give everything to see her back and safe. She took something in her pocket that she always carried with her since she came back from Castle Black. When she arrived and found the castle empty, she searched for any sign of Bran and Sansa. When she went to the nursery where her niece should have been, she found nothing like everywhere else, but her boots hit something on the floor. She saw something shining and took it. Ever since, it never left her.

The candles in the crypts produced a light that illuminated the golden necklace Arya was holding in her hand. She knew there was a direwolf under the lion. Sansa always had it around her neck. When she found it, she immediately knew that something horrible had happened. She was relieved when she found Bran with Meera inside the crypts, but she wished that Sansa had been with them.

They would find Sansa, and Arya would make sure the necklace was given back to her. For now, however, they couldn’t do much to save her. It frustrated Arya. The wights launched six assaults on Winterfell in the last three days. Jon had to maintain a heavy guard on the battlements at all time, and everyone was tired. They managed to hold back every assault, but Arya found something strange. They never saw any White Walker. The only ones who attacked were the wights. It looked like at Castle Black. They didn’t send their full forces on them. Did they try to wear them off before the final attack? Arya had talked about this with Jon and Davos, but they all had to agree there wasn’t much they could do except prepare for the next assault. They couldn’t leave Winterfell, or else they would all die for sure. All they could do was hold them off in the hope that Daenerys Targaryen and Tyrion Lannister arrived in time.
Arya wished her brother-in-law was with them. After thinking about this over and over again, she had come to acknowledge that his actions at the Wall with the wildfire trap were justified. Seeing how the White Walkers went through the Wall like through butter and the damage they made to the North, and all that within weeks if not days, she now agreed such solutions were to be considered. Tyrion was good at defending places. They could have good use of him there. She hoped Sansa was with him, and that their daughter was well too.

Arya stopped before the statue of her lord father. They burned his bones three days ago, after the first assault. It had been difficult for Arya and for Jon, but necessary. They had to do what was necessary now, if they were to survive. Arya was back in the Riverlands where she had to do everything to survive.

“I can think of better places where to spend your time, Arya.” Davos Seaworth had joined her. Arya was glad he stopped to call her my lady, just like she stopped to call him ser. He didn’t mind, and said he missed the time when he was a simple smuggler sailing across the Narrow Sea. Arya thought it would have been interesting to grow on a ship with this man. She believed her father would have liked him.

“It’s the only quiet spot in Winterfell,” she replied.

“It is true that, with the thousands of men we have inside these walls, it’s hard to be alone.” He came to stand next to her. “I met Ned Stark a few times. First after he lifted the siege of Storm’s End, and also at the Battle of Pyke. I regret I didn’t know him better. He seemed to be a good man.”

“He was. Honor got him killed.”

“Stannis said the same to Jon Snow. I’m sorry we had to burn his bones.”

“It was necessary.”

“Aye, necessary. That doesn’t mean it was the right thing to do.”

“What do you mean?”

The Onion Knight looked troubled and very sad. “Stannis had his own daughter burned alive because he thought it was necessary to take Winterfell. He may have thought it was necessary, but it wasn’t the right thing to do, no more than it was to sacrifice your friend Gendry.”

Gendry. She hadn’t thought about him for a while now. “Do you think he’s still alive?”

He sighed. “There’s no way to know.” He looked back at her father’s figure. “My father was a crabber. He was born in Flea Bottom, and he died in Flea Bottom. I wasn’t there when he left this world. I was smuggling goods for Salladhor Saan in Braavos. I had left the family home as soon as I could, and I never came back. He never got to know Marya or Matthos, and my son died without meeting his grandfather.”

“I never knew my grandfather either.”

“What the Mad King did to him was a horrible crime.”

“And he paid for it, just like Joffrey did. I just wish I could kill him myself.”

“It’s difficult to kill a king, Arya.”

“I would have killed him with a needle if need be.”
Davos chuckled. “I would have liked to see that.” The knight shook. “It’s very cold down there. I think I’ll head back.”

“Wait. I’m coming. Just leave me a minute.” Arya just took the time to light candles for her father, her aunt Lyanna and Rickon, and lit other candles for her mother and Robb even though they were never here. Nonetheless, statues were sculpted for them. None of them were there anymore. They were all gone, their bones reduced to ashes or nowhere to be found.

Arya walked out of the crypts with Davos. She didn’t know why, but she didn’t want to be alone anymore. She changed her mind soon enough when they emerged in the courtyard, for after a few paces they heard a northern soldier singing.

Snow is falling, snow is falling on the ground,

In the forest, in the forest there’s no sound,

A shallow grave is where we lie,

The boys and men who died,

And snow is falling on the ground,

And we are calling to be found;

And the seasons, and the seasons come and go,

In the springtime birds will sing and flowers grow,

At summer's end, the autumn breeze,

Will whisper through the trees,

And leaves are falling on the ground,

And we are calling to be found;

And in our homes, so many tears,

They don't know where we have gone,

And snow is falling on the ground,

And we are calling to be found,

We are calling to be found

“Couldn’t they do something else than singing?” she asked, exasperated. It seemed the prospect of imminent death had turned everyone into a bard.
“It’s better than to fight,” Ser Davos said. Not far away, a group of wildlings were playing dices with Northerners. Arya saw Jon farther, inspecting the trebuchets and the catapults on the battlements.

Then they heard a sound that had become all too familiar. The three distinct blows of a horn warned them about the seventh assault. Arya was almost relieved to have something to do and she ran to the battlements. On her way, she seized a bow and a pile of arrows. She learned to shoot as she grew up, perfected her shooting skills when she was with the Brotherhood without Banners, and she kept training after that when Winterfell was freed from the Boltons. She could fight the enemy in long range and close combat all alike.

The archers all took place, while other men prepared their siege engines. They were from everywhere north of King’s Landing. Lannisters, Tullys, Arryns, Northerners, wildlings, even a few black brothers and Lord Beric and his men. They all prepared for the coming battle. The storm engulfed them very quickly. Still, they knocked and got ready to rain fire on the enemy.

There was nothing to see for a long time, safe for the snow that kept smashing against their faces. Arya searched all the area ahead of her, ready for anything. Or so she thought, for she wasn’t ready for what actually came on them.

The battlements quaked when the first boulder smashed against the walls. Arya knew the foundations of Winterfell were strong. Luwin once told them that catapults and trebuchets were incapable of making a breach into its walls. And yet, someone was trying. Large pieces of rocks flew in their directions. Arya watched one fall directly on the battlements, killing about twenty men with it. She looked behind her and saw that boulders were flying on them from every direction. Some had landed in the courtyard, and a catapult was destroyed. She saw one fall into the godswood.

“Hold your positions!” she heard a man shout. She already knew that was what they had to do.

These huge rocks could only be the beginning of something bigger. Looking over the battlements against, the events gave her reason. Tens of thousand of wights were walking towards them. Arya had never seen so many of them. She knocked and prepared, trying to ignore the projectiles that fell all around her.

“Loose!”

When the order came, her arrow flew through the air. She saw dead men falling into the snow, though she couldn’t hear their cries. There were torches all along the battlements. She took another arrow and placed the pointy end into the fire, readying for another volley. Two more volleys went out before the archers were given leave to fire at will. A sea of undead men were coming on them. They advanced slowly, uncaring for the flaming arrows that fell over them, indifferent to the cries of their companions who fell. Arya kept shooting.

A large block fell not far from her, and she was thrown on her right. The man just on her left had been killed. Arya took his arrows and resumed to shoot. She only had the time to send two more arrows. The wights were at the bottom of the walls, and more were coming. They didn’t shoot back. They had no arrows. A man not far from her threw a torch on the ground. A large line of fire appeared all around the castle, devouring all the wights who dared to come too close, and there were many. They burned.

It was at this time that Arya saw one of them. A White Walker walked through the enemy lines, a long sword of ice in hand. Arya targeted him, and her arrow flew right to his head. It bounced on him. He continued to walk as if nothing could reach him. Arya shot another arrow at him, and again he didn’t feel a thing. He reached the gate at the moment Arya was about to shoot him a third time.
She shot it at the precise moment when the White Walker smashed the sword against the gate.

The effects of the two attacks couldn’t be more different. The gate was entirely destroyed and reduced to pieces. Her arrow didn’t even leave a scratch. The wights rushed within along with the White Walker. Winterfell had double walls, and as a matter of consequence, the gates were doubled too. Arya watched powerless as the second gate was reduced to rubble as well.

Jon had positioned men at each gate to stop any breach by the enemy, and the wights were welcomed by arrows and swords. However, Arya realized these events were not isolated. She was near the South Gate, and from her position she could see that the Hunter’s Gate had been breached too. She couldn’t see the North Gate or the East Gate, but seeing the situation at two other gates, she wasn’t very optimistic. She looked at the army in front of their walls. There were still many archers who kept shooting, but what enemies they killed were immediately replaced. The wights couldn’t climb the walls. Arya saw some trying to do so and failing in previous battles. Their only access were the gates. She dropped her bow and arrows, unsheathed her sword, took a nearby torch and went down the stairs. There was the battle that mattered. *If we lose the gates, we lose Winterfell.*

Arya burned the first wight she came across, then a second one. Jon had organized his men so that there would be at least one carrying a torch for another fighting with a sword. Being in the last lines, Arya mostly used the torch. She used her sword any time a wight managed to get through the lines. She saw Jon engaged in a duel with a White Walker, and he destroyed it. Several wights around them fell to pieces the moment the White Walker was reduced to shards of ice.

Jon was at the South Gate. His small victory allowed a respite to his men and the wights were driven back a little. Arya turned her attention to the Hunter’s Gate, where the situation was worse. She ran into the battle, seeing archers rain fire on the wights from the towers. They had progressed much more at this place. They were about to take the gate. If the Hunter’s Gate fell, they were lost.

The ground trembled. Arya heard a great noise coming from the north. It sounded like when the Wall fell. She thought she saw dust rising in the air, but she couldn’t see what caused this. However, she had a pretty good idea of what it might be. She saw the Night King use his powers to bring down the Wall. What were the walls of in comparison?

Arya came across a wight with a sigil of the Golden Tooth who tried to kill her, only to end with fire in his guts. When he fell on the ground, Arya saw that a giant was coming in through the Hunter’s Gate. This giant had blue eyes. He released a powerful roar, took a man on the ground and broke him in two, and another roar was released.

“Retreat to the Great Keep!” she heard someone shout.
DAENERYS X

The cold winds of the North struck her face hard as Drogon flew. Vast lands spread below, but she couldn’t see most of them due to the thick snow that kept falling. She had a bad feeling about all this. Despite his strength, Drogon struggled against the strong wind at this altitude. She could feel him giving more effort to keep going ahead.

The weather had gotten worse very soon after she took off, and it seemed to keep getting worse as she continued to fly. She lost sight of the Kingsroad after two minutes. If someone asked her where she was, she couldn’t have given an answer. She decided to make Drogon fly in semicircles, hoping it would prevent her from missing anything. Sometimes she could discern a forest, or the outline of it, but nothing more. The air grew colder. This, conjugated with her lack of vision, prompted her to lower her altitude. Drogon released a powerful scream. He didn’t like the weather either. He grew up in warm lands and never faced something similar.

She caught sight of something far away. It was something yellow, like a fire. A very small fire. She saw another one, then the small points multiplied. Daenerys made Drogon go down a little further, and she saw everything.

There was a huge castle which fitted the description she had from Gerold Hightower, Malcolm Branfield and Tyrion Lannister. It could only be Winterfell. Fires were visible everywhere inside the castle, and trails of fire could also be seen leaving its walls and disappearing in the fields around it. The fields themselves, however, could barely be seen, for they were occupied by the largest army Daenerys had ever seen. Her breathing was cut short by the multitude pressing around Winterfell. They had to be at least one hundred thousand men, and there were figures more massive than men among them, great beasts of different shapes, some of human form. Winterfell was surrounded. Now she knew why her scouts never returned.

Her army was coming, but it would need some time to reach the castle. Maybe an hour. She had to warn them to press on. Before she could turn around, she saw a great explosion on one of the walls of Winterfell. A large section was left open, a large breach was made by which the enemies entered by the hundreds. At the same time, as Drogon kept closing on the castle, Daenerys realized that men who had to be at least twice the size of normal human beings were throwing huge blocks on the castle. There were other large creatures with long horns ramming against the walls as well. She saw one of the giants going through a gate and entering Winterfell.

Her army would never be there in time. *If you can’t defeat them at Winterfell, you won’t be able to defeat them anywhere.* Revan’s voice resonated in her mind. She had no time to warn her men. They would never be there in time. The decision was easy to take. With one single word, she ordered Drogon to fly down.

Her dragon plunged, releasing a powerful screech, deploying his large black wings. He went down, down, down, and down again. Until they were at the right altitude, right over a large courtyard.

“Dracarys!”

His black and red fire was unleashed upon the giant inside the castle. His head took fire. Daenerys heard with satisfaction its screams of pain mingled to those of the victorious Drogon, but the battle was far from being over.
She took altitude again and flew to the side of the castle that collapsed. There Drogon made another
carnage, burning dozens of men within one second. As he went up, Daenerys noticed the huge
creatures that kept ramming the walls. She had Drogon turn and attack one of them. Its furs were
carbonized in an instant, along with twenty men or so in the fields.

Something flew very close to Daenerys. Drogon’s path was disturbed, and when Daenerys looked
back, she saw a huge rock falling upon the castle’s walls. It missed them by an inch. Daenerys
spotted the huge men who were throwing these rocks in the swarm of things that covered the fields.
These were not people, but things. Daenerys saw them, and they were nothing like humans. If she
still doubted the existence of wights and White Walkers before, all her doubts were now gone.

She had Drogon flying to the bigger targets and spat fire on them. They were vulnerable to fire,
indeed. *He is the prince that was promised, and his is the song of ice and fire.* She heard these words
from one of the Red Priests one day, but she hadn’t known its meaning. Now she thought she knew.
The words were said in High Valyrian and the way they were spoken could mean *she is the princess
that was promised, and hers is the song of ice and fire.*

This army looked without end. Daenerys continued to rain fire on them, but there were always more
of them. As she kept burning them all, Daenerys recalled that Winterfell was vulnerable. She flew to
it and saw that the people defending the castle were still fighting inside, and that the enemies were
assaulting the walls again. She spotted five of these beasts with horns heading towards the section
that was previously crushed, with a man before them.

Daenerys positioned Drogon, and when she was above the beasts, she unleashed fire upon them.
The flames engulfed them for a very long time, since Drogon didn’t stop spitting fire. A large area
before the crumbled walls was turned into a field of fire. When Drogon stopped spitting fire, the
beasts were all gone. However, the man before them wasn’t.

Daenerys watched in complete stupor a man with blue eyes and a black armor standing among the
flames, looking at her. There was something on his head that had the shape of a crown.

“Dracarys!” She ordered Drogon to unleash his fire again, and he did. The man still stood there,
without a single scratch, unbothered by fire. It didn’t work on him.

A great tempest raged around them. A great crowd was marching on Winterfell. Wights came in
numbers behind the man with blue eyes, led by other men like him. These eyes were as cold as
winter. He wasn’t a man. Not anymore. The vision Revan showed her had become true. Daenerys
was standing face to face with the Night King.

He reached something behind his back, and something that looked like a long spear came from it. It
seemed to be made of ice. He looked at her, then targeted her with his spear, and was about to throw
it.

A thunderous scream came from her right at this moment. Daenerys looked at its origin and saw a
large flame of pale gold with red and orange coming for the Night King. Then Viserion slammed
into the leader of the White Walkers before continuing his path. When Daenerys looked at the Night
King lying on the ground, she saw the handle of his spear next to him, but the ice was gone. It had
melted. Green, orange and yellow flames were shot behind him and the wights that were following
the Night King burned. Rhaegal was there too.

Before Daenerys could ask herself what her two other dragons were doing here, the Night King was
getting back on his knees. Daenerys ordered Drogon to fly away, putting distance between her and
the Night King. She didn’t know what this spear would have done without the intervention of
Viserion, but she didn’t want to take the risk to see Drogon hurt or killed for the sake of knowing it.
In the meantime, Rhaegal was dropping his fire on the wights all over the battlefield. Viserion, on his side, led an attack on the enemies who were near the walls of Winterfell, just like Daenerys did. She joined him, weakening the dead all around the castle, giving a chance to those who fought inside its walls to survive. Fire surrounded Winterfell. A few days ago, someone told her that Winterfell could have been another Harrenhal, had the Starks decided to not bend the knee to her ancestors three centuries ago. It was ironic to think that the dragons could have destroyed this castle, and that now they were saving it.

As Daenerys thought that the battle was turning into a dance of dragons, her three children spitting their fire on the dead, she heard horns. A great blow of air stroke her from behind. The air was hot, not cold. Looking from where it came, she saw very clearly who did this. Her view was much better. The storm had quieted down. Fires were visible at the distance, but these didn’t come from her dragons. And her army was coming, led by fire.
Gerold I

GEROLD I

A long time ago, in what seemed to be another life, he was sparring with his brother. Not the brother who rode by his side right now, the family’s sword at his belt. He never stood a chance against Garlan. He was the one born to fight in the family. Altos, on the other side, he always knew he could beat him, and Gerold hoped he would succeed.

She was among the people watching them. She was the person who made him believe that something good could actually happen to him in this life. She was the one who persuaded him that a third son could actually get something else than the leftovers his elder brothers allowed him to grab.

The duel had started well enough. He held his ground and managed to place his father’s heir into fragile situations. However, in the end, it didn’t work. He lost. He lost because deep inside, he doubted he could ever be better than Altos. He wanted to be. He didn’t care for the fact that Garlan was better, but Altos… He only wished he could bring him on his knees one time and prove that being the firstborn didn’t make him better, but Gerold wasn’t sure he could do it. He was still the small boy Altos mocked at every turn, and that was his doom. Altos defeated him, humiliated him once again. He had never been able to fight back against him. When he was on the ground, he couldn’t stand up, not before his brother. He could never get back on his feet. Except this time.

When she came to stop Altos, and when his brother slapped the woman he loved, all his uncertainties, all his doubts vanished in one moment and were replaced by the purest rage. He could suffer the others making a joke out of him, or even mistreating him to some extent. He was used to that, especially coming from Altos. But never, never, he would allow someone to raise a hand on the woman he loved. And so he fought, he fought like a savage beast. He could have killed Altos, he knew that, but in this moment, he didn’t care. All he cared about was Mira.

He thought about her every day. Even as they rode, trying to reach Winterfell before it was too late, his wife occupied a part of his mind, like she always did. No matter what he did, she was always there. Sometimes he tried to forget her, even for a few moments, when it was unbearable. He even visited brothels, but in every girl he went to, he saw a detail reminding him of his wife, and felt even worse after spending time with them because he could also see that they were not Mira. The thought of her made him miserable, and he had wanted to turn back his heels and go back to her more often than he could count, but words that his father told him before he left the Hightower were stuck in his head. You are a Hightower, my son. Don’t ever forget that. If you’re going north, it’s for your family above everything else.

He hadn’t minded at this moment. Mira was a Hightower, or so he thought. My name is Mira Forrester, and this is my home. My family is here, they are in danger, and I’m not going to risk the life of the people I love. He felt betrayed, more than she could ever know. However, that was before he learned the truth. I don’t believe it would have been very wise for a pregnant woman to travel miles in the snow and among storms. And that was nothing compared to what he said afterwards. I have many flaws, Ser Gerold Hightower, but abandoning a woman alone with a child when he’s yours is probably one of the things I despise the most. I hope you will never meet a Forrester again, because they all want to skin you alive right now.

And Mira was a Forrester. He never thought he would reach a further bottom end until yesterday, when everyone began to worry that no scout units returned. He was afraid of Lord Tyrion, to be honest. Everyone said he was dead, and yet he lived, and the queen had accepted him on her council.
She took dinners with him, and only with him. And there was also the fact that this little man despised him. Gerold could hear it in his voice. Whenever he saw the Lord of Casterly Rock, he didn’t see the dwarf, but a man casting a very large shadow, a shadow he was afraid that could devour him and leave him into darkness. The worst was that Gerold felt he deserved this hatred. Everything told him that the Imp was right to despise him. When he finally gathered the courage to address him, to ask him if he thought Ironrath would survive, the Lord of Casterly Rock’s answer almost destroyed him.

He answered in a tired voice, and unlike the last time they spoke at Moat Cailin, there was no hatred in his voice. “You know, with all these missing scouts, I wouldn’t be surprised if the dead reached Winterfell. And if they reached Winterfell, then it’s almost certain that Ironrath and everyone who remained inside is dead.” A stone had fallen into his stomach. The little lord had looked at Gerold. “You know what’s worse than death? Staying alive and losing all the people you love. I know what I’m talking about.”

Such were the things he thought about as he looked ahead of him. The Red Priests had led the way as they rode to reach Winterfell before it was too late. Strangely, the storm was smaller. Fired preceded them as they progressed forward. Gerold saw one of the priests light a huge fire only by gazing at a pile of wood. It seemed these people had many tricks up their sleeves. The air was warmer, snow almost turned to rain on their army. Everyone was ready for battle.

Ahead of him, Gerold saw the castle of Winterfell. He had been there almost a year ago, and he didn’t take part to the battle. He was in the reserves. This time would be different. The most disorganized army he ever saw was besieging Winterfell. Well, besieging wasn’t the appropriate term. It was something between attacking and surrounding, and there were more people in the fields than he could count. He never saw an army big like that, and yet he saw two only in the last year. It looked like a disorganized mob rushing against walls. The only problem was that the walls were breached. The enemies were running into the castle through the gate he could see. And there were mammoths, and giants. And dragons too. Three dragons flew over the battlefield and breathed fire on the enemies. Gerold thought they were trying to keep the dead at distance from Winterfell, but from what he could see, it wasn’t entirely successful. The enemy’s army seemed without limit in numbers.

Gerold felt a hand on his shoulder. He was riding in a huge army as well, next to savages who spoke a language he couldn’t understand, and fellow knights from the Reach, the Stormlands, the Crownlands, the Riverlands, the Westerlands and the North, not to mention the man at the head of the army who wielded a flaming sword. The whole might of Westeros was gathered here. However, it didn’t give him trust. The only one who gave him trust right now was the man riding next to him, the one who reassured him with a pression on his shoulder, his brother Garlan. Gerold looked at him.

“Ready?” He looked down. He didn’t dare to answer. It was then that his big brother told him something he needed to hear. “Gerold, if Mira is still alive, she’s in there. And there’s only one way for you to ever see her again.”

He looked up to meet his brother’s eyes, who were serious and encouraging at the same time. They told you know what you have to do. Gerold looked back at Winterfell. Could she be there? Was there a chance…

“CHARGE!”

The great shout came and everyone ordered their horses to run forward. With only an instant of hesitation, Gerold did the same, and they charged the dead enemies in front of them. He heard other people shout and roar all around him. The battle had begun. This time, he would be a part of it. He unsheathed his sword from its scabbard and threw a side glance to his brother. Garlan was staring
straight ahead of him, ready for the impact. Gerold decided to be ready as well. That was his chance. Winterfell was growing in his sight. If Mira is still alive, she’s in there. That was his chance for everything. You should learn to surrender quickly. That’s all you’re good for. He would prove to Altos that he was wrong. He would find her. He focused on the battlefield ahead of him, and saw the enemy lines, if you could call that lines, getting closer. He readied himself, and when the contact was made, he was prepared.

The first wight who happened to be close to his horse found himself impaled on the said sword. The steel passed through the flesh and cut the body in two. Gerold roared and swung his sword at every side, cutting and hacking every enemy he came upon. There were Dothrakis near him and he perceived from the side how they used their two arched sword to reduce wights to rubble. Gerold didn’t care for their blue eyes or their visible bones or their deadly appearance. He was ready to kill them all, if killing them was possible. He wouldn’t stop. He would never stop. And yet he did.

At one moment, his horse rode through a wight, and the next moment he was falling onto the ground. Gerold rolled on his back and managed to get up on his feet quickly enough. He was met immediately by a man with a red armor, but this one wasn’t alive like Lord Tyrion’s men. He had no flesh on the face and ran at him with his sword brandished as if he wanted to chop him like a tree. Gerold blocked the blow and sent him one of his own. The head was gone. However, the fight didn’t stop there.

To Gerold’s horror, this thing kept fighting without a head. He cut an arm, but it kept holding the sword with the other arm, albeit very clumsily. He slashed the dead soldier from balls to head, then finally hit him with his sword at the leg, which was gone immediately. Holding on only one leg and with a lone arm, without a head on his shoulders, the wight was without defense. Gerold finished the work and cut through the wight in the middle, separating him in two. The parts kept moving, but he decided they were no more danger.

He saw a Dothraki with a wight on his back, the dead man tearing the flesh off his back as the savage did everything to get rid of it. Gerold saw a torch still lit lying near his feet and seized it. Half the soldiers were carrying one. He shoved it into the wight, who began to scream like a wild beast, and the savage could get rid of the nuisance and go back to fight. Gerold imitated him.

With a torch, things were much easier. The fire only needed to touch the wight so that it would be inoffensive. The moment fire touched it, the fight was over. Gerold saw several other men doing the same all around him. Knights and Dothrakis kept hacking the dead from their horses, with sword or whatever it was that could cut, weakening if not killing them, while torch bearers dealt with the dead for good. There were also some men who had weapons made of dragonglass, a material mined in Dragonstone that could destroy White Walkers and wights all alike. At the same time, many men fell around him.

He kept fighting, and fighting, seeing dragons fly over his head and fires about everywhere across the battlefield. Gerold was sweating under his armor. And then he saw him.

He had blue eyes, like the wights, but his skin was a very pale blue, looking more like ice than dead flesh, and he had a strange sword with a long handle in his hands. He hacked the people around him, no matter where they came from, with easiness. Gerold saw a knight approaching him with his horse, and the animal was impaled. The knight followed. His spear tumbled towards Gerold, and he saw that it was made of dragonglass. He seized it and advanced toward the enemy. The cold blue eyes met his. He threw the spear toward the White Walker when he thought he was close enough. The weapon broke when it met the armor and miserably fell on the ground. Gerold swore he saw a smile on this thing’s face, a smile that reminded him of Altos’s mocking smile.
Gerold unsheathed his sword and prepared to meet his opponent. When the White Walker swung his sword, Gerold ducked and struck a hit on his leg. Nothing happened. He received a back hand on his face and stumbled behind. When he brought back his sword on his opponent, the blades met and his own shattered. It was only an inch and his belly would have been opened. He stumbled again, and this time fell on his back. The White Walker walked towards him, with the obvious intention to deliver the fatal blow.

Then a point of steel appeared through the White Walker’s heart, or at least where the heart should have been. It didn’t scream like a wight, for it vanished immediately, reduced to pieces of ice. Where the White Walker previously was Garlan now stood. His brother released a sigh.

“It’s a chance Father gave me the family’s sword before I left,” he said. Yes, it was a chance. There weren’t many houses in Westeros who had a Valyrian steel sword, and the Hightowers were among the few with this privilege.

His brother offered him a hand and Gerold seized it to stand up. “Come on, little brother, the battle is not over.”

No indeed, it wasn’t. Gerold and Garlan went back into the melee. They fought as hard as they could, watching over each other at the same time. From afar, Gerold saw the Red Priest with a mask, still on his horse, swinging his flaming sword through a White Walker that exploded. Another knight from the Reach rode by his side, and together they headed south, to Winterfell.
Jon watched the giant who came through the Hunter’s Gate seize two men who were running away and crush them on the ground. He didn’t know who screamed to retreat, but that was a big mistake. The men were running everywhere, trying to escape a death they were condemned to if they didn’t fight. If they lost the gates, they lost Winterfell.

The impossible arrived at this moment. A great gust of fire came from nowhere and devoured the giant’s head. It fell, crushing many wights with him. Jon looked up to see a giant black beast with huge wings flying over their heads. He looked in awe to the beast flying away. He realized most men who began to retreat had stopped.

“Fight!”

The shout brought some back into the battle, and the screams they unleashed as they returned to their positions and fought the wights again forced the others to do the same. It returned to a real chaos of fight. Jon pierced, hacked, cut, hit, punched. He did everything to take as many dead men with him before he died. He knew he could die, and that his chances to live were slim, but at least he would give these fuckers a fight. Longclaw danced all around with its master, ending the Night King’s work. From time to time, Jon witnessed the black dragon spitting fire on the other side of the walls. He thought that fewer dead men came in through the gates.

*Let’s give these fuckers a true hell of a fight. And let’s win this battle.*

A Lannister always paid his debts, and it seemed that Tyrion Lannister lived by these words. They arrived just in time. The balance of the battle was beginning to turn. However, it only turned in the sense they could hold the dead at bay. The gates were still being fought for. They slowed down, sometimes even pushed back the enemy’s advance, but he kept coming at them, and while his men were tiring, the dead didn’t seem to exhaust or tire in any way.

He changed of position, alternating between the South Gate and the Hunter’s Gate, encouraging his men at both positions, while he kept killing every wight who happened before him. He found himself fighting three at the same time, using every parade he had to keep the trio of swords away from him. He destroyed one, only to have one wight on his right and another on his left. Suddenly, the one on the left burned, and Jon turned all his attention to his right. A swing of sword at the neck and the third wight was gone. When he looked back at where the second wight burned, he saw Arya fighting another dead. He spotted another enemy rushing onto her from her back. Jon rushed on him and smashed him to pieces before he could do any harm to his sister.

They found themselves fighting back to back, Arya with her long sword and a torch, Jon with Longclaw, the white wolf head reminding him of his Stark origins and upbringing. His arms ached from the effort he gave to repel the enemies.

“Your Grace!”

Jon looked where the voice came from, and saw Ser Davos running towards him. “You’re supposed to guard the North Gate,” Jon shouted as he destroyed another wight.
“The North Gate is gone. And the walls too. There’s a large breach. Wights are coming in numbers. We cannot hold them.”

The walls were breached at the North Gate. Holding an army of dead men trying to get through a gate was already very difficult, but a breach was impossible to hold. He remembered how they failed to hold the Wall after the First Fall.

“Did you send the reserves?” Jon asked. They kept large numbers of men in reserve in case the enemy would manage to break through their defenses.

“We sent all of them, but we won’t hold for long.”

“Stay here, Ser Davos. Lead the operations at the South Gate.”

Jon gathered five hundred men to follow him to the North Gate. It may be hopeless, but they had to defend the north side of Winterfell. If they lost the walls at one position, their defenses would be worth nothing. Worse, if the dead managed to take possession of the northern section of the castle, they could take the Great Keep. Bran was there, still lost in his visions.

When Jon arrived near the North Gate, he realized how dire the situation was. Men fought everywhere in a complete chaos. The breach was long for about a hundred feet, and the dead were rushing inside. Jon joined the fight with the men he brought, bringing what relief they could to the people already fighting. There were many bodies on the ground. This sight reminded him of the Second Battle of Winterfell. He prayed to the Old Gods to keep the dead at bay in the southern part of the castle, or else they would be surrounded on all sides, like when Ramsay sent his phalanx.

While he fought, Jon saw a miracle happen. A dragon, smaller than the black one, passed by the breach and threw fire on it. The debris were on fire, creating a wall of fire instead of a wall of stone. He saw wights trying to get through the breach burning right away.

He doubled his efforts to pull back the enemy. He saw Tormund fighting in a corner with other wildlings, cutting through the dead, roaring like a wild beast. The wildlings were used to fight the dead. Despite their absence of discipline, they were the best to fight the wights in hand to hand. They knew their weaknesses.

Jon joined his friend, destroying two wights on his way. “That’s a hell of a fight, Lord Snow,” he said, grinning and laughing. He cut a wight in two from head to toe. Whether you were dead or alive, Tormund Giantsbane was a dangerous enemy to have.

“Once this is over, you’ll show me how to make this drink you have north of the Wall, because I’ll need a lot of it,” Jon said. “And that’s an order from your king.”

“Stay alive and I’ll tell you, but not because you’re a king.” Tormund roared back as he attacked another wight. This one couldn’t resist the leader of the Free Folk more than any other.

They were beginning to get back the advantage, thanks to the wall of fire that kept wights at bay, when the said wall disappeared. Five White Walkers walked through it, unbothered by fire or by anything around them. At the center of them stood the Night King. The fire being extinguished, wights rushed from behind them into the yard.

The battle got more intense than ever. They were losing ground. Jon tried to make himself a way to the White Walkers. He was the only one here with a sword made of Valyrian steel. The White Walkers were cutting through his men, invulnerable to their weapons. They remained together, side by side. None got far from the others.
As Jon was trying to make his way to them, his eyes met those of the Night King. They already met at Hardhome a long time ago, and again at the Wall when it fell for the second time. They had looked at each other as he raised his arms and an army of tens of thousand rose to follow him. Now he was being surrounded by the four White Walkers who accompanied him, and they prevented anyone from getting close to him. He raised his arms.

Jon knew exactly what he was doing, but it was too late. Someone gripped his knee, and he immediately slashed the body on the ground. He looked around and saw more of them rising. He had to stop him, now. He was the only one who could do it. Just as he was about to run forward to the enemy, he heard a terrible roar next to him. Tormund had been surrounded by five or six wights. Jon saw him being stabbed by as many swords as there were enemies on him.

Jon screamed and charged in the hope that his friend could still be saved. He hacked to pieces all the wights. Tormund fell on his knees. He seized Jon’s hand. “Don’t let me come back.”

He fell on his side. These were his last words. Jon would have expected him to ask that he made sure the White Walkers didn’t make it out, but instead Tormund begged him to not be turned into one of these things. In some way, that was the same. The only way to stop Tormund from returning as a wight was to kill the Night King.

Jon stood to face the leader of the White Walkers. Bran said he once was a man, and some legends said he had been a commander of the Night’s Watch. Jon slowly walked to him. The rest of the battlefield didn’t matter anymore. Two of the White Walkers accompanying their king prepared to engage him. Five against one. He already killed more than one White Walker, three overall. However, it was always in singular combat. The odds were against him, but there was nothing else to do. If he couldn’t destroy the Night King, then who would?

Coming out of the dust behind the five Walkers, a dark figure emerged on a dark horse, wielding a flaming sword. He swung it at one of the guards behind the Night King and the White Walker in question was destroyed. Another rider came upon the second Walker behind, but his sword was met by the enemy’s and blocked.

Jon didn’t hesitate. He launched forward at the two enemies standing before him. They had looked surprised by the irruption of these two horsemen and Jon couldn’t let an opportunity like that pass by. However, the White Walker he attacked blocked him easily, and Jon found himself dealing with two enemies at the same time. He was forced on the defensive and parried the attacks the best he could. He was the best swordsman in Winterfell before he went to the Wall, but these two were not to be taken lightly. He saw one of the riders fighting the other White Walker behind. The Night King did nothing. He stared in Jon’s direction.

Jon spotted a red glow by his right and realized the man with a burning sword engaged one of the White Walkers he was fighting. It was a three-to-three fight. The Night King didn’t join the fray. He kept looking into Jon’s direction. Jon swung at the White Walker’s legs, but the enemy stopped his blow and stepped back. He tried to chop Jon’s head from his shoulders, but Longclaw met the ice sword. It was Jon who then tried an attack on its arm and again it was stopped. They exchanged blows without stopping, and each blocked the other. Finally, Jon saw an opening and seized it. He swung the sword from down to up. The White Walker could deflect the blow, but his sword was no longer in position to protect him. Jon swung it one last time and finished his enemy. The White Walker was gone.

He looked at the Night King, who still remained in retreat and gazed in his direction, looking… confused? Was that what Jon saw? Confusion on the face of the leader of the White Walkers? He noticed Jon advancing towards him, surely, for he raised his sword and brought it down. Jon blocked
it, but the blow was powerful, and it was difficult for him to not place a knee on the ground. He
ducked and attacked the Night King on the side, only to be blocked. Who could think that men who
seemed made of ice were so agile and quick. The White Walkers he fought before were nothing
compared to those he faced today.

The Night King brought his sword forward, point first at his heart, and Jon moved to his left to avoid
it. He tried to smash the king’s head, but he parried with a single hand. He didn’t need to hold his
sword with two hands it seemed. That meant his second hand was free.

Jon stepped back just in time. If he hadn’t, the ice dagger would have gotten right into his heart. So
the Night King fought with a sword and a dagger, his blows with one hand as powerful if not more
than Jon’s own attacks with two hands. He blocked the attacks and stayed away from the dagger,
until the Night threw it at him. It struck his right arm, leaving a superficial injury on it, but Jon felt the
pain very strongly. The Night King advanced and brought his sword down on him. Jon blocked it
with Longclaw, but the Night King now wielded his sword with two hands and forced it down. Jon
fought with all his forces. The pain in his arm became unbearable. And then, he felt a wave of
warmth run through his veins, and a new energy emerging. He pushed back the sword of ice and
struck, then he struck again, again, and again. At each blow, the Night King gave ground, and at last
a blow took his sword out of his hands. Jon didn’t miss it. He plunged Longclaw straight into where
the Night King’s heart should have been.

A deafening scream was heard immediately, and Jon saw that it came from the Night King. Where
Longclaw got through him, a blue light appeared all around. The Night King looked straight in front
of him, over Jon’s shoulder, and he exploded into a million shards of ice. Jon raised an arm to protect
his face.

When Jon removed his arm, he saw a red figure he knew only too well standing several feet from
him. She brought him back from the dead, and he exiled her. Melisandre of Asshai was right there in
front of him.

A long moment of silence went on, and no sound could be heard. And then, an explosion of cries
came from behind. Jon looked there and, behind the masked man with a flaming sword who showed
no reaction, he saw all his men raising their sword in the air. The cries were of joy. There wasn’t a
single wight left.

“What happened?” The knight who arrived just in time to help Jon was next to him, asking this
question. A pile of ice shards not far away revealed he destroyed the White Walker he was fighting.

“When the king of the dead dies, then nothing dead can survive near him,” the masked man
answered. Jon realized he wore red robes, similar to some of Melisandre’s.

“Who are you?” Jon asked him.

“Who I am is not important, my message is. This battle is not over.”

He walked by Jon and went towards the breach. He also walked by Melisandre, as if she didn’t exist.
Job walked until he was close to her.

“Why are you here?” he asked her.

“Doing my duty to my Lord, Jon Snow,” she answered.

“You’re Jon Snow?” the knight asked him.

He turned to face him. “Aye.” The knight looked at his sword’s pommel.
“My name is Dickon Tarly.”

Jon’s eyes widened in utter surprise. “You’re Sam’s brother.”

“He talked to me about you. And he sent me back Heartsbane before I travelled in the North. It’s a chance that he did. I saw what these things did to normal swords. The next time he talks about surreal creatures, I’ll believe him.” He shook his head. “Revan is right though. This battle is probably not over.”

He walked back to the breach. Jon looked at Melisandre, who held his gaze, though there was none of the pride she displayed before Stannis died. Jon just walked past her and emerged on the battlefield after climbing the debris of the walls. There he found Revan and Sam’s brother watching the fields around Winterfell. Jon saw many men on horses everywhere, hacking dead men. And the dead were retreating, running away. Three huge dragons kept raining fire on them.

“It seems the battle is over,” Dickon Tarly said. “I’m going to check on my men.”

He left. Jon remained there, looking at the whole battlefield. The dead were running away, the Night King was dead. They won.

“It’s over,” he whispered, releasing a long sigh of relief.

“It’s never over, Jon Snow.” Jon looked to his right, where the masked man stood. “Don’t forget this. It is never over.”

He walked away, and progressively disappeared from Jon’s eyesight. Jon realized the air was warmer, and that snow almost turned to rain when it touched the ground. The temperature was far less cold, and his sweat didn’t only come from the heat of battle anymore.

“I see you’ve just met another member of my order.” Melisandre’s voice came from behind him. “I hope you will trust him more than you trusted me.”

“What are you doing here?” he asked again.

“I serve my Lord,” she repeated.

“The last time we spoke, you said your Lord ordered to burn children,” Jon countered, angrily.

She looked down. “I was wrong. I came back in the hope I could be useful.”

“I told you that if you ever came back, I would hang you for murder.”

“And I am back. If you want to execute me, Jon Snow, then do it. Maybe my part to play in this war was to help you defeat the Night King, and I did it. If that’s the case, then there is no reason left for me to live.”

She stared straight at him again. She didn’t defy him, and she didn’t ask for forgiveness, but there was something else in her eyes. It was as if she asked him if he really wanted to kill her. If that was the case, then in all honesty, Jon didn’t want to.

They heard a long screech and Jon saw one of the dragons coming their way. He stepped back when he landed at a respectful distance from them. There was someone on his back. He climbed down the beast and walked toward them.

“It seems we arrived just in time,” he said. Tyrion Lannister was standing right in front of him.
Jon let himself drop on the ground and brought his friend into an embrace. “I’m glad you’re alive.”

“Well, me too,” the small man replied, obviously uncomfortable about the whole situation. Jon stood back.

“We thought you were dead.”

Tyrion scoffed. “You can’t imagine how right you were.” Jon frowned. “Let’s just say we made a similar journey, Jon Snow.”

The dwarf directed his eyes in Melisandre’s direction. Jon looked at her. She nodded. There were men who assembled behind and looked at the dragon Tyrion Lannister just arrived with. Jon looked back at his friend, who shrugged. Jon’s eyes wandered to the beast he rode to come here, then back to his friend.

“You were riding a dragon?”

“Yes, that’s long story,” Tyrion replied. He looked in the skies. “But I think it will have to wait.” Jon followed his gaze and saw a large black dragon, larger than the one Tyrion arrived on, coming their way. “I suppose it’s time for you to meet the queen, Jon Snow.”

Jon thought he perceived a certain concern in his friend’s voice, and when the black beast landed next to his smaller brother, Jon understood why. The pale dragon was very quiet when compared to his big brother, who opened his mouth wide and screamed at them. When he dropped his head, he revealed a young woman with blond hair on his back. She climbed down and walked to Tyrion, who knelt before her.

“Your Grace.”

“I thought I ordered you to not approach my dragons,” she said. Her voice was imperious. She spoke and behaved like someone who was used to give orders and to see them followed.

“I agree, but if I didn’t, you have to admit that you might be dead right now.”

A silence followed. “Rise. We’ll talk about it later.” Jon wondered who Tyrion was worried about. He and Daenerys Targaryen walked together to him. She looked at the woman standing close to Jon. “Lady Melisandre.”

“Your Grace.” She bowed.

“Where is Jon Snow? I need to talk with him.”

Everyone seemed a little surprised and shocked. It was Tyrion who spoke first. “He is right in front of you, your Grace.”

She looked at him. Her eyes were purple. She was the one to look surprise this time. “You are Jon Snow?” She didn’t seem to believe it was possible.

Jon inhaled deeply. He still had his word in hand. She was defenseless, standing there without any weapon, without anything to protect her. He had thought about it a long time ago, and he knew what he had to do. Slowly, he took Longclaw’s handle with his two hands.

“Your Grace.”

He pointed it towards the ground and bent the knee. Behind him, Jon heard everyone else slowly
kneeling before the only queen of Westeros. The history was repeating itself.

Chapter End Notes

Again, I hope you enjoyed my version of a Third Battle of Winterfell. You may have noted a few similarities between this battle and the Battle of Pelennor Fields in "Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King".

The battle began with the defense almost without hope of Winterfell. Arya trying to shot down a White Walker before he breaks the gates (White Walkers can shatter steel, so they can destroy a portcullis, like in the fanfic "Ned Stark Lives!" by cbstevp) is inspired by the scene of the Battle of Helm' Deep in the "Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers". Despite the defenders' efforts, they can't hope to repel the invaders without reinforcements from the outside.

Then Daenerys arrives and balances the fight, without being able to completely turn the tide. She faces the Night King, only to discover that even dragonfire cannot destroy it (only wights can be destroyed by fire, not the White Walkers). She is only saved thanks to Tyrion's intervention, who came with Viserion against her orders, and who destroys the weapon that was destined to kill Drogon.

The balance of the fight truly turns for the living when Daenerys's army arrives. Helped by the powers of the Red Priests, the army is capable of fighting the dead within a lessened storm. A part of the army has weapons made of dragonglass, and they have fire as well. That's where we get our first POV chapter from Gerold Hightower, Mira's husband.

In the meantime, Jon is able to rally his men inside the walls of Winterfell, where they manage to hold their ground long enough to let Daenerys's army deal with the enemy outside. This battle inside the walls is not without casualties and ends with a final duel between the Night King and five other White Walkers on one side, and Jon Snow, Revan and Dickon Tarly on the other side, three of the few warriors with Valyrian steel sword on the battlefield. The death of the Night King causes many wights to fall and the remaining to retreat, chased by the dragons. The battle ends with Jon reuniting with Tyrion and meeting Daenerys for the first time.

Each chapter somehow plays the role to show us the battle from a different perspective. Arya sets the context and shows us the condition of the defenders of the castle along with their struggle to hold it against an army much stronger than theirs. Daenerys gives us a view of the battle from the skies, Gerold a view from the field outside the castle, while Jon shows us how the battle is going inside the walls once the tide has begun to turn.

Now, Winterfell has been saved, but the war is not over yet and the presence of Daenerys in the North might bring complications. Not all Northerners may accept her as their queen after all.

I ask you to leave a review about this battle. Tell me what you think of it, good and bad.

Next chapter is next week: Tyrion
P.-S.: I want to apologize for only uploading the battle today. It was supposed to be published on Saturday, but a certain government I'm working for wanted me to write a budget instead of fanfictions :)

For a third time, I hope you liked these four chapters.
TYRION XXXIII

The room was empty, and cold. The crib was still there, near the window, but it didn’t make him feel like there was something in this room. This had been the residence of Joanna and her wetnurse, and almost of Sansa as well since she spent as much time as she could with their daughter. Now they were gone. A thin layer of dust covered the floor and the crib itself. Tyrion climbed the small stool near the crib. It was placed to allow him to take Joanna in his arms when he wanted. He wandered his finger over the edge of the crib and looked at the dust that accumulated on it. He rubbed his fingers, sending the dust into the air. No one entered this room for a very long time.

Tyrion had hoped that Sansa and Joanna were safe inside Winterfell while he rode with Daenerys. The betrayal of the Vale didn’t mean they were able to seize Winterfell. The castle was very strong, even with a small garrison, and he thought Sansa would have enough sense to leave most of the troops Ser Vance Corbray brought with him outside the castle. His wife and daughter had to be safe inside these walls. He was wrong.

His greatest worry when he arrived was what Daenerys Targaryen would do with Jon Snow. First, she didn’t recognize him. Tyrion told her that Jon Snow didn’t look like a Targaryen, but it didn’t seem to be enough. She didn’t consider the possibility that the man standing in front of her was her nephew, and even after Tyrion told her, she seemed very skeptical. Still, the fact Jon Snow bent the knee before her, and was followed, although reluctantly, by his fellow countrymen and the other people who were with him, relieved the tension. The Mad King’s daughter was welcomed inside Winterfell and accepted Jon Snow’s pledge, though without giving much detail for the time being.

Once Daenerys walked inside Winterfell, the first thing Tyrion did was to ask Jon Snow about Sansa and Joanna. Jon Snow had been surprised. He thought they could have escaped with Tyrion. He had to tell Jon Snow everything that happened, about the attack near Winterfell, the death of Bronn and Podrick, how he was carried by a dragon to the army of Daenerys, his resurrection, and their journey to Winterfell. He also told him that a part of the garrison of Moat Cailin died, but he limited his explanations to a battle between those who agreed to surrender and those who refused. He would explain everything in detail later, when they would be alone. For now, they had more important concerns.

Tyrion was worried more than anything about Sansa and Joanna. Their bodies hadn’t been found, to the opposite of that of many other people. Jon suspected they were taken as hostages by the lords of the Vale. Tyrion felt his blood boiling inside of him. If they dared anything against them, he would make the Rains of Castamere or the Red Wedding look like mercy. Whoever kidnapped his family would pay the price.

“There was nothing when we arrived. Nothing at all.” The voice behind him tried to be reassuring. “I’m sure they are well. The wife and the daughter of the Lord of Casterly Rock are too valuable hostages to be killed.”
“It didn’t stop Joffrey from killing Eddard Stark, or to beat Sansa in public. It didn’t stop Lord Karstark from killing Martyn and Willem against Robb Stark’s will. And that didn’t stop the Sand Snakes from murdering Myrcella,” Tyrion replied. He turned to look at Ser Davos Seaworth, who was at a loss of words.

“I… They must be alive.”

“If they are, then I hope that whoever did this treat them well. For his own sake.” And for the sake of Sansa and Joanna. Sansa was kidnapped because she is my wife, and Joanna was taken away because she is my daughter. I swore to protect them, to protect them both, and I failed.

“We better go, my lord. The… queen will want to speak with all us.”

“Yes, true.” Let’s hope she doesn’t burn me alive for riding one of her children and convincing the other to follow.

Tyrion and Ser Davos went to a large room that was used for what could be a small council for the Lord of Winterfell or the King in the North. Bran and Arya Stark, along with Meera Reed and Jon Snow were already present. They had to wait some time before Daenerys Targaryen arrived with two advisors, the Red Priest Revan and Malcolm Branfield. This was meant as a private reunion, and anything said here wouldn’t be public. The queen didn’t deign invite men to represent the different kingdoms of Westeros. The discussion they were about to have wasn’t for them to hear.

“Shall we begin?” she asked to no one in particular. She considered their silence meant they approved. “First, Jon Snow, I want you to know that Lord Tyrion told me about your intentions once this war would be over. He says you sent a raven explaining them, but we never received it. So far, you showed that you were true to your word, and I hope I’ll have no reason to doubt it in the future.”

“You won’t have to. However, I also asked as a condition to my surrender that you let my brothers and sisters live,” Jon Snow said.

“You don’t have to worry about that. If House Stark accepts me as their queen, I will allow them to remain the Wardens of the North and Lords of Winterfell. Your siblings don’t have anything to fear as long they bend the knee too.”

She looked at Arya and Bran. “We will,” Bran said. Arya hesitated, but after an encouraging look from Jon, she agreed with a simple aye.

“Good, so.” She turned her head towards Bran. “Since Jon Snow will join the Night’s Watch again, I suppose you are the Lord of Winterfell now.”

“No, I’m not. I cannot rule the North,” Bran said.

The queen frowned. “Why not? What’s wrong with you?”

“I am the Three-Eyed Raven.” Daenerys didn’t seem convinced. “It’s complicated.”

“It is,” the masked man said. “Let’s just say, your Grace, that Brandon Stark would be unfit to rule in his current state.”

“It’s not about the fact I cannot walk,” Bran said. “It’s just that… I have other things to do.”

“And what are these things?” Daenerys asked, still looking skeptical.

“It’s complicated.”
“It seems a lot of things are complicated.”

Tyrion intervened. “I think that if Brandon Stark doesn’t want to be Lord of Winterfell, then we shouldn’t force him.”

“Very well, though I don’t understand why you refuse.”

Jon Snow spoke. “By all the laws of the Seven Kingdoms, Sansa comes after Bran if he is not Lord of Winterfell. However, she disappeared.” He looked at Tyrion, showing sympathy.

“She was probably kidnapped by some rogue men from the Vale. They must have brought her somewhere they can hide her,” Ser Davos said.

“Then we’ll find her, and her daughter as well.” She shot a look at Tyrion, meaning she would honor her promise, or so he thought. “There is something else I do not understand, though.” She looked at Jon. “Why are you going back to the Wall? You were given a chance for a new life, outside the Night’s Watch, and yet you’re ready to bind yourself to the same oath for the second time. Why?”

“I don’t want any fight between us,” Jon replied. “The dead are ravaging our lands, turning our people into monsters. The War of the Five Kings devastated all the country, and winter has come. It is no more time for fighting between us. If the price to defeating the White Walkers is to chain myself to the Wall again, then so be it, I do it gladly.”

“So you’re giving up everything? Any claim you might have on the Iron Throne, or the North or any other kingdom, and the possibility to marry and have children? Please forgive me, Jon Snow. Lord Tyrion told me the Starks are always true to their word, but I find it hard to believe that you would be ready to sacrifice everything, especially when you could have so much. I found out that most people only give up on the possibility to have these things when it is clear they will never have them, and even then, sometimes they don’t. Why should I believe you?”

Tyrion saw that Jon was getting unnerved. “Look, I didn’t ask to be king. The lords chose me. I was the bastard of Winterfell for more than fifteen years. I don’t claim that I never envied my brothers and sisters, but I accepted the fact that I wouldn’t have much. I joined the Night’s Watch of my own free will, and I chose to remain in it when I had the opportunity to leave. I did things my heart and my mind opposed to respect the vows I swore. When my brother marched on the south, I wanted to join him. I was brought back to Castle Black by my sworn brothers, and I had a good discussion with the Lord Commander the next morning. He asked me if my brother’s war was more important than our war, the war against the dead. He asked me if it mattered who sat on the damn Iron Throne when the Night King and his army came for us. He asked me if I was a brother of the Night’s Watch, or a bastard who wanted to play at war. I don’t care about the Iron Throne. I dedicated my life to the fight against the dead, so as long as you allow the people I love to live, then I have nothing against you being the queen. Unless you’re like your father.”

The tension was so thick that you could have cut through it with a knife. Jon Snow and Daenerys Targaryen were staring at each other with intensity. “My father was an evil man. I know what he did to the Starks, and it was criminal.” She looked around to Bran and Arya. “On behalf of House Targaryen, I ask your forgiveness for the crimes he committed against your family. I ask you to not judge me on my father’s actions. I’m not like him.” She looked again at Jon. “Since you bent the knee, I’m willing to trust you if you trust me. You can ask every lord south and north of the Neck that I met. Those who resist me are treated like rebels, but those who bend the knee keep their lands. I did so with the people in the Reach who abandoned my family when the war was over, and with those of the kingdoms who rebelled against my father. I know you raised the sword with good reasons against him, and I don’t blame you for that. The only thing I blame the rebels for are their subsequent actions. They swore an oath to House Targaryen. My father may have burned people
alive, but Rhaegar, Aegon, Rhaenys, Viserys and I never did such a thing. Our only crimes were to be Targaryens. After dethroning my father, the rebels should have allowed my house to remain in power. Instead, they installed an usurper on my family’s throne. I was forced to flee and to hide for most of my life. Assassins were sent after me, and if it wasn’t for a disgraced knight who was condemned by one of the leaders of this rebellion, I would have died of poison many years ago. But I don’t hold children responsible for their father’s crimes. I expect the same from you all.”

There was a silence that seemed to show that everyone agreed. Jon Snow broke it. “I don’t intend to judge you on your father’s crimes, but this is not the time for all this. We need to unite our forces. The Night King is gone, but there are still many wights out there, and certainly other White Walkers. They still occupy half of the North and we need to destroy them.”

“There is one more matter I want to discuss. There are some who say that you are my nephew, Jon Snow.”

Jon Snow looked down before he gazed at her again. “It seems I am.”

Daenerys nodded. “I heard there was a man, a certain Howland Reed, who was there when you were born. I’d like to talk with him.”

Jon Snow seemed very hesitant all of a sudden. “Lord Reed is dead, fighting against the dead.”

Fuck. That wasn’t good, and the queen’s next words proved it. “That’s a shame. The only man who could prove that you are indeed a Targaryen is dead.”

Tyrion decided to intervene. “Howland Reed testified before half the Seven Kingdoms that Jon Snow was born from Lyanna Stark and your brother Rhaegar at the Tower of Joy, at the end of Robert’s rebellion.”

“Yet I would have liked to hear it from his own mouth.” She looked straight to Jon Snow. “I want to believe that you are my nephew. The only family member I ever knew was my brother Viserys, and he died the day he threatened to open my belly and cut my baby out of it with his sword. From this day, he wasn’t my brother anymore. I would be glad to know that another Targaryen survived, but I will not believe a stranger I never met when he says that he is my brother’s son. Not without proof. Especially when the stranger in question doesn’t look at all like a Targaryen.”

Jon Snow’s face took a softer expression. “I have no proof to give you, but I am no threat to you. My uncle found my mother dying when she gave birth to me, and he promised her to keep me safe. You said it yourself. Robert Baratheon was hunting the surviving Targaryens. He killed your nephew and your niece when they were still in the cradle. And you told us how you lived during your exile, always running from one place to another. That’s why my uncle protected me, why he lied to everyone and told them I was his son. Even his own wife didn’t know about it. So I have no proof, but I think you understand why Lord Stark took that decision.”

The queen’s gaze was no longer hard, but Tyrion doubted she would accept the explanation like that.

“I have proof.”

Everyone turned to Bran Stark. “You do?” she asked.

“Aye. I can prove that Jon is the son of your brother Rhaegar.”

“Very well. Tell me how.”

Bran extended his hand. “Take my hand. I can show you.”
“Bran, it’s too dangerous,” Meera Reed said.

“Don’t worry, Meera. I’m in full control again. I think my recent difficulties were caused by the Night King, but now he’s gone. It’s without danger.”

“You were almost stuck in your visions during the whole battle,” the crannogwoman argued.

“And I got out of there when Jon destroyed the Night King.” The Stark turned back his attention to Daenerys. “I can show you.”

Daenerys questioned Tyrion, Jon and Revan with her eyes. Tyrion made her a sign telling she could trust him. He didn’t fully understand the boy’s powers, and he didn’t think he would ever understand them, but they were real. Jon Snow nodded.

“You can trust him, your Grace,” the Red Priest said.

The Targaryen queen slowly walked towards Bran and took his hand into her own. She raised her head, and for some time it was as if she was looking at something on the wall, though there was nothing to see there. It lasted some time, maybe a minute, and then Bran released her hand and she came back to reality. Slowly, she turned on herself and looked at Jon Snow.

“Your real name is Aegon Targaryen,” she said.

“His name is Jon,” Arya opposed.

“It’s the name Father gave him,” Bran explained. “He couldn’t call him by his true name. Everyone would have known the truth.” He looked at Jon. “I showed her your birth.”

“Your mother gave you that name before she died,” Daenerys said. She took a few steps in Jon’s direction and looked straight into his eyes. “So you’re really my nephew.”

“I suppose so,” he said.

She remained still, looking at his face for a long time. Then she straightened and put back a more official face. “I’m sorry to have doubted you. I apologize.” She turned towards a map laying on the table. “You told me the wights still occupy half of the North. Where are they?”

Tyrion noticed that her hand was shaking. That was great news for her, but she didn’t want to show it. “All the lands north of Winterfell. And we received a raven from the Dreadfort two days ago. They are under attack as well. We didn’t have any news from them since,” Jon said.

“The Dreadfort mustn’t fall.” It was the Red Priest who spoke with a strong voice. “Its fall could be as catastrophic as the fall of Winterfell. We must send them reinforcements right away.”

“I know the Dreadfort is a powerful and important fortress,” Tyrion began, “but Ser Brynden Tully is leading the defenses there with a strong garrison, and seeing how many White Walkers were here when Winterfell was attacked and now that the Night King was destroyed, I think they should be able to hold their positions.”

“Do not underestimate the White Walkers. They lost their leader, the first White Walker, but they’re not gone. The disappearance of the Night King only neutralized the wights who were inside the walls of Winterfell when it happened. There are still tens of thousand out there, led by the remaining Others. They will fight to the end. They’ve waited this moment for eight thousand years, and they’re not going to let it slip away.” He turned to Daenerys. “Queen Daenerys, with your permission, I would ride to the Dreadfort immediately with the Fiery Hand. We cannot let the fortress fall.”
Tyrion found him a little too much enthusiastic or set on defending the Dreadfort. What was there in this castle that was so important for this priest? He had the same reaction when he heard that Winterfell was in danger.

“I will give you five thousand men to save the Dreadfort,” Daenerys told him, “and I will join you as soon as Drogon is rested. I suggest we take the day to rest and heal our men, then the army will ride north to free the territories that are under the control of the White Walkers. Jon Snow, I expect you and your men to join us and to help us in this fight.”

“We will have to divide our forces, your Grace,” Jon Snow said. “There are several castles to be freed, and we lost contact with others, like Bear Island. We have to clean the territory up to the Wall. There might be some men still alive there. The North is wide. It won’t be easy.”

“We’ll find a way. I will not abandon my people. I suggest we go back to prepare our respective men for the march tomorrow. Lord Tyrion, I would like to speak with you at the end of the day. Join me after dinner. We’ll have important matters to discuss.”

The queen left, and so did Branfield and Revan. Malcolm was silent for the whole reunion. He didn’t seem to have a lot to say. Tyrion heard the queen asking him questions about his niece.

“She trusts you?” Jon asked him once she was gone.

“I wouldn’t say trust, not yet. You cannot erase decades of enmity with one battle,” Tyrion said.

“She seems to trust you enough to let you ride one of her dragons,” Arya said.

“The truth is she didn’t allow me to. I did so without her permission. It may be why she wants to talk with me later.”

“How did you manage to ride one of her dragons?” Jon asked.

Tyrion shrugged. “I don’t know. The dragon just accepted me to climb on his back, it seems. He trusted me.”

“I thought only Targaryens could ride dragons,” Arya said. “Jon, maybe you could ride one of hers.”

“I would suggest not to ask her immediately. They are her children. Anyway, we don’t need to be Targaryens to ride a dragon. There were several dragon riders through history who were not Targaryens. All you need is dragonblood in your veins.”

“And you have some?” Jon asked, obviously unconvinced.

Tyrion shrugged again. “I suppose I have some ancestor I’m not aware of with dragonblood. Probably a Valyrian. Some came to Westeros. It only takes one, and that can be enough. Anyway, I don’t think she will allow me near one of her dragons again any time soon.”

Jon and Arya kept looking at him with quizzical looks. Tyrion was annoyed by this. He was intrigued by his ability to ride one of the queen’s dragons, but the important remained that he could do it in order to save Winterfell. If he didn’t, Daenerys may be dead, killed by that spear the Night King was pointing towards her. If Tyrion hadn’t rushed with Viserion on the Night King, spitting fire that melted his icy spear and ramming him aside, Daenerys Targaryen would probably be dead by now and Winterfell may have fallen. He would never forget the feeling he had when he rode the dragon. That was a childhood dream become true, but he wasn’t sure it would happen again. The next time he disobeyed a queen he might not have the chance to save her life.
“Let’s go. We have a lot of work to do,” Jon Snow said. His sister, or rather cousin, followed him. Tyrion was following suit when he was called form behind.

“Lord Tyrion, we need to talk. Meera, could you leave us alone a few minutes?”

The girl hesitated, then she acquiesced and left. This one was in love with Bran. He watched her leave. She might be a frog-eater, like so many people called crannogmen, but she wasn’t ugly, and Tyrion was sure that she was quite pretty by her people’s standards. He looked at Brandon Stark while the door closed.

“What is it, Bran?”

“I didn’t want to tell you while everyone was here. I think you deserve to know.”

“To know what?”

“The truth.”

“The truth about what?”

“About yourself.” Bran extended his hand, like he did for Daenerys.

“Thanks Bran, but… I’m not very fond of visions.”

“Have you ever seen your mother?”

“No.” That stung, especially now that Sansa and Joanna were gone and he had no way to know where they were, or even if they were alive. They had to be alive. “She died giving birth to me.” Yet his daughter was called after her.

“I can show her to you.”

Tyrion considered the hand that was offered to him. He had tried to not ask himself too many questions about his lady mother. She died the day he was born. She gave her life to bring him into the world, or he took her life to come into it the way his lord father put it, and sometimes Tyrion thought that Tywin Lannister wasn’t wrong.

“What are you going to show of her, exactly?” he said as he approached Bran.

“The reason why Lord Tywin hated you so much.”

Without warning, Bran seized his arm and Tyrion was brought into a storm that lasted one second, before he arrived on solid ground. The air was warmer here, and you could smell the sea nearby. There were large windows giving on the said sea. Tyrion immediately knew where he was. Casterly Rock. It seems like a lifetime since I’ve been here.

He heard someone screaming on his left and turned to see two women. One was lying on a bed, wearing nightclothes, and she was the one screaming. Her belly was swelling. Tyrion couldn’t see her face. She was hidden by another woman, stouter, with blond hair. He moved until she was no longer hidden by his aunt Genna. Tywin Lannister’s sister was younger, but already showed a generous fatness at all levels. It wasn’t her that Tyrion looked at. For the first time in his life, he saw the woman who gave him life. She had blond shining hair, and looked a lot like Cersei, though he could also see the differences. Her cheekbones were not as high as his sister. Cersei had some of their father’s traits on her face, while his mother displayed none. She had her hair free, loosened, falling on each side of her face, with some sticking on her forehead with sweat. When she was done
screaming, she opened her eyes. They were green, and bright. Tyrion took in every detail he could see. He had heard that she was beautiful, like his sister, but now he could see it by himself, and to be honest, he found her more beautiful than Cersei, and by far.

She looked at Genna, panting. His aunt was holding one of her hand in hers. “It’s harder than with Jaime and Cersei.”

Those were the first words he ever heard his lady mother say. She had a fair and beautiful voice as well. It hurt him a little that these words were about him making his mother suffer, a suffering that would lead to her death eventually. Maybe he was seeing her last moments. Maybe she would die within a few days. Why was Bran showing him this? Why didn’t he show him a pleasant memory, one where she would be laughing, smiling, her face shining with happiness instead of sweat?

“I am in pain, Genna.”

“You’ll get through it, my dear. You got through it the first time. I see no reason for it to be any different,” his aunt said, trying to reassure her. It didn’t seem to work. His mother was right to be afraid. She was dying.

“Rhaella didn’t get through most of her pregnancies,” his mother replied.

“You are not Rhaella, and Tywin is not Aerys.” Tyrion thought he dreamed, for he swore that he saw her mother scoff.

“You have no idea of who Tywin is, or what he became.”

“I know it’s difficult, Joanna. I can barely imagine what you went through. But Tywin loves you. I know it and you know it too.”

“I’m no longer sure he loves me. I’m not even sure if he ever loved me.” That surprised him. He heard his father loved his wife and wasn’t the same man after she died.

“He would never wish for anything to happen to you, Joanna. You remember? He smiled the day you were wed, and he smiled the day Jaime and Cersei were born. I saw it, and you saw it too.”

“It happened a long time ago. You weren’t there Genna, that night. When I was called by the king, he did nothing. He said nothing, he didn’t stand up, or lifted a finger, or moved the slightest. He didn’t even dare to look at me. And he knew. Don’t try to justify him. HE KNEW!”

Her mother burst into uncontrollable sobs. “He used me,” she said, still crying. “He used me to get what he always wanted. All that in the hope that he could put our daughter into a prince’s bed and so he could boast that his grandchildren were kings and queens.”

“Joanna, calm down,” Genna begged her. “I don’t know what to say. I never thought Tywin would do that, but… He always cared for you.”

“Not as much as he cares for his ambitions or his dynasty.”

Tyrion watched the whole scene, petrified. His mother was there, sobbing, dying, and there was nothing he could do.

“You shouldn’t have taken Moon Tea,” Genna said all of a sudden. Tyrion’s eyes widened. His mother didn’t want to get pregnant. She wanted to stop it, to kill him.

“I didn’t know what to do. We know the truth, Genna, and Tywin knows it too, or he suspects.” His
mother looked at Genna, tears running all over her face. “He’s going to kill him.” Genna said nothing, but from the face she made, Tyrion could tell that she agreed with his mother. “Genna, he’s my son. I don’t care who his father is. I don’t want him to die.” She gripped his aunt’s hand more tightly. “Tywin is going to kill him. Don’t let him do it.” His mother begged. “He’s my child.”

Genna had a face that showed utter destruction. “I’ll do my best. We’ll protect him, together.”

“Tywin must be sure that he is his son. I don’t care about the truth. He must live.”

“I know, and he will live. Tywin will never kill a Lannister.”

“I’m no longer sure of anything.”

“Joanna.” His aunt put a hand on her shoulder. “The child will live. I promise. And Aerys will pay for what he did. Sooner or later, he will pay. A Lannister always pays his debts.”

“Yes, a Lannister always pays his debts.” By the way she said it, he knew his mother didn’t believe it. “Make sure that Tywin pays his too. Make sure my child lives. He doesn’t deserve to pay for his father’s crimes. I’m already paying the price.”

They were back to Winterfell. Tyrion breathed heavily. His eyes crossed those of Bran. The boy had a sorry expression on his face. Tyrion’s heart was beating more quickly that it ever did.

*That can’t be. That can’t be.* That was all he could think of. He didn’t know what happened afterwards, but he remembered finding himself in the sept of Winterfell, kneeling before the Father’s altar. He didn’t know why he came here. He didn’t believe in gods and mocked them at every turn.

He lost all faith he could have the day Tysha left his life. He told her he dreamed of becoming High Septon, saying he would look taller with a crown. She had laughed. She didn’t laugh because she mocked him, or perhaps she did, but if it was the case, she convinced him of the opposite.

*There’s just a problem, Tyrion. Septons cannot marry.* And thus he had forgotten about becoming a septon, or even a maester, since they were forced to celibacy as well. Still, it hadn’t taken religion out of his life. He remembered Tysha insisted that they prayed every evening before they went to bed.

Tyrion had accepted, since she wanted it so much. He wanted her to be happy and would have done anything for her. They prayed, and Tyrion found himself believing into gods more than ever during those two weeks. They would pray, then make love. He stopped to pray after Tysha disappeared, but he kept fucking women, though he could never feel happy like he was with Tysha. Not before he met Sansa.

Various words and moments came back to his mind. *Men’s laws give you the right to bear my name and display my colors since I cannot prove that you are not mine.* That’s what his father told him after he asked for Casterly Rock, his right. *I wanted to carry you into the sea and let the waves wash you away. Instead, I let you live. And I brought you up as my son. Because you’re a Lannister.*

Because he was a Lannister, and not because he was his son. He said that he brought him up as his son, not that he was his son. There was only one time when his father told him he was his son, and it was after the disaster of the Whispering Wood. That was when he needed him. He never called him son afterwards.

How should he feel about it? Tywin Lannister never truly was a father to him. Now he supposed he knew why. No, he did know why. How should he feel, knowing about his true origins? The only comfort he took from this was that his mother loved him, despite how he was conceived, despite what he was. But she died, and he never got to know her. Would have things be different, had she lived? Would she be proud of him? Would she truly have loved him, considering what his father did to her?
It explained so many things. It explained why Viserion was so easy to approach, why he accepted him, why he felt a bond with the small dragon. Could it even have something to see with the way he managed to get along with Daenerys so easily?

“I thought you never prayed.”

He turned very quickly to see Arya Stark standing behind him. They were alone in the sept, which Tyrion considered strange with the way Winterfell was packed. It wasn’t normal. He and Arya Stark shouldn’t be all alone here.

“Sansa told me you never prayed,” she continued, as an explanation.

Tyrion turned back his gaze to the Father. “I wonder how she could fall in love with a man who doesn’t believe in gods,” he said. That was all that could come to his mind right now.

“I asked myself the same question many times. Not how she could love someone who didn’t believe in gods. I’m quite sure Joffrey couldn’t, but… I wondered again and again how she fell in love with you.”

“I don’t know.”

Indeed, how could Sansa fall in love with him? And how did he fall in love with her? They were so different, when he thought about that, and he failed to protect her. How could she love someone like him? How could anyone love someone like him? Had Cersei and Jaime known all this time? Was Jaime aware of this and loved him like a brother all the same? Tyrion doubted it. He doubted Jaime would ever have loved him if he knew the truth.

“Well, look. I… I wanted to give you this.” Tyrion didn’t turn the head. However, she placed something in front of him, on the floor. It was a small necklace. He recognized it after a moment. He gave it to Sansa a long time ago. The lion necklace, with a wolf hidden beneath it.

“I found it near her chambers,” her sister explained. “I thought you should have it.”

He took it in his hand and stared at the necklace he made for the woman he loved. The woman he lost.

“Look, I haven’t always been nice with you, but… I believe you care about Sansa, and I know she loves you. So, you can always count on me to save her. We’ll find her. And I’ll make sure whoever kidnapped her will pay. The North remembers.”

Tyrion kept staring at the necklace. When he looked behind, his sister-in-law was gone. He looked again at the necklace and closed his hand on it. He would find Sansa and Joanna. They were all he had left.

When Tyrion left the sept, he realized it was already late. When he went into the Great Hall, he saw that the dinner had already been served. He remembered that Daenerys Targaryen asked to talk with him. My half-sister.

Tyrion slowly walked to her room. On his way, he wondered what he should do. Should he tell her? He saw how she doubted about Jon Snow, and he didn’t think that she would react positively if he pretended to be of her family as well, without anything to prove it. However, he also remembered how often she asked him questions about her nephew, even while she wasn’t sure he really was of her family. But she had time to muse about Jon Snow’s supposed parenthood for months, while he… Well, she knew nothing of him. She didn’t have time to consider this possibility.
He hit at her door and she allowed him inside. She invited him to take a seat before her, and he did. While he poured wine for both of them, he caught himself thinking about the fact that he was pouring wine for his sister. He drank with Cersei before, though their conversations were never pleasant. When he thought about it, he enjoyed his time with Daenerys much more.

“You weren’t there for dinner,” she said.

“I was busy, and not really hungry,” he lied.

None of them said anything for a while.

“When you met Jon Snow, you said you suspected he was Rhaegar’s son. Did you really believe it?” she asked.

“It was more of a mad theory I made.” And yet, it was true.

“But you said you knew the truth the moment you asked him about his dreams of dragons.”

“Well, someone can dream of dragons without being a Targaryen. That doesn’t mean you are one of them.” Not that he could tell. He made dreams of dragons, was fascinated by fire, going so far as to staring into fires for hours, imagining his sister and his father, or the man he thought to be his father, burning into them.

“I dreamed of dragons very often when I was young. And now I have three, and they are real. I thought the dragons were all gone, but after Drogo died, I relied upon a dream to hatch the stone eggs Illyrio Mopatis gave me. It was only a dream, and yet it came true.”

“There is magic in dragonblood. The children of Valyria all have dragonblood in their veins, and you probably have more than anyone else alive. Perhaps it gives you a power to see the future, or perhaps it’s telling you what you must do. I don’t know. There is much about dragonlore we ignore. We barely scratched the surface.”

“How is it you can ride Viserion?” She looked at him intently.

“I don’t know.”

“He went as far as to bring your dead body to me. He never saw you before. He allowed you to approach him without showing any sign of hostility, and he even allowed you to climb on his back.”

She was waiting for an answer. Tyrion had no choice. “Your Grace, the maesters, the septons, and all the other people who studied dragons agree on nothing but this: dragons are magical creatures. They are intelligent. Some say they are even more intelligent than men, but in a different way. They don’t think like us, with logics and rational thoughts. But they can feel a danger, or if someone is to be trusted or to be considered as an enemy. I meant no harm to your dragon. I was only curious, and he must have felt it. That’s why he allowed me to approach him. He knew I was no threat. And maybe he allowed me to ride him to Winterfell because he felt you would be in danger.”

Tyrion knew it couldn’t be a full explanation. Why would Viserion need a rider to save his mother? And why would he bring his body to Daenerys Targaryen?

“Still, I find it strange that he chose you, considering you have no dragonblood. Unless you have some.”

“There has never been any marriage between a Lannister and a Targaryen. My lord father tried to marry my sister Cersei to your brother Rhaegar, but your father chose Elia Martell instead. Maybe
there is a Valyrian somewhere among my ancestors. Some have come to Westeros.”

Tyrion knew very well that if he had a Valyrian ancestor, which was very unlikely, he must have lived a thousand years ago. When he was a child and mad for dragons, he searched for any evidence of ties between his family and the old civilization of Valyria. Anything that concerned dragons was an obsession for him back then. He found nothing. However, he didn’t tell the queen.

“I gave you the order to not approach my dragons,” she suddenly said. “And you disobeyed me.”

“Yes. I’m sorry about…”

“You did the right thing.” Tyrion was caught off guard. “If you hadn’t come with Viserion and Rhaegal, I would probably be dead. For that, you have my eternal gratitude. I will not forget this.”

Tyrion was truly surprised, not to mention that her expression of thankfulness truly seemed genuine. Cersei never looked at him like that. All she ever showed him was scorn, disdain and hatred. “Well, I only tried to do the right thing.” That sounded strange coming from him.

“You served me well, Lord Tyrion. Since you came to me, you helped me to take Moat Cailin and convinced several lords of the North to bend the knee. You did everything I asked from you and played a decisive role in the Battle of Winterfell. You even ordered the Westerlands to surrender without resistance.”

“I knew we had no chance against you, especially with the threat in the North.”

“That shows you are clever and wise. You accepted to sacrifice your homeland to save all Westeros, and you spared the lives of countless innocents.” It was strange for him, after being questioned and accused by Jon Snow at every turn for killing thousands of people. “You were also among the few to consider the White Walkers to be a serious threat, when most of my advisors were sure they were only stories for children. Do you know Lord Varys?”

“The Spider? Yes, I know him. Or at least, I think I know him. It is difficult to know such a man. He is very good at keeping secrets.”

“He speaks highly of you.” A very small man can cast a very large shadow.

“Should I feel flattered, when it comes from an eunuch?”

She laid down her cup. “Lord Tyrion Lannister, I want you to be Hand of the Queen.”

Tyrion almost choked on his wine. “Forgive me?”

“You heard me. I want you to be my Hand. I need someone capable and loyal for the task, and for now, I haven’t seen anyone better than you for the position.”

Tyrion would lie if he didn’t feel flattered, but truth be told, he wasn’t sure if he should feel like that about it. “I’m not sure if your allies would like it, your Grace.”

“For now, I am betrothed to a Dornish prince, and I have another Dornish and two lords from the Reach on my small council. Lord Varys and Lady Kinvara are completing it. But I also need someone the other kingdoms will accept and respect as my Hand. You already served as Hand before. You arranged the betrothal between your niece Myrcella and Prince Doran’s son and made an alliance with the Martells. They were very pleased when you sent them the head of the assassin who killed the Princess Elia. You managed to create an alliance between four kingdoms. And I heard the Tyrells even proposed a marriage between you and their daughter.”
Yes, Tyrion remembered. That was when Olenna Tyrell tried to sabotage his marriage with Sansa. And the worst was that Tyrion contemplated the idea for a short moment.

“I’m not sure, your Grace.”

“Do you have a better suggestion in mind?” she asked. Tyrion quickly realized he had none, and it seemed the queen understood it very quickly. “So?”

“I suppose I cannot refuse.”

“It would be in your interest to accept.” For a short time, Tyrion thought she was teasing him, but he chased the idea from his head.

“Very well. I accept.”

“Good. I have a first mission for you as my Hand. I need you to take the Vale of Arryn.”

“The Vale of Arryn?”

“This is the last kingdom that didn’t bend the knee. I sent my Unsullied in the Vale with a few more men. They are only ten thousand. I had no news from them for a while now, but they are likely struggling to take this kingdom. I cannot send them the necessary reinforcements since I need all my resources in the North to fight the White Walkers. I want you to go there and force Harrold Arryn and every other lord to surrender and swear fealty to me.”

“Well, if your Unsullied cannot take the Vale by themselves, I don’t think I will be able to change much to that. I’m pretty good at talking, but I don’t think I can convince the lords of the Vale to surrender so easily. And most of their strongholds are almost impossible to take. I’m afraid a single dwarf won’t make any difference.”

“You will, with Viserion.” Tyrion wasn’t sure of what he just heard. She probably noticed it for she explained further. “You will fly to the Vale with Viserion. Find Grey Worm. He is the commander of the Unsullied. Give him this. He will know he has to obey you.” She handled him a parchment. “Make sure the Vale surrenders by every mean necessary. In the meantime, I will deal with the White Walkers.”

That was certainly not something Tyrion expected. Daenerys Targaryen couldn’t give a task like this one to someone she didn’t trust. Unless it was a test. Tyrion could have believed in the second possibility if she didn’t grant him one of her dragons for this mission. That was definitely not something he expected.

“Very well. I will leave for the Vale tomorrow,” he said.

“One more thing. We believe that Sansa Stark is in the Vale.” That truly caught Tyrion’s attention. “My advisors and Jon Snow’s advisors don’t believe she could be hidden in the North. If she is alive, this is where she is, and your daughter as well. You’ll be able to find them.” Sansa. Joanna. He had a chance to find them. “And if you find those who kidnapped them, you have the authorization to deal with them. I only ask that you grant them a trial if it’s possible.”

She raised her glass of wine. After a moment, Tyrion raised it as well, and they drank together. As they did so, he thought that Daenerys Targaryen undoubtedly was a better sister than Cersei.
So, this chapter reveals a secret that wasn't really a secret anymore. Most of you certainly figured it out some chapters ago, or highly suspected it. Here is the official confirmation: in this fanfiction, yes, Tyrion is a Targaryen. In fact, if you go back a very long time ago, two years ago when I uploaded the three Tywin chapters at the beginning of this story, Tywin thought that he could see two people in Tyrion. The two people in question were Joanna and Aerys, although he refused to admit it.

I tried to bring Tyrion and Arya closer in this chapter, using Sansa's disappearance and their mutual desire for revenge against those who did it as a way for them to connect. As for Daenerys, I think we all saw in the show that she and Tyrion quickly bonded despite their different origins that should have made them enemies in normal time. Tyrion very quickly developed a better relationship with Daenerys than with most of the Lannisters.

Please review

Next chapter : Mira
Mira XXXIII

Chapter Notes

Mira right after the battle.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

MIRA XIII

She woke up with a start, her heart pounding in her chest. She needed some time to quiet down and breathe normally. She didn’t remember the nightmare she made, but it was horrible for sure.

She closed her eyes for the time she needed to calm down. When she opened them, she saw that she was in her chamber in Winterfell. It was a simple room and considering how many people had to live inside the castle, it was a miracle she was given a room for her and her alone. Well, not her alone. For three days now, she shared it with someone.

She wasn’t lying down in her bed. They told her to rest, but she struggled to sleep, so she spent her nights sitting in the chair near the fireplace, reading until slumber claimed her. That was what happened the last evening. The book she read was lying on the floor at her feet. She was buried into furs to protect her from the cold.

It had been hard and long. Two days. Two insufferable days. They could be prepared. Their mothers and the maesters could describe the best they could what was ahead of them, but words were never good enough to explain the ordeal they would face. At least she had her family with her. Since her mother sent her south, Mira didn’t think she would have any member of her family with her when the day would come. The distance between Ironrath and any castle in the Reach was far too great for even her lady mother to travel all the way, despite the special event it would be. She pictured her husband and his family being there, not the other way around. Preparing herself, she threw aside one of the furs covering her and stood up. Immediately, she felt the cold seizing her. She rubbed her arms to warm herself as she looked down at the crib.

Rodrik hadn’t been easy to bring into the world. For this reason, she first thought to call him Asher, but Rodrik was the eldest, the man who was supposed to follow Father as Lord of Ironrath. It only seemed fair that she called her son after her eldest late brother. She knew Asher would understand, just like Ethan would, and her father. The four deserved to have a boy named after them. But she only had one son, and she didn’t expect to have others.

That should have been a day of joy, but she gave birth to Rodrik while battle raged around Winterfell. Talia said it was a glimmer of hope in these tumultuous times. To be honest, Mira was too exhausted to feel anything. She was alone to raise a child, and it took away most of the joy she should have felt. She pitied the small boy who slept right in front of her, ignoring that he would grow without a father. He would never know him.

Rodrik was born three days ago, and two days after his birth, the White Walkers sent a huge assault against Winterfell. Mira remained in the Great Keep, confined in her chambers with her son and Talia. Ryon was too impatient to stay quiet here, so he had been pacing during all the battle in the Great Hall. That’s what happened when a boy was eager to fight and you forbade him to participate to the battle.
Mira didn’t see the battle, but she heard it. She heard the huge rocks falling upon Winterfell, smashing against its walls, the iron of the gates shattering, the roars of giants and dragons. She heard the walls on the northern side crumbling under the magic of the Night King. And then, everything was quiet. Talia had gone out. When she came back, she wasn’t alone. Mira saw him for the first time in years. Her uncle Malcolm had hugged her warmly. He was exactly like she reminded him. He couldn’t say the same about her.

“Look at you. You’ve grown up so much. You were still a little girl the last time I saw you, and now, you’re a woman.”

Asher told her that their uncle was serving Daenerys Targaryen, but it was still very unexpected to see him there. Mira had cried while she was in his arms. Later, he took Rodrik into his arms, saying her was holding the next generations of Branfields and Forresters in his arms with a large smile. He only regretted that his sister couldn’t be here to see it. Mira regretted it too.

The joy she felt at seeing her uncle alive and learning they defeated the White Walkers was cooled down by the following news. Her husband was there.

It was Talia who told her that he was present, riding in the queen’s army. Part of her wanted to run to him and jump into his arms, another part wanted to run at him as well, but to slap him across the face, and another part just didn’t want to see him.

Talia said they wouldn’t allow him to approach, and Mira didn’t argue against it. If they asked her whether she wanted to see him or not, she didn’t know what her answer would have been. She supposed that Gerold wouldn’t want to see her anyway. Wasn’t it what he said the last time they met? *I don’t want to see you again.* It saddened and infuriated her at the same time.

Looking at her baby, a small smile crept to her face. She had him, if she didn’t have her husband. She didn’t want to disturb him so she began to walk around the room, being careful to not make any noise. She was weak since she came out of labor, so she couldn’t move too much. A single turn around her chamber and she fell back into her chair. She took back the book she let on the floor last night and tried to resume her reading where she stopped it. It was *A History of House Stark* by Maester Binns. It was the right book to read if you wanted to sleep. The writing style was monotonous, and the same sentences were often to be found again and again. It was difficult to read. The maester used ten words whenever he could say the same with one. Still, there were many details as well. She had reached the moment when Torrhen Stark bent the knee to Aegon Targaryen. How fitting it was, considering Jon Snow bent the knee before another Targaryen only yesterday.

Someone knocked. Mira put aside her book and slowly walked to the door. She opened it carefully, to not wake up Rodrik. Her uncle was on the other side. She let him in.

“I wanted to see how you fared,” he whispered.

“I’m fine, thank you.” She closed the door.

“How do you feel?”

“Tired. Exhausted.” Only standing right there made her short of breath.

“Come.” He gently grabbed her by the shoulder and led her to her bed where he sat next to her. “I recall when your mother gave birth to Ethan and Talia. It was her third pregnancy, but delivering twins is much harder than bringing up a single child. She stayed in bed for an entire week afterwards. You fare better than her.”
She nodded. “Anyway, that’s not as if I could do much. So, how are things with our new queen?”

“Quite well. She seems to trust Jon Snow, and now that she knows that he is truly her nephew, I think it will be easier between them. I just regret that Tyrion Lannister is leaving.”

“Where is he going?”

“To the Vale, with one of the queen’s dragons. We believe that the Lady Sansa and her child may be there, and Harrold Arryn still resists the Unsullied.”

“I hope they find them.” Sansa was her friend, and now that Mira had a son, she understood better than ever what it could be to lose your own flesh and blood. Lord Tyrion also helped her in King’s Landing. The North remembers, and she would never forget what he and his lady wife did for her.

“And you, what are you going to do?”

“We’re leaving very soon. Two hours, three at most.”

“So you’re leaving you too.”

“Yes. I’m sorry I couldn’t stay longer, my dear niece.” He placed a comforting hand on her shoulder.

“But before we leave, there’s someone who would like to speak with you. A certain brother-in-law of yours. Garlan Hightower.”

She didn’t know he was here. “He wants to talk with me?”

“Yes. We don’t have much time, so if you want to speak with him, it would be best if it was now.”

She thought about it for a few seconds. Garlan had always been kind with her, almost another brother when she was at the Hightower, as much as Elys was another sister. She nodded.

“Good. I’ll fetch him. Take care of you while I’m away, Mira.”

He kissed her on the forehead and walked away. Mira prayed that he wouldn’t die like all the others. Barely had he crossed the threshold that her brother-in-law walked in, already prepared for war, wearing full armor.

“Lady Mira.” He bowed before her.

“Ser Garlan.” She forced herself to smile. Gerold’s brother was always gentle, and he wasn’t the one who wrote to obey her husband to leave Ironrath at the worst possible moment. She didn’t want to hate him, no more than she wanted to hate Gerold.

“I heard you were here. To be honest, I was hoping you would come and see us, but since you didn’t, I decided to come to you myself,” she explained.

“Maester Aaron told me to remain inside.” That was no lie. The maester of Deepwood Motte, who escaped with the Glovers when the White Walkers closed on their castle, told her to not exhaust herself after her days of labor. She needed time to rest.

“Yes, I understand, and I wouldn’t blame you even if you were not pregnant.” She nodded to acknowledge what he said. He looked towards the crib. “Is it a boy?”

“Yes. Do you want to see him?”

“If it doesn’t bother you.”
She shook her head. It didn’t bother her, not really. She placed a finger on her lips to remind him they were not to make any noise. Her brother-in-law approached the crib and looked at his nephew. A smile appeared on his face.

“Did the delivery go well?” he asked.

“Well enough. It was difficult. I’ll have to rest for a while, but he is alright.”

“What’s his name?”

“Rodrik.”

“Like your brother.” He nodded. “He would like it.” He walked away from the crib and sat in a chair. Mira imitated him by sitting on her bed. “I wouldn’t blame you if you hated me, my lady.”

“I don’t.”

“You must resent me, at the very least.”

“Not you. House Hightower, Lord Hightower, yes.” And Gerold, too. How can I not resent him?

“But not you.”

“My lord grandfather made a mistake when he called Gerold back. And my brother was wrong to leave Ironrath. Only two hundred men survived our expedition in the North. Many more would still be alive if he stayed with you. The only excuses I can find to him is that it’s difficult to disobey your lord and grandfather. And I know he would never have abandoned you if he knew you were pregnant.”

A silence followed. None of them dared to speak. Had Mira told her husband about her condition the moment he arrived, would things have been different?

“Did you know, back then?” he asked her.

“Aye.”

“You should have told him.” There was hint of reproach in his voice, but he sounded sorry as well. Nonetheless, he may be right. If only she told him right away.

“I tried,” she replied weakly.

No sound came out of his mouth, until he released a long sigh and pulled his hand in his hair. “Damn it. Forgive me.”

“What’s going to happen now?”

“We’re leaving soon. We are riding north, to cleanse the land from these things. I never thought I would fight dead men.” He stood up and sighed again before he spoke to her. “Gerold will follow me on the way north, so you won’t see him for a while.”

She nodded. She didn’t know how she felt about it, or how she should feel.

“Look, Mira. I know it’s not easy. When Gerold joined us, he was… different. I never saw him like this before. Believe me, he had been miserable before, but this time… He was worse than ever. I think there’s something that broke him up there, in the North, and it’s not the argument you had.”

She knew immediately what it was. “He killed someone. For me.”
He nodded. He understood. “I know one thing. He still loves you. And I never saw someone blaming himself so much for what he did. When we come back, you’ll have to sort this out between you two. Once this war is over.”

He told her to take care of herself and was about to leave, but Mira had a question to ask him. “Garlan, do you think I used your family?”

He had a sad expression when he answered, and he took some time to give a reply. “I think that in most marriages, we use the other and his family for our own ends.” That was quite true. Marriages were always made in the interest of the family. “Did you know that someone in your family was still alive?”

“No.”

“Well, you used us to get your home back, and we used you to get your home for ourselves. My family is not really in any position to judge yours. If I had been in your place, I don’t think I would have acted any better.”

He left Mira with these words. Should they make her feel better? Marriages were made to cement alliances, and these alliances were never made out of kindness. Once they were made, honor demanded that they respected the alliance and that they came to the help of their allies and families, but without marriage, they would never help each other. The Glovers would never help the Forresters if they weren’t their bannermen, and neither would the Forresters assist the Glovers or the Starks if they were not sworn to them. And yet, what made a Glover, a Stark or a Forrester so different from a Tyrell or a Lannister? Long before they had any reason to hate each other, never would a Forrester have risked his life for a Lannister or a Hightower. If the Mad King had murdered the Lord of Highgarden, would the North have taken up arms against Aerys Targaryen? Rickard Stark would probably have fought for his king, even though what he would have done was criminal. They may maintain alliances that already existed without considering their personal interests, but when it came to forge alliances, Northerners were not more honorable than any southern family. Robb Stark made an alliance with House Frey, despite them being one of the most despicable families in Westeros. He wanted to make an alliance with Renly Baratheon, even though he wasn’t the rightful king. Northerners were better to honor alliances, but to make them, they were no better than anyone else. Didn’t Mira herself marry into House Hightower to escape a marriage with a Whitehill? She acted for her own interest and didn’t think a single moment about the man she would marry. Garlan had the truth of it.

Someone knocked on the door, and she heard a voice she both dreaded and wanted to hear. “Mira.” A moment went on. “Mira.”

She had to answer. “You may come in,” she said, her voice hoarse. She wasn’t sure he heard her. “You may come in,” she repeated louder.

Another moment went on during which nothing happened, and then the handle of he door turned. It turned very slowly, until it couldn’t be turned further. She thought the door would never open. She was wrong. It was ajar. He didn’t open it further. From where she was, she couldn’t see through the crack that was open.

“Mira, I…” His voice was shaking. She heard a gulp, and a sound that looked like a sniff. “I… I wanted to… I needed… I…”

He struggled to speak, while she didn’t know what to say. What was she supposed to say, after everything that happened between them?
“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry,” he said, his voice still trembling. “If… Please forgive me. I had to tell you this. I don’t know if we’ll see each other again. I just want you to know… I love you. I have always loved you, from the moment I saw you. You’re the best thing that happened in my life. I love you.”

She listened to everything he said. Her eyes stung. She heard him releasing the handle, then footsteps on the floor. He walked away, and as the sound of his boots faded, she closed her eyes and let tears fall from her eyes. There was a voice in her that told her to go to him, but another said she shouldn’t, that it wouldn’t make anything better. The tears kept running down her cheeks, and she wondered if she would ever see him again.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter : Margaery
Margaery X

Chapter Notes

While the North fights White Walkers, King's Landing must deal with a completely different sort of problems, and Margaery is a witness.

MARGAERY X

“There have been thirteen casualties today, my lady, and that was only on our side, without accounting for those who were injured. The city has been turned into a battlefield. Men are fighting for every street. Houses have been turned into fortresses where men can regroup to hold a defense position or send a counter-attack, or they are being used as command posts. Alleys and dark corners are hidings for traps and ambushes. My little birds are telling me that for every soldier who dies, two civilians perish. The Dornish and your countrymen use them as shields or enlist them as soldiers, and they are being used as arrow fodder. Many are only children, children you used to visit in their orphanages not long ago.”

Not long ago? Whatever Lord Varys might say, for her it seemed like it happened in another age. “It is regrettable, Lord Varys,” she said, looking through the window, away from him. From the balcony, she could see the smoke emanating from fires there and there in the city.

“Regrettable? Lady Margaery, I know that you didn’t go in these orphanages only so that people could see you helping those in need. I know you cared about the people of this city. I know you still care.”

It was true. Visiting and helping the poor were not only a part of her plans to gain the people’s support. And she did care about the people, or she thought. Maybe when she was among them, she cared, and when she wrote letters to orphanages and poorhouses and septs, she cared as well. You and the children are ever in our thoughts. Mira wrote this before the royal wedding, the second, the one with Joffrey. She was the only one in Margaery’s retinue from that time who was still alive. Cersei and the Sparrows killed all the others. She wished her friend was still there, with her.

She may have cared for those in need and the people when she was among them, but the moment she was back in the Red Keep, preparing the wedding and thinking about what gown she would wear today, she only thought about herself. Margaery wasn’t a monster, she knew it. No one in her family was a monster. That didn’t stop Loras and so many other people she loved from dying.

“Do you really want to see them all die?” Varys asked.

“Of course not!” she snapped. She stared at him. “I already saw too many people die. Do you think I want this to go on?”

“No, I think not. But if you don’t, then help me.”

“How?”

“By bringing the peace back to this city.”
Margaery laughed. “I am a prisoner here, Lord Varys.” An honored guest. “I don’t see how a prisoner could help to bring back the peace.”

“You have the prince’s ear. He listens to you.”

“No, he doesn’t.” He didn’t before, and he wouldn’t listen to her now or in the future. “He listens to nobody. You saw what he did. He murdered someone of his own blood. I warned him about the Sand Snakes. I warned him about the dangers of what he was doing and look at what he did! You warned him too, and he didn’t listen either. All he did was to run after revenge. He only thought about avenging the woman he loved, and he convinced himself that it was all for justice.” She stopped to breathe. “He won’t listen to me. I am useless.”

The Spider had a concerned expression. “You changed, my lady. I remember when I first saw you in the throne room. It was after the Battle of Blackwater. You were… radiant. A true rose, appearing just after so many people died, promising a better future. That’s how everyone saw you, highborn and lowborn alike. You gave them hope that this war would come to an end.”

“Well, that hope was a lie.” They both knew it was the case. Things hadn’t gone better, but worse.

“But it was hope all the same, and people need hope to go forward. You are the heir to Highgarden, the only daughter of its actual lord. You were the queen not long ago.”

“But I’m not the queen, not anymore.”

“No, indeed, and I wouldn’t suggest you to try and become it again.” Those words relieved her. The eunuch wouldn’t attempt to convince her to take a crown. “Still, everyone remembers the time when you were the queen, a time of peace and bliss, however short it was.”

“Yes, it was short. I was put into a cell beneath the Great Sept, my brother was killed, and the city was burned to the ground while I was queen.”

“While you were under arrest, and during that time, the people prayed for you. They wanted you back. They remained in front of the Great Sept of Baelor for hours, begging for your return. It was under Cersei’s rule that King’s Landing was destroyed. Everyone knows it. They only keep good memories of your time by Tommen’s side. You were the best queen we had since the Good Queen Alysanne.”

“And what good it did?” She snapped once more. “I almost died. The city was entirely burnt and thousands of people died. I lost my brother and many of my dearest friends. I lost my husband. I… I lost… my son.”

She burst into sobs and sat back into her chair. She tried to stay strong, but she couldn’t. She could barely have a glimpse at him before he was taken away from her, and she would never see him again.

“I can only imagine what a pain it must be for you. To lose a child… it must be terrible.” She wanted him to go. She didn’t need empty words of comfort from an eunuch. “But your son is still alive, my lady. And he has a good life, you have to believe me.” How could she believe him? For what she knew, her son could be dead, drowned into the Narrow Sea or buried in a field somewhere in the Stormlands, or maybe burned on a pyre. The Spider continued. “But if we cannot put an end to this bloodshed in the streets, the war will expand outside of it. Dorne and the Reach, Sunspear and Highgarden will fight each other, and it will be another war where thousands of people will die. Your son might be among them.”
Was that a threat? She looked at the eunuch, trying to decipher any sign compromising him, but all he showed was concern and sadness. He was probably a very good actor.

“Lady Margaery, you have more power than you realize. You have the power to prevent wars instead of starting them. Few people know you are here, but the moment you show yourself, if you do it at the right moment, you can put an end to all this. Even the Dornish respect you, and the lords of the Reach and the people of the city love you, even revere you. You can act as a mediator between the factions. You are the best chance we have.”

She scoffed. “You overestimate my influence, Lord Varys.”

“I think you underestimate it. You never used all the power and the influence you had. There was a young lady of the North who made you realize it during a trial, don’t you recall?”

Of course, she remembered. Sansa gave her a chance to get rid of Cersei for good. Only, she came back later, and Tommen was too weak to make her leave. That was her doom.

“You can use the power you have much better than many who preceded you, and yet you do nothing,” Lord Varys declared. Margaery thought he tried to hide a certain disgust in his voice.

“We are at war, Lord Varys. In times of war, a woman’s voice account for little. There is nothing I can do to put an end to it.”

“Yes, there is. We talked about it.”

“Yes, we talked, and you know I will do nothing.”

Varys sighed. “I hope you will change your mind. Your family will be in danger as long as this war goes on. Think about what kind of realm you want your son to grow in. A realm of peace and plenty, a haven for the people, or a realm of chaos and war, a gaping pit that will swallow him, you, and everyone you love.”

The sound of the door closing echoed on the walls of Margaery’s chamber after Varys left. It had to be one of the very few places in the capital that was quiet now. The section of the Red Keep where she lived was deserted. They kept hiding her from everyone, even though rumors of her presence began to spread among the noble men and women who resided in the city. The common people, however, had no idea that she could be here, of that she was sure. Anyway, they were too busy fighting somebody else’s war.

Everything began when the trial for murder of Tyene Sand came to an end. Trystane Martell, her lord father Mace Tyrell and Lord Anders Yronwood unanimously condemned the prince’s cousin to death. She didn’t know all the details, but among the many things she heard, it seemed that Tyene Sand demanded a trial by combat. It was refused to her because of a decree Tommen made not long before he died. Lord Varys said her husband took that decision because the High Sparrow put it as a condition to free her.

When the trial by combat was refused, something happened, though no one could exactly say what it was. Some said that Dornish and Reach men started to fight in the crowd immediately. Others said that another Sand Snake was murdered, and this started the battle. There were others who pretended that it was a Sand Snake who killed someone in the assistance and that this was the act that started it all. One of the stories said that a shadow killed the Sand Snake. It reminded Margaery of Lady Brienne’s tale of Renly’s death.

What was certain is that the Dornish and Reach men who assisted to the trial started to fight, and in
the confusion, Trystane Martell killed two of his cousins. After that, the Yronwoods, who supported the prince up to now, turned against him. Margaery suspected that Lord Anders Yronwood waited for an opportunity to turn against Trystane, to avenge his grandfather’s death, who was supposedly killed by Oberyn Martell with a poisoned dagger. Only a few Dornish remained loyal to Trystane. He allied with her father and his men, and the war inside King’s Landing started.

She didn’t have much detail on this war, but many people died every day. The two sides seemed to be on equal grounds. Her father called reinforcements from Highgarden to help them, and ordered his seneschal, her granduncle Garth, to raise men to defend the Reach’s borders and stop any army from travelling from Dorne to King’s Landing. It was unclear, for now, what Doran Martell would do. His bannermen, some among his most powerful, were at war with the Tyrells, but they were also fighting his son. Margaery expected troubles inside Dorne very soon.

She didn’t know how to feel about the Sand Snakes’ deaths. She didn’t know them very well, except for Tyene. Despite treating her as a prisoner after they escaped the Great Sept and abandoning her brother to the wildfire, Margaery still owed her life to Tyene Sand. She had been her only contact with the exterior world for weeks when she was imprisoned. They rejoiced together when Cersei was put into a cell by the Sparrows. Even though her motivations were selfish, Tyene Sand saved her. And Trystane… How could he actually kill with his bare hands members of his own family? She knew he was blinded by his desire of revenge, but she believed he would execute his cousins, not kill them himself. It seemed she didn’t know him at all.

Margaery wandered through her apartments for most of the day. She had nothing to do. The Red Keep felt empty and absurdly big without people to share it with. She only had two handmaidens, and although they spoke a little more with her than when she first arrived, they maintained the discussion to a minimum, ordered as they were to not get too close to Margaery. They were nothing like Mira and Sera, or Megga or Alla.

As the day went on, the light of the sun lowered, and soon it was totally dark, though from the lights in the city, fights were still going on. How many would die today? With resignation, Margaery decided she should sleep. Better to sleep than to do nothing, after all. She had changed and was about to go to bed when her lord father came. He looked exhausted but forced himself to smile at her. That brought a genuine smile to her face as well and she ran into his arms.

“I’m sorry to visit you so late, my dear, but I wanted to spend some time with you,” he told her with his tired voice. He was coming back from the battle in the streets, obviously, though he took time to take a bath before he came to her.

“Don’t worry, Father. I was going to bed because I didn’t know what else to do.”

They sat at a table. “I could tell your grandmother to come and to keep you company, if you wish,” he offered.

“With the situation out there?”

“No, it’s true. It would be dangerous for her. I suppose I just want to see you happy again, like before. Before all this.”

“That was before,” she said. She knew they were both thinking about Loras.

“There was a time you were always all smile. I can still remember you swimming into the Mander with your cousins and your friends. Your mother and I used to look at you. We marvelled at how happy you were.”
Margaery nodded sadly. That was a long time ago, and those times would never come again.

“I would like to see you smile again,” her father said.

“It’s difficult. With… you know.”

He nodded. He knew why. Her brother’s death deeply affected all of them. “You know, Margaery, I know this may not be the appropriate time but, I have been considering options for a marriage.”

Margaery rolled her eyes. “Father, I highly doubt anyone would want to marry me.”

“Nonsense. Who wouldn’t want to marry you?”

“I had three husbands. The first preferred the company of men and was assassinated in his own tent. The second was poisoned at our wedding feast. The third committed suicide. I don’t see any man wanting me as his wife now.”

“It wasn’t your fault. You are not to blame for their deaths.”

“As I am not to blame for Loras’s death too, I suppose.” She felt another wave of tears coming, and she kept them the best she could. “If I hadn’t been so set on becoming queen, maybe he would still be alive.” Her voice was trembling as she spoke.

Her father’s gaze dropped. “You know, when I decided to organize your marriage with Lord Renly, your grandmother told me it was a foolish idea, and I didn’t listen to her.”

“No one listened to her. She once told me that she had known a great many clever men, and that the reason why she outlived them all was that she ignored them. Seeing how our decisions ended, I suppose she was right. Loras, Mother, you and me, we all wanted this alliance with Renly. We all wanted me to be the queen.”

“The odds were on our side, Margaery. We had everything. And an opportunity like that wouldn’t come back before long. It was our chance. How could I foresee that… Loras… would die?” He was close to tears too.

“Maybe we were too ambitious. Maybe House Tyrell is not fit to sit on the Iron Throne,” she whispered.

“We have as much right on it as anyone else.”

Margaery scoffed. “You remember who we used to be, Father? Stewards. We were stewards for the Gardeners, a family that ruled over the Reach for thousands of years. The only reason why we have Highgarden today is because the Gardeners all died and we opened our gates to Aegon three hundred years ago. We did nothing to gain our position. We only bent the knee. The Starks, the Lannisters, the Arryns, the Martells, the Targaryens, the Baratheons, they all earned their power and their titles. We never fought for them. They were given to us by the Targaryens. And Cersei’s death? Did we get it by ourselves? She killed Randyll Tarly, our best general. We could do nothing against the invasion of the Ironborn. Without Daenerys Targaryen, we would be nothing today. We have never earned anything by ourselves. And here we come, imagining we can sit on the Iron Throne, that our time has come. If we had been more patient, Loras would still be alive, and many more people as well.”

“Maybe,” her father conceded in a whisper. “I wish he was still alive.”

They remained in silence for quite some time. “Father, tell me, did you… do you love Mother?”
That was a question she had been asking herself for some time now. She had all the time in the world for questions. He seemed very surprised, but he answered all the same. “Well, of course, I love her.”

“Did you love her the moment you were wed?”

He hesitated. “Your mother and I… Well, our betrothal was decided two years before the wedding took place. We got to see each other a few times before we were wed, but… I cannot tell you that I loved her back then. I knew it was my duty to marry her, and I did. She did it too. I must admit the first years were difficult.”

“Why?”

“Your mother is a beautiful and gentle woman, but we didn’t have much in common. She grew up at the Hightower, in Oldtown, so she was used to live in a big city. Highgarden wasn’t a place she hated, but she didn’t love it either. And in feasts, she seemed out of place. She wasn’t very talkative. We were so different that, sometimes, an entire day could pass and we wouldn’t see each other.”

She didn’t know about it. Her mother and father were always very kind with each other and showed discreet signs of affection on a daily basis. Margaery grew up witnessing it. They were happy together, and none of them ever denied it.

“What changed?”

“You.” A large smile took shape on his lips. “Two years after our wedding, your lady mother came to me one morning, and she told me she was pregnant. I thought this was the best day of my life. I went to see her every day after that. We talked about the baby, what name he should have. We both wanted children very much. That brought us closer. And then a few months later, your mother began her labour. I was in the room next to hers all the time, and when the child came out, I was there to see her.” He looked at her, tears of joy in his eyes. “And the moment I saw you was the most beautiful moment in my life. It was Alerie’s too.” He seldom called her mother by her first name when he talked about her, even to his children. “You were a miracle. After that, I loved her, and I loved you too, and Loras, like you could never imagine.”

She thought she knew what he meant, even though she couldn’t tell him. She couldn’t tell her own father that he was a grandfather. Doing so would endanger her child’s life. “You were lucky. Renly didn’t enjoy the company of women at all, Joffrey spent his days shooting on dead animals, and Tommen…”

She said nothing of the father of her son. She didn’t know him long enough to know if she loved him, though he was the only one of her three husbands to love her.

“I’m sorry I didn’t arrange you a better marriage.”

“It’s not your fault, Father. I agreed with all these marriages. I wanted them. I’m as much to blame as anyone else in this story.”

Her lord father shook his head. “I could have married you to anybody. I had requests of marriage from everyone. I could have found you so much better than the Lannisters. Your mother had reservations about Joffrey and Tommen. I should have listened to her this time. Renly was something, but Joffrey…I made mistakes.” He took a more serious expression now, as if he realized something. “You know, Lord Randyll Tarly once proposed that I could marry you to his son. Now that Lord Dickon is Lord of Horn Hill, he might be a possible match.”

She sighed. “Before you make any plans, Father, remember that it is Daenerys Targaryen who will
choose who I marry, and we are in no position to oppose her.”

“I can still make her suggestions.”

“Be careful all the same. She is not a rose like me. She is a dragon.”

She nodded, understanding the situation. “All the same, I wish I chose you a different husband. I mean, no one would refuse you.”

“Someone did,” she reminded him, a smile creeping to her face.

“I will never understand why he refused.”

“He was already married, Father,” she reminded him.

“I know, but still.”

“Did you agree with Grandmother’s idea?” she asked out of curiosity.

“No, I wanted you to marry the new king, Tommen, back then. I didn’t agree with her, but she went on with the idea all the same.”

She nodded. “I didn’t agree with her, me neither.”

“I must say he surprised me. The moment we made our offer, he ordered that your grandmother left the city immediately.”

Margaery smiled at the thought. “It seemed she had found someone as sharp as she was.”

“Well, he missed something.”

She didn’t know if her father was being honest, or just wanted to cheer her up, but she appreciated it no matter the intent. “In another life, another world, another story maybe, he might have accepted. But the moment a redhead girl came into his life, there was no way to split them apart.”

She blinked, then yawned. “I will leave. You must be tired.”

“So are you,” she commented. He acknowledged it with a nod. Standing up, he approached and kissed her on the forehead.

“Have a good night, my little rose.”

Margaery may have been right about her father’s exhaustion, but she knew for a certainty that he was right about hers too. The moment she slipped under her covers, she fell asleep.

In her sleep, she was swimming in a large pool of water, inside a very dark place, but lit with torches. She plunged into the water of the pool and went very deep until she found the bottom. Its surface was smooth and reminded her of a particular texture. It wasn’t rock. She began to swim up, trying to reach again the water’s surface as she lost the air she had kept in her lungs. She managed to reach the top, but her lungs and her throat were on fire. She found herself in the sand, coughing.

_Why did you do that? Why?_

The voice came from somewhere, but she didn’t know what somewhere it was. However, she knew why she did it, why she risked her life.
“Loras.” That was the only word she could pronounce between two coughs. Her brother was dead, and she would never see him again. She was naked in the dark, all alone.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry that I was late to upload this chapter. I've been sick lately and I was late in writing the story as a consequence.

I'm going to stop uploading chapters for some time, to give me some time to write. The next chapter will be uploaded on April 1st, and it will be from Sansa's perspective.

Please review
Okay, it's been almost a month and a half since I last updated. I'm sorry for those who waited and wondered where the hell I was. First, let me reassure you, I'm still alive, and more important than that, I'm not about to leave "A Shadow and a Wolf" unfinished. Only, as I'm approaching the end of this story, I find harder than before to write the last chapters. So, to make sure I keep updating on a regular basis, here's what I'm going to do:

- There will be at least one update per week, on Saturday (standard hour in Montreal)
- I may publish two new chapters in some weeks, but there is no guarantee to it. When it happens, the second chapter will uploaded on Wednesday.

I just found myself unable to keep the pace I previously had, so I hope you will forgive me. We really are in the end of this fanfiction, and I'll do everything to give you a fantastic ending.

Now, let's go back to the story. Most of our characters are in the North, and they just stopped the Night King from taking Winterfell. However, the dead are not gone yet, many White Walkers are still alive, and the war is far from being over. In King's Landing, Trystane and Margaery must deal with a civil war. As for Sansa, she must face a very difficult situation as well.

There are songs in this chapter. If you want to listen to them as they come, see the links below (in their order of appearance):
- Hands of Gold (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bdmh9eRUz8g)
- Sansa's Hymn (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKvOQXPfrMA)
- Halfman's Song (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOQsYk8cbnE)
- Halfman's Song, with female voice by Sharm (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_tIP5VM7QyY)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

**SANSAXXXXIII**

She remained still, her legs bent and stuck together, brought to her chest, her arms encircling her knees, her head pressed against her thighs. A full bucket of hot water was spilled over her head, spilling her already wet hair over her arms and shoulders. Despite the warmth of the water, she shivered. She knew what was coming, and nothing could reassure her.

Today was the day when she would get married, again. She was already married, to a good man, the kind of man her father had wanted her to marry. He hadn’t lived to organize the match he wished for her, but Sansa took comfort in the idea that her father certainly knew that she would spend her life with a good person. Nothing was sure anymore. Tyrion might be dead. Littlefinger was the greatest liar in all the Seven Kingdoms, and Sansa clung to it, trying to persuade herself that her husband was still alive, somewhere, and that he was looking for her.

However, it was difficult to remain convinced that the man she loved was alive and that the opposite
was impossible. Sansa had no contact with the exterior over the last weeks. The only news she received were those that Littlefinger carefully chose to let her know, she was sure of that. He showed her a raven that was supposedly sent from the North, with the seal of House Umber on it. It claimed the wights got through the Wall.

She knew why he told her this information. He wanted her to believe that, whether Tyrion was dead or alive, it made no difference, for the dead would soon claim him. She knew Baelish hid her things, but she didn’t know which ones he was hiding. This only made her more uncertain than ever.

Back in King’s Landing, Sansa had managed to adjust to the condition of hostage quite quickly, all things considered. She was taught to obey, and that’s what she did when she was prisoner of Joffrey’s claws. Now, however, after knowing what power was like, what it was to wield it and to use it, she didn’t know if she could go back to being the little bird she was in the capital.

She arrived at Runestone two days ago, and everything was almost ready for the wedding at her arrival. She was welcomed by Harrold Arryn and the Lords of the Vale who were not in the North. She recognized none of them. They were all in Baelish’s pocket, or they didn’t care for her at all. They welcomed her like a well trained prey for a hunt. Lord Arryn was his usual self, a model of courtesy masking his arrogance and hypocrisy.

“I hope your journey was without problem, my lady,” he told her.

“It depends what you mean by problems. There are some who see the others’ problems as opportunities,” she retorted.

They gave her an appropriate welcome for a prisoner, she gave them the gratitude they had to expect from a prisoner. The following day, yesterday, she supped with Harrold Arryn. Littlefinger had done his work very well, as usual. Harrold Arryn was persuaded that she truly believed to be in love with Tyrion because she lost all her family. He assured her that she would be much better in the Vale, that he was the best husband she could dream of, that he would protect her against all dangers, and that her daughter would be safe. All lies. She wanted to send the roasted pork in her plate to his face. She was beginning to wonder how she suffered this treatment for so long in the capital. Perhaps because there she had friends. Sandor Clegane, who saved her from the angry mob. Shae, who was her confident. Tyrion, who was there to protect her from Joffrey and Tywin. Here, she had no one. She was alone, a prey for Littlefinger’s schemes. She hoped that Daenerys Targaryen would feed him to her dragons once she dealt with the dead.

Littlefinger had told her about his plans. He spent a lot of time with her. She knew that look he had when he stared at her, and it disgusted her. There was only one man in the world who could look at her this way, and he did it with kindness and humor, not cold cruelty and desire like Baelish did. As he stared at her, imagining who knew what, he explained to her his intentions in detail. He revelled in exposing his plans to her. He was counting on the war in the North to kill most of his enemies. The Lords of the Vale who opposed him were all there. Jon, Tyrion, Arya, the northern lords, Daenerys and her army were there. Even if Daenerys defeated the dead, her army, already divided, would be crippled, reduced by the losses to battles, sickness and cold. Her Dothraki hordes were undisciplined and despised by all the people in Westeros. As soon as the main enemy would be defeated, the different factions in her army would turn on each other. In the meantime, her absence would trigger a conflict between the two powerful houses who supported her, the Martells and the Tyrells. The Vale would remain outside the conflict, protected by its mighty mountains and the Gates of the Moon. When the time would come, they would assault the whole Westeros with their forces. Through Sansa and her daughter, Harrold Arryn could claim the Riverlands and Casterly Rock, and eventually the North. An alliance with either the Tyrells or the Martells would be made possible by their suicidal war. Daenerys would pick one side. She would have no choice to do it. The other side
would make an alliance with the Vale when they saw they had no other choice, and once Daenerys was defeated, Harrold Arryn could claim the Iron Throne for him and Sansa, with Baelish in the shadows to rule the Seven Kingdoms.

There were several flaws to Littlefinger’s plans, and Sansa outlined them to him. He was forgetting the queen’s dragons, the mistrust everyone had towards him, and the fact that if the White Walkers won, there would be no Iron Throne left to sit upon, no kingdoms to rule, no living soul to call him king. Littlefinger had waved away her objections as if they didn’t matter. Dragons could be killed, very few outside of the Vale actually knew he was the man pulling the strings for Lord Arryn, and if the White Walkers took over all the Seven Kingdoms, then his actions wouldn’t matter, but they would if Daenerys defeated them. Tyrion would call that a Nash equilibrium, if her memories were right.

“You believe you are a prisoner, I can see that,” Baelish had told her. “But a day will come when you will thank me for what I’ve done for you.”

Sansa felt that Littlefinger’s plans were that of a man desperate for power, risking everything. His plan was only to bring chaos, and to use this chaos to his advantage. That’s what he always did. Plant the seeds for chaos, and then climb the ladder while everyone was too busy fighting in the pit.

There was something that Sansa couldn’t support, and that was the constant lies Littlefinger told about her husband. He kept reminding her of the rape of his first wife, but he changed the truth, repeating that Tyrion gave Tysha to his father’s men and willingly took part to the rape. Even Harrold Arryn talked about it when they supped yesterday.

“He might have told you that it wasn’t his fault, but you mustn’t let him fool yourself, my lady. He is a Lannister, and the Lannisters are all liars. They’re the ones who murdered your father.”

Arryn was either stupid or a liar like his counsellor. Littlefinger was the greatest liar in all the Seven Kingdoms, and he contributed to the downfall of her house as much if not more than the Lannisters. He was a damn son of a whore.

“You should watch your tongue, my lady.”

The voice of the maid who helped her to take a bath brought her out of her thoughts. “I said nothing,” Sansa denied.

“You’re not very good at lying. I heard you very well. Don’t worry, I’ll tell no one. I don’t see any reason why to do it. Get out the tub.”

Sansa did as she was told. She was reduced to a doll who did everything she was told. The maid, Vala, draped her in towels and dried her.

“Stay still, my lady.” She led Sansa to a glass and began to brush her hair. Vala was assigned to her at her arrival. Probably in the forties, she was no longer of the first youth, but a respectably handsome woman nonetheless. Her blond hair fell in disorder on her shoulders and her blue grey eyes were sharp. She never smiled and performed her tasks dutifully, nothing more. Sansa sometimes felt patronized by her.

“Eager to marry Lord Arryn?” she asked, almost on a tone of reproach.

“I didn’t have a say in the matter,” Sansa replied.

“No, you didn’t, of course. Still, many would be thrilled to be his wife.”
“Many, but not all of them.”

“True. Just like many women would like to share his bed. Do you want to?”

“What would my answer change?”

“Nothing,” Vala acknowledged. “Women don’t get to choose who they marry, or who they sleep with, for that matter.” She twitched Sansa’s hair by inadvertence. “Sorry, my lady.”

“Do you know Lord Arryn? Or… what do you know of him?”

“Only what everyone knows,” Vala replied. “He brings every woman who has the bad luck to be in his eyesight to his bed, he fucks them, gets them pregnant, then leaves them to fare on their own.” She stopped to brush for a moment, then sighed before she resumed. “I doubt it will change with your marriage. Men never change.”

“You’re wrong. They can.” She thought about Tyrion.

“They can’t,” the maid insisted. “Deep down, they always remain the same. They are either good or evil. The good ones die protecting those they love, the evil ones live abandoning those they claim to love. Any lord in this castle would sacrifice everyone they know to save their skin, Lord Arryn the first.”

“You shouldn’t say these things?”

“Why? No one cares. Everyone knows it’s the truth. As long as we respect the protocol and don’t spit it as his face in front of everyone so they can pretend they have a great lord, no one will be bothered by my words. As a servant, I am nothing, and how could words from nothing matter to the proud and great Harrold Arryn? Here, you’re ready.”

Her hair style was very complex, a chain of tresses that reminded her of her wedding. Shae and Brella had bathed her, dressed her, brushed her hair, and perfumed her like a doll for that day. They had just been done when Tyrion walked in. The husband of your dreams, he had joked, before he said that she did look glorious. Tyrion only believed half of what he said on this day, and she wasn’t sure she believed anything he said, but he was the closest that a man could be to the husband of her dreams.

Three years ago, she would have been overjoyed to marry Harrold Arryn. Now she would give everything she had to escape and run back to Tyrion.

If he’s still alive, a voice said in the back of her mind, very similar to that of Littlefinger. She chased the voice. Her husband, her true husband, not the one they were forcing her to marry today, was still alive out there, somewhere. She was Sansa Lannister.

Vala kept pestering and complaining about men as she put away a few accessories. Sansa noticed her harsh words, barely disguised, were directed towards someone in particular.

“What did Lord Arryn do to you?” she asked Vala.

“What every man do, especially those like him.”

“What is it?”

Vala sighed. “You will hear about it, sooner or later. I have a daughter. Her name is Cissy. She used to work as a servant for Lady Waynwood, just like me. She also happened to be pretty, so pretty that she caught the eye of the young and handsome Harrold Hardyng. He got her pregnant. She was only
The servant scoffed. “Men are all the same. I warned Cissy, I told her not to trust him. Her own father got me pregnant and left me alone to bring up a daughter on my own as soon as he discovered I was pregnant. Cissy thought that the proud and great Harrold Arryn was different. She said he would marry her, that they would live together, like one big happy family. The moment she told him she was pregnant, he lost all interest in her. You can still hear him telling jokes about my daughter’s fatness. She gained weight during the pregnancy, and because of that Harrold Arryn mocks her. Not that he didn’t mock her before, but after he left her, he kept laughing at her while she cried and screamed, bringing his child into the world. A child he never cared about. He boasts that he had a little daughter from her, but he doesn’t care about the child. Lady Waynwood was kind with Cissy. She is a woman, so I guess she understands what it can be like to be abandoned by a man. She married her to one of her men-at-arms. I can’t say it’s much better. Back when I was still at Ironoaks, every time I saw Cissy, she had bruises on her arms and her face, and I don’t think it comes from the steward. Lady Waynwood ended up sending me here. She wanted to get me far from her young knight, to prevent a scandal, because I started telling everyone what I really thought about him. A knight? Horseshit, I say! He’s a damn son of a whore!”

“You shouldn’t say these things,” Sansa warned her again.

She agreed with her about Harrold Arryn, but it would do the woman no good if she was beaten, whipped or executed for insulting the Lord Protector of the Vale. It was useless to insult someone openly. She learned it the hard way during her time in King’s Landing. You only said your opinion about someone when it was of use for you, and right now they had no use for that.

“Why shouldn’t I? If these tales about the demons in the North are true, then I’ll be dead before this winter is over, so why not use the time that’s left to me to let the truth come out. And this way you know how lucky you are to marry this son of a whore.”

Two more servants entered at this moment. They were carrying a package, and Sansa had quite a good idea of what it was. Vala, shutting her mouth, helped them to put it on Sansa. She noticed the gown was grey, but nothing more. She couldn’t care less. This wasn’t a wedding, this wasn’t a wedding gown, and she wasn’t a bride. She already said the words, to another man, and deep down she knew he was still alive. Littlefinger always lied.

They could make her wear a costly gown with a cloak to the Stark colors. They could force her to walk down the aisle to the altar where a man would wait for her. They could tie her hand to his in a ribbon. They could make her say pretty words to him. They could force her to sit by his side during the feast that would follow. They could bring her to his chambers, but she knew who she was. She was Sansa Lannister. No one could take that away from her.

When she was ready, the servants left her alone. Sansa didn’t look in the glass. She had no interest in seeing how she looked like. The woman who wore this gown and was about to get wed wasn’t her. It was another woman, the one who spoke pretty words and empty courtesies to survive. She looked through the window. Her daughter was out there, somewhere. Maybe. She pushed back the thought that she might be dead. Joanna couldn’t be dead. She had to be alive.

The door creaked as it opened, and Sansa had a quite a good idea of who it might be.

“You are beautiful, Lady Sansa.” She wanted nothing more than to rip out his tongue.

“I suppose you know about the expression a golden cage, Lord Baelish. Have you ever been in
“I have.” That surprised her, but she refused to face him. She kept her back turned on him. “Back to Riverrun, when I was fostered to your grandfather. I was a ward, an honored guest, but in fact I was a prisoner. An honored prisoner, but a prisoner still. I was forced to look at the woman I loved being taken away from me, and there was nothing I could do. I was in a cage, Sansa. There is no worse cage than the one where you must look at the woman you love being kept away from you. Where you see her being taken away from you.” He made a pause. “I loved your mother dearly.”

“Did you cry when she died? Did you regret helping the men who had her killed? Was there even a moment when you regretted your actions that led to her death?”

Littlefinger took his time to answer. “I loved your mother more than you could ever know. In a better world, one where love could overcome strength and duty, you might have been my child. But we don’t live in that world. I could never be with your mother. It was impossible. I ran after the impossible.”

He had approached her as he spoke and was now caressing her hair. A chill went through her spine, and she had to think very strongly about Joanna to not spit in his face. He then ran his hand on her shoulder, then down her back. It was bare because of the gown, until he reached her hips. Then he approached his lips from her ear.

“You’re more beautiful than she ever was.”

She stepped forward, freeing herself from the touch of Petyr Baelish. She turned to face him, and he seemed surprised by her expression of hatred.

“My mother saw you as a friend. You will not even get that from me.” She let some time slip. “Unless you prove yourself first.”

“What do I have to do?” he asked. He had his interested look again.

“Give me back what you took away from my mother. I want my daughter, and his father.”

He smirked, but before he could answer, someone else opened the door. It was another servant. She was closer to Sansa’s age, in the twenties, with long black hair and blue eyes. “It is time. The ceremony will begin.”

Petyr Baelish bowed to her. “Enjoy, my lady. This is a new life that begins for you.”

This was no life, but she didn’t say it. Littlefinger left and the servant stepped aside to let four men escort Sansa to the sept.

Sansa was like a ghost during the whole ceremony. She walked, moved and spoke without thinking. She felt nothing when she walked to the altar, barely noticed the man who claimed he was her new husband and the guests who were present for the ceremony, barely heard the septon speak the words. She almost didn’t feel the ribbon on her arm, or the hand of the man standing before her, and she said things without even thinking about them. The words were thought to all the young ladies from the age of four. All knew it by heart. What brought her back to the reality was the kiss.

It felt so wrong. She probably pushed and almost spat at Lord Arryn. She was close to wiping her mouth after. When she looked at Harrold Arryn again, she saw him all smile, contemplating her, before he turned to the assembly that applauded them. Sansa turned as well. She saw Ser Vance Corbray among them, just like Lord Belmore, and most of all Littlefinger, who stood before everyone else and looked at her with that smirk, accompanied with the look of desire in his eyes.
The sept was in the castle, so they managed to get to the Great Hall without going outside.

“Normally, we would do a procession in the courtyard, my lady,” her so-called new husband explained, “but with the cold times, I thought it would be better for you if we headed immediately to the feast.”

She couldn’t care less, and indeed she cared not for the feast at all. She ate a few crumbs, nothing more. She answered with a distant voice to any attempt from Harrold Arryn to engage a conversation with her. He managed to amuse himself with other people, anyway, especially with lords and knights coming to congratulate him. Sansa said the usual words of thanks and gratitude to those who came to her, and pulled up a smile, but it faded as soon as they were gone. She would make it clear to the man sitting by her side that she wasn’t happy, and she would tell him the reason why when the time was right. She would get Joanna back.

There was some dancing afterwards, and she refused to participate. That didn’t stop the Lord of the Eyrie to dance with half the women of the assembly. Of course, he danced with the half that was pretty and young. All this time, she felt the gaze of Littlefinger on her. She knew he was undressing her in his mind. What else would a brothelkeeper do? He probably undressed in his mind every woman he saw, evaluating how worth they were. She was no different. He assessed her value for his plans, and he decided she was valuable as a wife for the Lord of the Eyrie, another piece in his game.

There were songs too, bards and musicians who came to play between dances. Sansa always loved music, but this time she couldn’t find any interest in it. She found no interest in anything about this feast. She was giving the impression to Harrold Arryn that only one thing could interest her. Well, two things in fact.

She barely ate, but she drank more than her share. Tyrion told her that one of the reasons why he got horribly drunk during their wedding feast was that he hoped to be drunk enough that, come the morning, he would have forgotten everything. In some way, Sansa was following his example as well as honoring him. She didn’t drink as much as he did that night. Tyrion was the drinker, not her. Her mother and Septa Lemore educated her too well. She couldn’t bring herself to be totally drunk. Still, it helped to be partially drunk. Her husband used to say that everything was better with some wine in the belly. After a few cups, Sansa effectively felt better. Not much better, but better all the same. She thought she might get through the feast.

A woman was just done singing *The Bear and the Maiden Fair*. This song was sung at every wedding. She heard it at all the weddings she attended, including hers. She wished she had enjoyed listening to it back then, for she could not see a way to enjoy it now. The so-called groom, the lord who Littlefinger said every woman in the Vale wanted, danced with the servant who interrupted Sansa’s discussion with Littlefinger. She was probably older than Harrold Arryn, but it didn’t seem to bother him. As long as the woman was pretty, it was good for him. They both laughed as they danced and she whispered something in the ear of the Lord Protector of the Vale.

“A pretty sight, isn’t it, my lady?” Ser Vance Corbray had come and was standing before her, on her right, just to let her see what was going on the dance floor.

“A sad thing for this girl. She’s not the one marrying him,” Sansa commented dryly. She secretly wished it was this girl who was the new Lady of the Vale.

“That’s a sad thing for you too, my lady. I suppose it is hard to look at your husband going to whores. Though I suppose you must be used to it by now, considering your previous marriage.”

“Unlike certain men, Tyrion Lannister held up his promises.” She stared at the knight who betrayed them straight into his eyes.
“Unlike certain men, Tyrion Lannister is dead,” he replied. Corbray smiled. “We have a surprise for you, my lady. I heard you were very fond of singing. Well, I hope you will like the next song.”

He left with a cruel smile. Sansa watched him go as the guests exploded in applause. The dance was over and a new bard was coming forward, a tall and slim man with a small beard, dressed like a Lannister soldier, but with a harp in his hand. He sat and prepared as Harrold Arryn staggered to his place at her right. He was probably at least beginning to get drunk. The song began. Sansa never heard it before.

He rode through the streets of the city
   Down from his hill on high
O'er the winds and the steppes and the cobble
   He rode to a woman's side
   For she was his secret treasure
   She was his shame and his bliss
   And a chain and a keep are nothing
   Compared to a woman's kiss
   For hands of gold are always cold
   But a woman's hands are warm
   For hands of gold are always cold
   But a woman's hands are warm

Sansa hated the song the moment she heard the first verse. She saw Ser Vance and Littlefinger smiling cruelly at her. She wasn’t stupid, and they knew it. They knew it would hurt her to hear about the woman Tyrion loved before her.

And there he stood with sword in hand
   The Last of Darry's ten
   And red the grass beneath his feet
   and red his banner's bright
   And red the glow of the setting sun that bathe him in its light

"Come one, come on", the great lord called, "my sword is hungry still".
And with the cry of savage rage they swarmed across the rill
And with the cry of savage rage they swarmed across the rill

He rode through the streets of the city
Down from his hill on high
O'er the winds and the steppes and the cobble
He rode to a woman's side
For she was his secret treasure
She was his shame and his bliss
For a chain and a keep are nothing
Compared to a woman's kiss

She was his secret treasure. She was his shame. She was his bliss. If you ever set foot again in Westeros, I’ll have your head. And you’ll never see Tyrion again. He’s my husband now. These words were meant to be the last she would say to her former friend, to the woman who betrayed her. But before she left the cell, Shae warned her about someone else. She warned her about the very person who kidnapped her, took her daughter away from her and murdered the man she loved. No, he didn’t murder him. It was a lie. Everything he said was a lie. With Littlefinger, even the truth was a lie.

For hands of gold are always cold
But a woman's hands are warm
For hands of gold are always cold
But a woman's hands are warm
For hands of gold are always cold
But a woman's hands are warm
For hands of gold are always cold
But a woman's hands are warm

The hall roared in applause again. Sansa clapped her hands without enthusiasm. The bard was departing and the musicians were about to start again when Lord Harrold Arryn decided to stand. Everyone fell silent.

“My lords, my ladies, we are all together today for a great event. The union of the two greatest
houses in the history of Westeros. House Stark and House Arryn, two houses that should have been united a long time ago by the bounds of marriage. Two houses that have waged wars against common enemies, two houses who never raised the sword against each other.”

Sansa almost didn’t manage to hold her laughs. The Starks and the Arryns had been at war before, and more than once, in conflicts that lasted over a thousand years. The knight didn’t know his history well.

“Today, we do not only face a common enemy together. We finally are one and only family. My lady wife’s father once was a ward for Lord Jon Arryn, and the sister of his ward’s lady wife was his own wife. Our houses were bonded through these marriages, but today we are one and only house. We will avenge all those who died at the hands of usurpers and bring justice to them. From the deserts of Dorne to the icy landscapes of the North, from the Sunset to the Narrow Sea, from the Iron Islands to Dragonstone, from King’s Landing to the smallest village in the Seven Kingdoms, I will avenge the deaths of Jon Arryn, Eddard Stark, his children, and all the others who died at the hands of the Targaryens and the Lannisters. I will have no rest until these houses and their allies are defeated and sent where they belong. Under the ground!”

The men in the assembly roared in approval. Sansa remained impassive. Her so-called husband didn’t stop.

“But for now, let’s rejoice before the real war begins. Let’s enjoy this moment before glory and honor calls for us. Let us listen to a song in honor of the Lady Sansa of House Stark, the most beautiful woman in the Seven Kingdoms, and of the entire world. Let us not forget that, sooner or later, war must end so we can go back to the people we love.”

The servant Harrold Arryn was dancing a few moments ago stepped forward. When she sang, Sansa immediately recognized the song. She sang it during the Battle of the Blackwater, and she sang it for Tyrion while he was recovering, after the trial. He had woken up while she sang it for him.

\[
\text{Gentle Mother, font of mercy,}\\
\text{Save our sons from war, we pray.}\\
\text{Stay the swords and stay the arrows,}\\
\text{Let them know a better day.}\\
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\text{Gentle Mother, font of mercy,}\\
\text{Save our sons from war, we pray.}\\
\text{Stay the swords and stay the arrows,}\\
\text{Let them know a better day.}\\
\]

\[
\text{Gentle Mother, strength of women,}\\
\]

Help our daughters through this fray.
Soothe the wrath and tame the fury,
Teach us all a kinder way.

Stay the swords and stay the arrows,
Let them know a better day.

Gentle Mother, font of mercy,
Save our sons from war, we pray.
Stay the swords and stay the arrows,
Let them know a better day.

Gentle Mother, font of mercy,
Save our sons from war, we pray.

Gentle Mother, font of mercy,
Save our sons from war, we pray.

Stay the swords and stay the arrows,
Let them know a better day.

At the end of the song, Sansa was singing with the other woman. They both had wonderful voices, so it created a beautiful duo singing the Mother’s Hymn. A silence followed, and then everyone applauded. Sansa’s eyes met the woman’s eyes. She smiled at Sansa and bowed. Applauses continued for quite a while. When they were over, the young woman didn’t leave. She remained where she was and addressed Lord Arryn without being asked, something quite rare for a servant.

“Lord Arryn, do you wish me to continue?” she asked. The Lord of the Eyrie looked unsure for a moment. “You asked me for another song, don’t you remember?”

His face lightened up. “Oh, yes. Forgive me.” He stood once again. “Although I have no love for him, my lady wife had another husband before me. And although he didn’t deserve her, he did protect her in his own way, and gave me the opportunity to meet her. For that I am thankful.” Harrold Arryn complimenting Tyrion Lannister. Everything was possible in this world. “Tyrion Lannister is dead, and only for keeping the Lady Sansa alive, he deserves that we keep some good memories of him. So, in his honor…”
He raised his cup to the servant and sat back. This time, a musician played to accompany her, and she sang something Sansa never heard before.

There are some who are born distinguished
There are some who are raised in praise
But me I was always the last in line
A blot in my father's gaze

No cheekbones chiselled on a feline face
No skill or savvy with a sword
But this game we all play is won in wily ways
And sly is this littlest lord

Cruel tricks of romance
Degraded by their spite
You snub your cub too many times
You just might feel his bite...

Beware, beware of the words I twist
I am small but my reach is long
And the ravens black against the winter's mist
Are whispering the half-man's song
They're whispering the half man's song...

The land is a blooming orchard
With fruits so juicy and ripe
With a clink of a coin loose the lion's loin
Play a tune on the half man's pipe
In the arms of a whore I made a promise
Sinking deeper into danger every day
Cut through all their shit with a brazen wit
Molding puppets from their minds of clay

I'm no man of honor
Myself is my true king
But somewhere deep within me
The bells of conscience ring

Beware, beware of the words I twist
I am small but my reach is long
And the ravens black against the winter's mist
Are whispering the half-man's song

They're whispering the half-man's song...
Whispering the half man's song...

The hall was silent as a crypt when she was done singing. You could hear a fly. Then someone clapped her hands. It was Sansa who did it. She felt the gaze of Harrold Arryn on her, and he followed suit. Soon everyone applauded, though the cheers were forced. The young woman bowed again and walked away. Sansa noticed that Littlefinger was one of the few to not applaud. He stepped forward as soon as the applause calmed down.

“My lords, my ladies, this is getting late, and if we want this marriage to be complete, then I believe there would be no better time for the bedding.”

Immediately, people cheered and shouted to bring them to bed. Sansa’s body tensed. She looked at Harrold Arryn, who was smiling like it was the most beautiful day of his life. This time, her husband wouldn’t forbid the bedding ceremony.

Hands clapped and people kept shouting as the men rushed towards Sansa and the women towards Harrold Arryn. Sansa shut her mind to the rest of the world, trying to ignore what was happening as they lifted her up and began to remove her dress, layer by layer. Despite her attempts, there were some details she couldn’t ignore. Among them were the avid eyes and pressing hands of Petyr Baelish.

It seemed to take an eternity. She felt every touch, every movement, every piece of clothes that was
ripped from her body. She didn’t move an inch. She was moved, used like a doll. So that was how you felt during a bedding ceremony. You didn’t feel like a child excited to become a woman. You felt like a toy the others were using. When they reached the bedchamber, she was thrown into the bed, only clad in her underwear.

Harrold Arryn arrived not much later, without much more clothes on him than her. The women couldn’t push him into the bed like the men did for her. Everyone left the room and left them alone to consummate their marriage.

Sansa’s heart was pounding in her chest. She saw the excitement on Harrold Arryn’s face, and on a lower part of his body. The girl who left Winterfell would have been excited about this moment, but she was no longer that girl. She knew who Harrold Arryn was, and she knew who she was. Sansa Lannister turned her back on him. It almost served no purpose since he placed a hand on her shoulder right away and kissed her neck.

She shied away. Tears were coming to her eyes.

“Sansa, are you alright?”

What a question! She was forced into a marriage she never wanted, separated from all those she loved, a prisoner in a golden cage, about to be raped, and he asked if she was alright? She wanted to slap him, tear his eyes away from their orbits and slice his throat with a knife. Instead, she only cried.

“Sansa, tell me what’s troubling you? I’m your husband.”

No, he wasn’t her husband. She pushed his hand away again when he tried to lay it softly on her back in an attempt to comfort her. He was the man she was forced to marry, the man who was too stupid to see that she didn’t want him, that her heart belonged to another, and that he would never make her happy. She was this man’s prisoner, and he didn’t realize it.

She told him nothing of what went through her mind, nothing of what she thought of him. Instead, she told him something that was true, the main reason why she didn’t try to kill him yet.

“I miss my daughter.”

He didn’t speak for a while. “I can have her brought here if you want.”

She turned to him and pulled up a face full of hope. “You would?”

“Yes, if that can make you happy. Does that make you happy?”

She made sure she looked uncertain. “When she is here, then yes, I think I could be happy. I haven’t seen her for so long.”

“I’ll write tomorrow to bring her to the Eyrie as quickly as possible.”

She smiled. “Thank you.” She might see her little Joanna again soon. She couldn’t be sure, but that was better than nothing.

“Now…”

Before Harrold Arryn could say anything, the door of their bedchamber slammed open and two guards wearing the Arryn colors walked in.

“What are you doing here?” Lord Arryn roared. “It better be important…”
One of the men punched him in the face. He collapsed on the bed next to her. Sansa put some distance between them and covered herself with the sheets as the two men pulled their lord away and tackled him on the wall. The distant cousin of Robin Arryn had a hand on his face and was groaning in pain.

“My lady.”

Sansa turned to the voice and saw her worst nightmare standing in the doorsteps. He carefully closed the door, not lifting his eyes from Sansa a single moment. The stare was more terrible than ever before. The grieving feeling in her stomach was growing.

“You are indeed a hundred times more beautiful than your mother ever was,” Littlefinger said, looking at her as if he could see through the sheets and the thin fabric of her underwear.

“What’s the meaning of this?” Harrold Arryn was able to articulate words again. He looked at Petyr Baelish in confusion. “What are you doing?”

“I’m taking what is mine by right,” Littlefinger replied.

“Yours by right?”

“Yes, my boy. As you said, she is the most beautiful woman in the world, and the most beautiful woman in the world is mine by right. You remember you promised to reward me for my services. Well, I’ve come to claim my reward.”

“She is my wife!”

“Really? Did you consummate the marriage yet? I don’t think so. She has far too many clothes on her. I’m well informed on that kind of things. This is my profession after all.”

“I am the Lord Protector of the Vale.”

“A wise man once said that every man who must say I am a lord is no lord.”

“You have no right here! You are on my lands!”

“Your lands? My dear boy…”

“Don’t call me boy!”

Littlefinger ignored the outburst. “My dear boy, the Vale of Arryn isn’t yours. All these lords here follow you because I convinced them to follow you. Because I paid them, because I promised them this or that, because they decided to follow me to serve you. I could convince them to serve any other lord in your place. Only, it was easier to make them choose you. You have the right name, you have the titles, you have the appearance. The lords and the people want a lord like you. I could have made them choose me to rule the Seven Kingdoms if I wanted, but it is far easier for me to put you in the throne with Sansa at your side. Far easier for me to let you be king in name while I am king in all but name.” He looked at Sansa. “And one of the king’s main duty is to further the family line. To make a child to the queen.”

He approached the bed. Sansa knew she had nowhere to go now. Littlefinger was beginning to open his breeches. No, she wouldn’t allow that to happen. She would kill him before he could have her. She had sheets covering her. She would strangle him with them. She tightened her grip on them and prepared to do what was necessary. She closed her eyes.
I love you, Joanna. I love you, Tyrion.

A thunderous sound came from the entrance of the room. Sansa opened her eyes and looked at where the sound came from. Another guard with the emblem of House Arryn walked in and drew his sword. Sansa saw his yellow eyes staring at her for a moment, and only for a moment. He immediately turned his attention to the two guards holding a struggling Harrold Arryn to the wall. Pushing Littlefinger aside like a mere nuisance, he slashed his sword across one of Baelish’s guards’ neck. The other guard managed to draw his sword, to no avail. He stopped the first blow, only to end with the point of the sword piercing through his heart and emerging from his back. He collapsed on the floor as the newcomer pulled back the weapon from his chest.

Within less than ten seconds, the two guards of Littlefinger were both dead. The man they were supposed to protect was getting back on his feet after being pushed on the floor. Harrold was free from his captors and looked at his savior.

“Thank you, ser.”

Without warning, the said ser slapped him in the face, and the Lord of the Eyrie collapsed once again against the wall. “I am no ser,” the man said on a grave voice. He removed his helmet to reveal a face covered by scars and long silvery hair.

Littlefinger now stood again on his two feet and looked in consternation at his assailant. “Who the hell are you?”

“You have forgotten your own lessons, Lord Baelish. Never turn your back on an enemy.”

The voice came from the door, and Littlefinger looked right there, but as soon as he turned to face the origin of the voice, he cried in pain and ended up lying on the floor, his hands around the place where he opened his breeches, soaked with blood. Between his fingers, Sansa noticed the presence of a bolt. When she looked at the origin of the voice, she saw a crossbow, unloaded.

The person who held the crossbow had long black hair and blue eyes. The individual wore simple clothes, well kept despite their simplicity. And that individual was a woman. More surprising was the fact that Sansa knew that woman. She was the servant who danced with Harrold Arryn during the feast and who sang just before the bedding ceremony. She was the same woman who interrupted her discussion with Littlefinger before the ceremony. Her eyes were not lit with joy now. They were full of hatred. Sansa seldom saw so much hatred in somebody’s eyes.

She looked to Sansa, and for a moment her expression softened. “Are you alright?” Sansa nodded. “Good.”

She turned back her attention to Littlefinger, wailing on the floor, holding the very thing he was going to use on Sansa. The servant only looked at him, and Sansa realized that this woman enjoyed looking at him suffering. Staring at Littlefinger, she had to admit that she felt no pity for him in that instant, and she didn’t mind if he suffered.

“Tell, Petyr Baelish,” the servant said, “how does it feel?”

Littlefinger struggled to move slightly on the floor and looked at Sansa. “Cat, help me. I… I love you.”

“You want to help him?” the servant asked Sansa, her tone indicating she didn’t expect her to answer by the affirmative. She was right.

“No.”
Littlefinger’s expression changed, turning to rage. “If I die… your daughter dies.”

Sansa recalled what he told her before. She had forgotten. “He’s lying,” the servant declared.

“She will. I swear. I left precise instructions. My men will kill her the moment they hear of my death.”

“They will not hear of your death, Petyr Baelish. You are dying, and you will die unknown to most. In a century, no one will remember your name.” The servant approached him as he kept looking at Sansa. She knelt close to him. “Does it hurt?”

She placed her hand where the bolt was and pushed it. Littlefinger yelled in pain. She kept pushing, blood staining her hand. “Did you ever wonder how they felt? All these women who worked for you? Did you ever wonder how they felt when a man entered them? I’m sure you never did. All you cared about was to satisfy your clients so you could make money out of all these desperate girls you used to your own benefit. Well, now you know how it feels.” She pushed even harder and more blood came out. Littlefinger wailed even louder. “That’s how it feels. Every time, that’s how it feels.”

She released her grip. The former Master of Coin kept wailing on the floor, blood pouring out of him with his life. The servant remained close to him.

“You’re going to die, Petyr Baelish,” she continued. “Nothing can save you this time. Your lies, your plots, your knowledge, nothing can save you. You should never have lied. You grew up in the Faith of the Seven, am I wrong? There’s a passage in the Book of the Father. It is one of the ten greatest principles of your religion. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. And you just spent your last days bearing false witness against your neighbor, and you didn’t even realize it.”

She approached her mouth from his ear. Littlefinger was still looking at Sansa. His eyes kept saying that if he died, her daughter died. Sansa couldn’t save this man, not after everything he did. Anyway, how could she stop him from dying? He received a bolt between his two legs. He wouldn’t survive long. His expression never changed, a mix of pleading and threat. He gave no consideration to the servant who talked to him. However, after she was done whispering in his ear, his expression changed completely.

He turned his head towards the servant who smiled cruelly at him. His face now showed a mix of terror and utter confusion. The servant stood up and proceeded to reload the crossbow.

“That’s impossible,” he whispered.

“Information is power, Petyr Baelish. Tell me, what power do you have left? You will die knowing the truth, and there’s nothing you can do about it.”

The crossbow was ready. She pointed it. Littlefinger looked back at her. “Sansa…”

Her name was the last word he uttered. A bolt in the eye shortened the life of the mockingbird. Sansa had her eyes fixed on his lifeless body. He was dead. The man who caused so much suffering to her family was dead. Joanna.

She heard another bolt fly. When she looked, she saw that Harrold Arryn wouldn’t live long either. He had a bolt in the neck. He died spitting blood, unable to breathe, much like Ser Hugh of the Vale five years ago. Ser Hugh had been the first man who Sansa witnessed dying. She had been fascinated back then by his death. Now she was terrified. She looked at the servant.

“Why did you do this?”
“I have little more respect for men who sleep with every woman they come across and abandon them once they’re pregnant than I do for brothelkeepers,” the servant answered.

“They’re going to kill us! Someone must have heard us. They’re… they’re going to kill my daughter.”

“They won’t.”

Her hand traveled under her clothes and came back as a fist. When she opened it, Sansa looked at a red stone in the shape of a hexagon.

Chapter End Notes

I hope for those who waited that you'll find some consolation with this chapter, for this is a central part for the final sprint of this story.

This is the shortest wedding chapter I ever wrote to this day, but I think you will agree with me this wasn't a wedding on which we wanted to expand. For once, however, I respected the tradition of Game of Thrones to make weddings a horror. After all, according to Tyrion and Varys, bells always ring for horror: a dead king, a city under siege, or a wedding.

Please review

Next chapter: Daenerys
Daenerys XI

Chapter Notes

As I promised last week, a new chapter every Saturday.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

DAENERYS XI

A mountain was fuming, spitting dark smoke, red trails furrowing its summit. It was a terrifying yet marvelous sight. Destructive, yet it was an object of fascination for Daenerys. She had heard that Valyria was surrounded by dozens of similar mountains in its glory. The mountains that surrounded Valyria made its wealth and glory, but they also were the cause of its doom, for when they all erupted together, the Valyrian civilization disappeared, and only her family survived on Dragonstone. From this family would come her ancestor, Aegon, and all the kings and queens who followed, until her.

The land all around was covered with a dark rock. Nearly all vegetation had been buried under it. All but a tree, and around this tree little green creatures were working. With tools made of dragonglass, they sculpted the volcanic stone and erected pillars all around the tree, in a strange pattern that reminded of a whirlwind. The Children of the Forest worked tirelessly in that limited area around the tree, under the watch of the bloody face. The ground shook under their feet, but the Children kept working. They wandered from one obelisk to the other on the grass that survived around the weirwood, ignoring the danger over them. The tree was at the feet of the volcano, and yet it was undamaged.

The vision stopped. Daenerys released Bran’s arm, and her nephew did the same. “Did you see it?” she asked him.

“Aye,” Jon Snow answered, barely giving her any attention. He was looking at his cousin. “What was it, Bran?”

“The place where the Night King was created,” the boy replied. “This is where every White Walker was created ever since the Long Night. You have to destroy it. If you don’t, then the Walkers will only come back. It might not happen before thousands of years, but they will come back. The only way to stop them forever is to destroy this place.”

“Where is it?” Daenerys asked.

The boy made a sign to someone in the room. The Red Priest Revan stepped forward and placed a map on the round table. They were in a large room in Highpoint, where they gathered a war council. The people present were Daenerys, Jon Snow, Brandon Stark, Malcolm Branfield, Gwyn Whitehill, Garlan Hightower, Robett Glover and Lyanna Mormont.

For a month now, they fought to throw out the White Walkers from the North. So far, the results were uncertain. They managed to free several strongholds, including Karhold and the Last Hearth, and succeeded to defend the Dreadfort. They had divided their forces in three armies. One was following the Kingsroad and heading for Castle Black. This was the main body of the army that Jon Snow and Daenerys were leading, with the ultimate objective to take back the control of the Wall.
The second army was led by Lord Glover and headed for Deepwood Motte. They had the task to secure the western half of the North and to help the Mormonts to take back the control of their island. The third army right now was at Karhold. Led by Ser Brynden Tully, the Blackfish, their task was to secure the eastern regions of the North.

Fighting the White Walkers was very different from fighting any enemy Daenerys ever faced. They didn’t defend the castles. They didn’t hold them. They hid in the forests, or in caves, wherever they could hide and from where they could launch unexpected attacks on any group of people passing by. Sometimes they simply hid in plain sight, during a storm. This was no usual war at all. It reminded Daenerys of her struggle with the Sons of the Harpy back in Meereen, but worse.

The White Walkers and their wights seemed to be retreating, but some obviously remained behind to cause trouble to their forces. The movements of the enemy were very difficult to track down, since they had no contact north of their position to inform them of anything that was going on. Even Varys had no little birds where there were no people alive. Freeing the North wasn’t an easy task. Wights were difficult to find, even to locate approximately. The commander of the garrisons left in the southern regions of the North sometimes reported that wights were spotted, in places south of Winterfell. It was like tracking criminals who hid in every corner and dark place inside a huge city. The most they could do was to place garrisons in the castles to intervene as quickly as possible everywhere the enemy was spotted, and most importantly to take back the Wall so no more enemies could cross south.

The map Revan showed them had a thick line in the south. The line was the Wall. The map displayed territories far beyond the Wall. There was a cross almost at the northern limit of the map. The masked Red Priest pointed it. “This is the place.”

“Are you sure? In the vision Brandon Stark just showed us, this place looked like it was in the Reach. There were no traces of snow,” she said.

“It’s because I showed you what happened eight thousand years ago, before the Night King was created. Back then, there were no winters in Westeros,” the boy answered.

“No winters? I find it hard to believe,” Lord Glover said.

“As strange as it may seem for a Lord of he North, it is the truth,” Revan said. “The Long Night was the first winter. The Others didn’t come with winter. Winter came with them. If you destroy this place where they were created, this winter will be the last.”

“Your Grace, we need to focus on taking back the North,” Lady Mormont declared. “The White Walkers are already a threat. With all due respect to your brother, our enemies are the White Walkers, not winter. The North survived winters for thousands of years, and we will continue to survive them, but we will not survive the White Walkers if they are not destroyed to the last.”

She said your Grace, but it wasn’t Daenerys she was addressing. For Northerners, Jon Snow was their king. She had no illusion about it. They followed her because he followed her, and for no other reason.

“I can assure you that we will deal with the White Walkers, together, all of us,” Jon Snow said.

“You are brave, Lyanna Mormont,” Revan said, “but you are short sighted and blinded by things you have considered to be true for far to long. Before the First Men came to Westeros, back when the Children of the Forest ruled over this land, there were no winters.” He looked at Daenerys. “Queen Daenerys, you’ve grown up in Essos. Do you remember anything that looked like winter there?”
“No, there’s no winter in Essos.”

“Exactly, but there are winters in Westeros, and it’s because of the Others. You saw it in the vision the Three-Eyed Raven just showed you. The place where the Night King was created is at the feet of a volcano.”

“Aye, so? What difference does it make?” Lord Glover asked.

“Have you ever wondered why places like Winterfell and the Dreadfort were built upon volcanic grounds?”

Everyone in the room exchanged quizzical looks. “Winterfell is not built upon volcanic grounds,” Jon Snow stated.

“Where do you think the hot pools that warm the castle come from?” the Red Priest asked.

Jon Snow didn’t answer. Daenerys questioned her advisor. “What are you trying to say, Revan?”

“The climate of the whole world is regulated by volcanos. They are everywhere, in Westeros and Essos. However, there’s a problem with this one.” He pointed the position where the first White Walker came into the world. “When the Others appeared, they started to kill not only men, but the Children of the Forest too, and they used the powers of the Children to their advantage. They stopped the volcano. He doesn’t release any heat like he used to. That’s why the weather of the northern regions is so harsh, and that’s why there are winters. Volcanos used to regulate the weather, but now they can’t, not as well as they did before.”

“You’re telling us that there are winters because a volcano stopped?” Ser Garlan asked, clearly unbelieving.

“He’s telling the truth,” Bran Stark said. “You only need to look at a map to understand it.”

“To look at a map?”

“Aye. The map shows the position of most volcanos in Westeros, those that Bran the Builder protected.”

Daenerys looked at the map of her country on the large table. There were mountains, but none were indicated to be volcanos. In fact, she didn’t see any since she arrived on the mainland. Dragonstone was the only place where she saw volcanos. Her ancestors live in a city surrounded by them, but she never saw any in her whole life until recently. Cities in Essos were built far from them, in fear of meeting a similar fate to that of the Valyrians, and Dothrakis avoided them as well.

Daenerys blinked while staring at the map. The most visible items were the names of the kingdoms, the roads, and the castles. Then she recalled something from tales she read a long time ago. It was in the histories and songs that Sr Jorah gave her for her wedding. The tales were about the construction of the great castles of Westeros. For each castle, there was one name that always came back.

“The castles. Bran the Builder built them.” She turned to the boy in the wheelchair. “Why did he truly build them?”

“To protect something,” he replied. She turned to Revan.

“You said that the North would be lost if we lost Winterfell, and you also said that the Dreadfort shouldn’t fall at all cost. You knew that.”
“There are many things that are known in certain circles of the Red Priests, and that are ignored by most people, especially those who believe they know the truth,” the priest said.

“What’s that all about?” Jon Snow asked.

“Every story about the construction of a great castle of this country involves Bran the Builder. He didn’t only build the Wall, but also Winterfell, Storm’s End, Highgarden, Casterly Rock.”

“These castles were not built to welcome wealthy and powerful families,” Revan continued. “They were built to protect something. Something Bran the Builder couldn’t afford to let fall in the hands of the Others.”

“Wait a minute,” Ser Garlan interrupted. “Are you telling us that Highgarden is built upon a volcano? That’s impossible.”

“The volcano is dormant, but it’s there.”

“You’re going to believe a man in red robes, your Grace?” Lord Glover asked his king. “They are fools who sing in front of a fire and burn children alive.”

“These fools saved your lives, Lord Glover, and they’re helping you to take back your lands,” Daenerys objected. “You will show them a minimum of respect, especially to those who didn’t burn people alive.”

Lord Glover seemed about to reply, but a look from Jon Snow stopped him. The former King in the North spoke. “Listen. I’m not sure if we can trust the Red Priests, but I trust my brother. If there’s a place where we can destroy the White Walkers for good, then we must go there. The First Men and the Children of the Forest fought the White Walkers together, and they built the Wall in order to protect us, but it wasn’t enough. They came back. If there’s a way to prevent them from ever returning, then we must take it.”

“I don’t know for you, Jon Snow, but this place is very far in the North,” Malcolm Branfield said. He looked at his queen. “Please forgive me, your Grace, but our army is not ready for such a march. Even if we go directly to the place Brandon Stark indicates, we will need one month to reach it, and that would be in the best conditions. We don’t know the territory, and the Dothrakis and knights from the southern kingdoms are not ready to face such a hard weather. We may need three months to reach our destination from the Wall, and as much time if not more to come back. Most of our army will not make it. The Northerners and the wildlings would have a better chance, but there are not enough left. Not to mention we still have to take the Wall back and to cleanse the North from all the wights that still infest it. I don’t believe an expedition is feasible.”

“Nor is it desirable,” Revan added. “I agree with Malcolm. An army will never make it to the sacred site. Anyway, by the time we send the men north of the Wall, the Others will have regrouped at this place, and they will be ready to protect it. No army will have a chance to win. Dragons, however…” Daenerys felt the gaze of the Red Priest through his mask. “The two of them can carry about fifteen people. With their dragonfire, if you left right now, you could end this.”

“Leave now? Abandon the army?” Ser Garlan said, unbelieving.

“Right now, the Others and their servants are fleeing, retreating, but most of them are still south of the Wall. Winterfell and the Dreadfort are secured. They can’t take them now. Daenerys Targaryen and Jon Snow could head north with the dragons and a few men. The sacred site is undefended. But if we wait until the whole North is free, it will be too late. The enemy’s forces will have gathered there, and it will be impossible to destroy it, and all you’ve done to defeat the dead will have been for
nothing."

Jon Snow was lost in his thoughts. He looked at Brandon. “Bran, what do you think of it?”

The boy didn’t answer immediately, but when he did, his voice was full of gravity. “Destroying this place is the only way to stop the White Walkers forever. If you let them go back there, they will come back, maybe not before another eight thousand years, but they will come back.”

“And this… place… is undefended right now? It’s vulnerable?”

“Aye, but it won’t be for long. Revan is right. It must be destroyed, before it’s too late.”

Brandon Stark and Revan exchanged nods. Jon Snow looked at the map, then turned to face Daenerys. “How much time would your dragons need to bring us there?”

“I would say two weeks, at most,” she answered.

He looked back at the map, pondering. “Aye. Let’s do it.”

“Your Grace…” the young Lyanna Mormont began.

“Lady Lyanna, I understand your concerns, but we have a chance to end things with the dead in a definitive way, and we can’t let it slip.”

“We need the dragons to fight the dead,” Garlan Hightower argued. “What’s telling us the dead will not come back into force once the dragons are gone? Let’s send only one, and the second can stay here. Or bring the third back.”

“Drogon and Rhaegal obey me, they will go wherever I go,” Daenerys declared. “As for Viserion, he is needed somewhere else. If my dragons are going north, they both go, and they go with me. However, we will need a second rider for Rhaegal if he is to accept anymore people on his back.”

She stared at Jon, a half-smile on her smile. She saw that his nephew understood what she implied.

“Your Grace, don’t do it, it’s a folly,” Lord Glover told Jon Snow.

“You have dragonblood. You can ride one. I think it would fitting that you ride Rhaegal. He was named after your father,” she said.

“What makes you believe he will accept me?” Jon asked.

“I don’t know. I just believe he will.”

“Your Grace, this is a trap,” Glover warned.

“Why would that be a trap?” she asked, beginning to feel unnerved.

“I don’t know. Maybe for your beast to bring him high in the sky and then drop him, so you can get rid of our king.”

“He’s no longer your king, Lord Glover. He bent the knee, have you forgotten?”

“No, I didn’t forget.” He cast a dark glance at Jon Snow.

“Lord Robett Glover, since I arrived in the North, all I’ve done is to help your people free their lands from the White Walkers. Have I given you a single reason to doubt my intentions?”
“It seems you forget quickly, like your father. You slaughtered Northerners at Moat Cailin.”

Once again, this came to bite her. “I regret what happened.”

“Regret? Aye. As much as the Mad King regretted murdering Lord Stark and his son, I guess.”

“I find it odd that a man so prone to judge my house accepted help from the Boltons and even sided with them, after the Red Wedding.”

“We never sided with them!”

“You refused to fight them. You accepted them as your Wardens of the North. You supported usurpers. You’re lucky that Jon Snow spared you, for your king would have been in his right to execute you for treason.”

“Enough! We already have a common enemy to fight. We have no time for this,” Jon Snow roared. “I’ll try to ride your dragon, if this can help to defeat the White Walkers that are left. The discussion is over. We will leave as soon as possible.”

People began to leave the room. Malcolm Branfield accompanied his niece-in-law, an arm around her shoulders. The Lady of Highpoint didn’t say a word during the whole reunion. Daenerys had spoken with her briefly when they arrived. She had lost all her family and now her husband was dead too. Her only brother who was still alive was at the Citadel. She managed to remain strong, but Daenerys could see that she was grieving. She had shared her personal experience from her time after the death of her own husband with the lady, and she had seemed grateful.

Daenerys and Jon Snow walked to the courtyard. Her dragons were outside the gates. Her nephew asked her a question.

“Do you really trust me to ride one of your dragons?”

“Since we met, you’ve done everything you could to make the northern lords obey me. I think that’s the least I can do. If I can’t trust anybody in the North, I will never be able to rule it justly. Better to begin with my own blood.”

Truth be told, Daenerys wasn’t certain if she was making the right choice by allowing Jon Snow to take his chance with Rhaegal. However, the visions that both Bran Stark and Revan showed her always proved to be true. She was the queen of all the Seven Kingdoms, the Protector of the Realm. She had a duty to protect her people not only now, but also in the future, long after she was dead. If destroying the place of origin of the White Walkers meant they would never return, then it was her duty as a queen to destroy it, and they couldn’t go there with only one rider.

“Thank you,” he replied. “But I’m not sure I will succeed. I know nothing about dragons.”

“I didn’t know how to ride one before I climbed on Drogon’s back, but that didn’t stop me from riding him.”

“What if I fail?”

“Let’s hope you won’t. You can still refuse to try, but then we will only be able to bring half a dozen people with us.”

“No, I’ll try. I’m just uncertain of the results.”

“You have it in your blood. You will succeed,” she insisted.
Daenerys wasn’t in fact that certain he would succeed, but she believed he would. She had seen him approaching Drogon one day. Her child had allowed him to approach without problems. To her, that was the proof that Jon Snow was indeed her nephew. The vision Brandon Stark gave her was another proof.

“Did you spend all your childhood in Winterfell?” she asked.

She tried to know him better during the last few weeks, but her nephew was quite gloomy and didn’t talk much. He also seemed to be avoiding her, though he did everything to support her in front of the Northerners and to make them accept her as their new queen.

“Aye, quite most of it. For me, it’s always been my home.”

“Lord Stark really never told you who you were? You always believed he was your father?”

“Aye.”

“And he never talked to you about your mother?”

“Never.”

The silence lingered between them. He was indeed not easy to talk with.

“When I left Winterfell, when I went to the Wall and joined the Night’s Watch, he told me that the next time we’d meet, we would talk about my mother. But we never met again.”

“I’m sorry. Eddard Stark took part to the rebellion that slaughtered my family, but I know he’s also the only one who tried to stop Robert from sending assassins against me.”

“My father didn’t take any part to your family’s slaughter.” His tone had climbed. Daenerys forced herself to not go down this path.

“I mean that he was part of a rebellion that ended with the death of most of my family,” she said, as calm as she could.

“Your father had his father and brother burned alive.”

“My father was a cruel man. I know what he did, and I know the Mad King earned his name. But don’t forget that he was also your grandfather. I hope you don’t judge me on my father’s actions, for I don’t judge you on yours.”

“I apologize. I didn’t mean to be rude. You helped us, your Grace. Without you, Winterfell would have fallen, and what’s left of my family would be dead. It’s just… difficult right now. All my life, I was Jon Snow, and I dreamed of being Jon Stark one day, and now I learn that my real name is Aegon Sand, or Aegon Snow, I don’t know anymore. And I learn at the same time that my grandfather murdered my uncle and my other grandfather, and that my two families fought and killed each other. Do you have any idea how it is?”

“No, I don’t,” she recognized after some time. “I knew who I was from the very beginning, and I’ve always known who I was, but it’s only recently that I’ve understood what it meant.”

“What did it mean?”

“That it was my duty to protect my people. I am their rightful queen. If I don’t protect them, who will?”
“Your father and my grandfather didn’t seem eager to protect them, even though he was king.”

“No, he wasn’t. No more than my brother Viserys. My father was a horrible king, and my brother would have been a horrible king as well.”

“What happened to him?”

“He threatened to cut out my baby when I still carried it, so my husband poured a crown of molten gold on his head,” she said on an impassive voice. Her nephew seemed troubled.

“I can see you had a wonderful family.”

“Was yours better?”

“None of my brothers and sisters tried to kill me, if that’s what you’re asking. Lord Stark treated me like his son, but he was careful to not spend too much time with me. Lady Stark was colder towards me, and Sansa called me half-brother and bastard as soon as she knew who I was, but things could have been far worse.”

“Sansa Lannister? Lord Tyrion’s wife?”

“Aye. Things have been better with her, recently.”

“Good to hear. Sometimes, Viserys would welcome me at night and talk to me about our homeland, but mostly, he vented his frustration of not being king on me, because I was the only one he could blame for that. I wish I had known my brother Rhaegar. Everyone said he was a good man.”

“That didn’t stop him from fleeing with my mother and starting a war.”

“Still, I would have liked to know him.”

Just like she would like to know his son, but for now, the task remained quite hard. They arrived in the courtyard and walked through the gates. As they approached her dragons in her camp, she noticed how uncertain her nephew looked.

“Don’t be afraid. They won’t hurt you. They didn’t hurt Tyrion Lannister, so I doubt they will hurt you.”

Her nephew shook his head. “How did Tyrion manage to mount one?”

“I don’t know,” Daenerys genuinely replied. “He claims he has no dragonblood, but I don’t see how else he could have done it. Do you know if there has ever been a marriage between a Lannister and a Targaryen in the past?” she asked him. Lord Tyrion told her there had never been one, but she doubted it.

“Not that I know of, but I didn’t spend my life studying the lineages of the families of Westeros. Why did you allow him to ride Viserion?”

“I’m not sure. I trust him.”

“A Lannister?”

“He proved his loyalty more than once.”

“Including at Moat Cailin?”
Daenerys pressed her lips together. The word had gone out quickly, despite their attempts to silence it. “It wasn’t what I wished for, Jon Snow, but if your men in the Neck had slowed us down, I wouldn’t have been there to save you at Winterfell.”

They stopped before the green dragon. “Rhaegal, named for my valiant brother who died on the green banks of the Trident, and who I never got to know,” she said. “Named after your father, Jon Snow.”

Her nephew looked afraid. Rhaegal was staring at him with intensity. Drogon, not far away, was also staring aggressively. “It’s ironic. With the way you described your brother, I wouldn’t have expected that Viserion would be the calmer of the three.” He didn’t stop looking at Rhaegal a single moment as he spoke.

“Viserys was cruel, weak and frightened, yet he was my brother still. When I gave his name to Viserion, I wanted my dragon to do what my brother could not.”

“I wish he was the one I tried to approach.”

“Get closer.”

Her nephew made one step towards Rhaegal, then another, and another. Rhaegal kept eyeing him, but he didn’t make any attempt against Jon. He only remained careful, very careful. And so was the man approaching him. When Jon Snow was close enough, he brought his hand to the muzzle. After a few seconds, Rhaegal calmed down.

“See? You have it in your blood. He will let you climb him.”

The former King in the North looked at her, still unsure, then he slowly got around the wings and carefully mounted her child. Daenerys then stepped aside and gave the word in Valyrian. Rhaegal flew in the sky.

She watched her nephew on the back of the dragon bearing his father’s name for quite some time. He seemed to be doing fine. A smile came to her lips. For the first time in a very long time, she didn’t feel alone in this world.

“It seems there’s a second head to the dragon.”

Daenerys knew this voice, and her thoughts turned darker all of a sudden. Melisandre was standing not far from her. Revan and two other Red Priestesses were at her side. She knew now what this woman did to the daughter of Stannis Baratheon. Red Priests weren’t as helpful as she initially thought they would be. Melisandre looked down when she realized Daenerys was staring at her and walked away. Revan approached her in the mean time, the two other priestesses remaining behind.

“I suggest you bring people who know the Others, your Grace, and skilled warriors too. It would also be better that they carry weapons that can destroy Others and their servants,” he told her.

“That makes you part of them,” she replied.

“I spent my life preparing for this moment, your Grace. If I die there, it wouldn’t bother me, for I would have fulfilled my duty.”

“I would prefer it if you lived, Revan. You are a valuable advisor.”

“A valuable advisor in times of war, your Grace. When peace comes back, you’ll need other people at your side. But for now, all that matters is to do what men should have done thousands of years ago.”
“Revan, tell me, the Children of the Forest created the White Walkers. They knew where they came from. They knew how to destroy them, didn’t they?”

“They knew, your Grace. The Three-Eyed Raven has all the knowledge of the Children. Brandon Stark took his information from them.”

“Why didn’t they destroy this place back then?”

“They should have,” Revan replied after a moment. “But they didn’t. That was their greatest mistake, but they are not the only ones to blame for that.”

“What do you mean?”

“I told you about the origin of my order. Azor Ahai created it and fought the servants of the Great Other. However, his servants were defeated in Essos much sooner than in Westeros. In the west, the battle was far more difficult. The Others were stronger, and there were more of them than in the east. When the war was over in Essos and the ice receded in the Shivering Sea, Azor Ahai left Essos. He sailed for Westeros and fought alongside the First Men against the Others. And just like in Essos, they finally retreated. But Azor Ahai didn’t finish what he began. Instead, he went back home.”

“Why?”

“No one knows exactly the reasons that motivated his choice. Some say he saw a bigger threat in the east, others believe he wrongly assumed the enemy was defeated, some say he missed his home. We don’t know for sure. What we know for sure is that he could have ended it, if he had wanted. He could have destroyed the Others forever, but he didn’t. Instead, the First Men and the Children were left alone, too weak to destroy the Others on their own. Instead, they did what they could to preserve what they had left. They built the Wall, and castles where the volcanos were, to protect them from the servants of evil. They did well. They kept the Others away for thousands of years, but they couldn’t keep them away forever. And today, millions of people pay the price for the mistake of one single man, not to mention all those people who died because of the hundreds of winters that happened in Westeros during these last eight thousand years.” He looked at Daenerys. “Don’t make the same mistake, Daenerys Targaryen. You and Jon Snow can defeat the dead for good. Finish what men began eight thousand years ago. You have dragons. They had none.”

He walked away. Daenerys looked back at the skies where her nephew was learning to fly. She thought about her third child, the one she sent with Tyrion to the Vale. When she would come back from their expedition in the North, Daenerys hoped that her Hand would bring her news that the Vale was hers. She also hoped that Tyrion would find his wife and his daughter. According to him, it was in the interest of the Vale lords that nothing had befallen them, or else a certain girl would poke some of them full of holes. That was, if he didn’t kill them first.

Chapter End Notes

So, I came up with this idea of volcanos regulating the weather in Westeros quite late after I started writing. I don’t know what you think of it, but I felt somehow White Walkers and winters couldn’t only be explained by magic, but also with science, since both are present in Game of Thrones. And to quote Arthur C. Clarke, magic is just science we don’t understand yet.
Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
Tyrion XXXIV

Chapter Notes

Tyrion back in the Vale, though not as a prisoner this time.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

TYRION XXXIV

The Gates of the Moon stood tall, though not very tall. It was a small castle by many standards, especially for a lord paramount and a warden, and even more so for kings. That was why Roland Arryn the First, fourth king of the Vale, had decided to build the Eyrie, in order to compare to Casterly Rock and the Hightower. Ironically, the Eyrie remained the smallest of the great castles of Westeros to belong to a paramount family. It was even smaller than the Gates of the Moon, and the Arryns could only live in the Eyrie during summer. When winter came, they had to transfer their family and their court to the Gates of the Moon. The Eyrie might be said to be impregnable, but to the opposite of Casterly Rock, the Hightower, Highgarden, and even Winterfell, it wasn’t a very pleasant place to live.

Tyrion had horrible memories of his days in the Eyrie. Now the castle was empty and the Gates of the Moon were the centre of the Vale of Arryn. The Eyrie was nothing more than an empty castle. A beautiful castle, indeed, but empty still. The Eyrie didn’t matter now. Only the Gates of the Moon mattered.

“You’ve been here for quite some time, haven’t you Grey Worm?” Tyrion asked to the tall Unsullied commander standing straight like a column next to him.

“We have not managed to take the castle yet. Too well defended,” he replied.

“Not many castles in Essos, isn’t it?” Tyrion tried to say in High Valyrian. Grey Worm looked at him with puzzled stare. He supposed his Valyrian was a little rusty.

“Unsullied will do what is necessary, but too many will die taking this castle.”

“I agree. The Gates of the Moon were made to withstand any assault. Even men who do not fear death will have a hard time taking it. We cannot walk around it. This is the entrance to the Vale. No one enters the Vale or leaves it without passing by the Gates of the Moon.”

The truth was, you couldn’t travel through the Vale and ignore a castle on your way. The Vale was a fertile valley surrounded by the Mountains of the Moon. The Gates of the Moon and the Eyrie guarded the entrance to the valley by the Eastern road, the only safe point of passage through the mountains, and safe was a relative statement. The hill tribes attacked everyone wandering on the road. The Unsullied had a hard time with them on their way. Tyrion wondered if Shagga or Timett was behind some of these attacks. Either way, the fact remained they had to take the Gates of the Moon if they were to proceed through the Vale.

“How many assaults did you lead against them?” Tyrion asked.

“Two, each was a failure.”
“Well, now things are different. We have a dragon with us.”

“Do you think Sansa could be here?”

The girl who asked the question was standing to Tyrion’s right while Grey Worm stood at his left. Arya Stark looked impatiently to the castle. She had arrived yesterday along with Tyrion. They travelled together on Viserion’s back. They both had the same objective, to save Sansa.

“The Gates of the Moon are the seat of House Arryn during winters, so yes, she may be here. That’s why we cannot just burn the castle to the ground. If Sansa is inside, then she would die with everyone else. And for the time being, it would be better to keep the castle intact. It can still be useful.”

“So, what do we do?”

“The Keeper of the Gates of the Moon is a certain Nestor Royce, if I recall?”

“Aye, that’s him.”

“Well, I suppose we need a little talk with Lord Nestor. I hope his conversation proves to be better than yours with Yohn Royce. Grey Worm, send a man to ask a parley with Nestor Royce. Tell him the Hand of the Queen wants to speak with him.”

Grey Worm left to perform the order. He executed every order Tyrion gave him without question. These Unsullied were indeed very efficient. Too bad the soldiers of Westeros weren’t as reliable. His father might have mocked the Free Cities for hiring sellsword companies to fight for them, but you had to give at least one thing to Astapor, their Unsullied were by far very superior to any army in Westeros.

“What if she’s here?” Arya asked.

“We find a way to free her. Royce probably doesn’t know I’m here, but he knows we have a dragon now. It might play in our favor. I don’t believe he wants the Gates of the Moon to turn into the Gates of the Ashes. Fear might be enough.”

“And if she’s not here?”

“Then Royce would be better to surrender because I won’t waste time here. If need be, I will burn the Gates of the Moon, as much as I would like to avoid it.”

Tyrion turned away and walked back to his personal tent. His sister-in-law followed him. “If Sansa isn’t here, then where do you think she could be?”

“I have no more idea about this than you, Arya. Sansa could be anywhere in the Vale. She might even not be there, but this is our best chance. She was kidnapped by lords from the Vale, so she is likely somewhere here. We may get some answers from Nestor Royce.”

Nestor Royce better had some answers for them, indeed. Tyrion had no idea of where his wife and his daughter were, and for the first time he was ready to do everything to reach an objective. If finding and rescuing the two people he loved the most in this world meant burning whole castles, he would do it. He wouldn’t do it until it was necessary, but he wouldn’t back down.

“I don’t know Nestor Royce,” Arya said. “I met Lord Yohn at the Eyrie after aunt Lysa died, but I never met Nestor Royce. What are his ties with Yohn Royce?”
“From what I know, he is the leader of a cadet branch of House Royce. They have no lands and no castles, nothing that belong to them in their own right.”

“What about he Gates of the Moon? Doesn’t it belong to them?”

“No, the Gates belong to House Arryn, just like the Eyrie. In fact, Nestor Royce is not really a lord. His true title is Keeper of the Gates of the Moon. This is a title bestowed by the Lord of the Eyrie to a man he trusts to keep and manage the Gates of the Moon and its territories in his name when he resides at the Eyrie in the summer. But once winter comes, the Lord of House Arryn moves to live at the Gates of the Moon. The Keeper only keeps the castle for Lord Arryn. He is named by him and can be removed at any moment, though I don’t think it often happened. Through history, the Arryns had a tendency to choose people of their own family to act as the Keeper, but Lysa Arryn seems to have broken the tradition. Not that she had too much choice.”

“Aye, true. There were no other Arryn apart from her son, and Robin Arryn was small, frail and sick. He could never run a castle.”

“From what I’ve seen of this boy, I’m not sure he could ever do anything.”

“I agree.”

For some time, they only walked. Arya Stark was taller than him, which was no surprise. Even Tommen was taller than him the last time he saw him. Tyrion thought with sorrow about his deceased nephew. He and Arya had the same desire to save Sansa. It was strange how the dwarf she was married to by force and the sister she kept fighting with now teamed up to find her.

“Was she able to run it?” his sister-in-law asked.

“What?”

“Casterly Rock. Could Sansa run it? Because at Winterfell she was horrible with sums and figures. I couldn’t see how she would be able to run the Red Keep for Joffrey.”

Tyrion smiled. “Well, the Rock had been run without a lady for more than thirty years before Sansa came, so the place didn’t have to fear much. She had a lot of help. And Creylen gave her lessons,” he added with a wink.

Arya laughed. “When we find her, I’ll be sure to remind her of it all the time.”

“Don’t tell her it’s me who told you about it. She could kill me for that.”

That was if they could find her. They would need some answers from Nestor Royce.

“You came here before the war, didn’t you?”

“Yes,” he answered. “Your aunt offered me the hospitality of the Vale, and I think you know by experience how welcoming she and her son were.”

“Aye. I know what the sky cells are.”

“I wonder if your mother would have been so quick to trust her sister with me if she had known that Lysa Arryn would throw her daughter into a similar cell to mine later.”

She looked at him. “I’m sorry. She was wrong to arrest you.”

Tyrion shook his head. “She wanted to protect her children. She was looking for the person who
tried to kill her son, and Littlefinger gave her someone, just not the right person. Your mother was a strong and proud woman, fierce and dangerous when she wanted to protect her family. I cannot claim that I loved her, after all I spent time freezing in a sky cell because of her, but I admired her. I can see some of her through Sansa, and through you too. Sansa may have your mother’s looks, but you are as dangerous as she was.”

That got him a smile from Arya Stark. She didn’t smile very often. He let her go to train while he went back to his tent and studied maps. After pouring himself some wine, he sat and stared again at a map of the entire Vale. The Eastern Road ended at the Bloody Gate, the last point of access before the Eyrie. Before they reached the Bloody Gate however, they had to take the Gates of the Moon. Once they had gone through both gates, there were several minor roads built at the time of the Kings of Mountain and Vale, back when the Arryns were kings just like the Lannisters or the Starks. They could use these roads to easily travel through the Vale. Because of the limited size of their army, Tyrion couldn’t split their forces without taking a huge risk that Harrold Arryn could come upon one and destroy it. The best course of action would be to march on the region of Runestone and Gulltown. The castle and the harbor were vital for the Vale, for their symbolic and economic value. Taking it would cut off the legs of House Arryn, depriving them of their main harbor and one of their most powerful bannerman. It would force Harrold Arryn to fight fifteen thousand Dothrakis and Unsullied, plus one dragon. One victory in open field could be enough to make House Arryn crumble into dust. The Arryns might have held the Vale for a very long time but seeing them unable to defend the Vale would turn some of their bannermen against them.

That was what they had to do. They had to force Harrold Arryn to meet them in the field. Threatening the most vital part of his kingdom was the best way to get him to face them. Anyway, Tyrion suspected that the young lord wouldn’t be able to resist the temptation to fight them by following the rules of chivalry. They just had to get through these bloody gates.

Sadly, this was easier to say than to do. Tyrion could understand that the Unsullied and the Dothrakis failed to take the Gates of the Moon. Dothrakis were not used or trained for sieges, and even though he had no doubt the Unsullied could do very well in that kind of battle, they had the disadvantage to fight during winter, something they weren’t used to while the Knights of the Vale were. And the Gates of the Moon were truly impregnable. The castle was in enemy territory, built to resist against the attacks of the hill tribes and to launch attacks against the hill tribes too. No wonder the Vale was never taken by exterior forces between the invasion of the Andals and Aegon’s Conquest.

An Unsullied walked towards them. “Nestor Royce is willing to discuss with you.”

Two hours later, as the sun was falling on the horizon, Tyrion stood on his horse, with Arya, Grey Worm and a Dothraki commander whose name he didn’t remember, facing Nestor Royce and two knights accompanying him.

“You were told wrong,” he replied. “I am alive, and now Hand of the Queen for Daenerys Targaryen. There’s a lot of that kind of things that happened recently. Look at Arya Stark right here. Everyone believed she was dead, and yet she’s here, alive and well. Believe me, I know how you feel right now. I almost thought she was dead me too.”

Nestor Royce eyed Arya carefully. “Apparently it was you who killed Lady Arryn.”

“Aye,” she said. “After she tried to kill me.”

“Lord Royce, I’m afraid the Knights of the Vale are no longer as high as honor. Some attacked me and my men on the road to Winterfell. They left me for dead but I was saved by an unexpected and
quite appreciated help. However, they kidnapped my wife and my daughter in the process, and I have good reasons to believe they are in the Vale, for I do not see where else they could be. So if you have any information regarding Sansa Stark and Joanna Lannister, I would appreciate that you share it with us,” Tyrion said.

Nestor Royce’s expression changed a few times as Tyrion talked, but when he answered he displayed the usual pride the Knights of the Vale felt entitled to. “Your version of this story is quite different from the one I heard, my lord, for according to Lord Arryn the Lannisters tried to betray their allies and to seize the North for themselves. Lord Arryn and his men stopped you from doing so and saved the Lady Sansa and her child before your own men tried to kill them.”

“I see the Arryns are better at lying than I thought.”

“Lannisters are pretty good liars too. You are men without honor,” Royce spat.

“Now, now. Let’s calm down. Lord Harrold Arryn told you I was dead, Lord Royce. And yet here I am. If he lied about this, what’s telling he didn’t lie about the rest?”

He saw doubts in the man’s eyes for a second, but it was quickly gone. “Lord Arryn is an honorable man, Imp. He would never lie. I’m sad he believed wrongly you were dead, for he intends to marry the Lady Sansa.”

A stunned silence followed. Tyrion felt a mix of boiling anger and cold fear in his guts. “What did you say?”

“You heard me, Imp. Lord Arryn is going to marry her and to take care of her child.”

“Tell me where she is,” Tyrion slowly said, making sure that his voice carried the threat he was ready to execute.

“Runestone. That’s where the wedding is taking place.”

Tyrion’s hands gripped the reins of his horse. “Surrender immediately, Royce, or I swear I will burn the Gates of the Moon to the ground until even Harrenhal looks shining and newly made compared to it.”

“Your threats are not frightening me, Imp.”

“They should. We have a dragon. If you didn’t see it, I’m sure your sentries did. I won’t hesitate to use it. Yield the Gates, bend the knee and proclaim Daenerys Targaryen as your true queen, or I will make sure you regret working for Harrold Arryn.”

“I will never bend the knee before a Targaryen.”

“Then in this case, you leave me no choice. The Gates of the Moon will be mine by tomorrow, or at least what’s left of them.”

As if to emphasize his saying, a great roar came from their camp, where Viserion was. Nestor Royce looked uneasy, but it didn’t prevent him from standing on his position. “I will guard my family’s castle. You will never have it.”

“It’s not your castle, Royce. It belongs to the Arryns, and you will die fighting for something that is not yours, and for a man who forces a woman to marry him when she’s already married. I expected more from a man who descends from the people who brought the Faith of the Seven in Westeros.”
The Keeper of the Gates looked furious. He had his horse turn away and rode towards the castle he would uselessly die defending. Tyrion and the others rode back to their camp as well. He went to see Viserion. The dragon was very quiet when compared to his brothers. He looked even calmer when Tyrion was around.

“Well, my boy,” he said when he was close enough.

He didn’t know if it was accurate to call him boy. Maesters debated for a very long time, without reaching a consensus, as to whether dragons were males or females, or both. If there were male and female dragons, no way was found yet to distinguish them. So Tyrion didn’t know if Viserion was a male dragon, but since he was called after Daenerys’s brother, it seemed appropriate for him to call him that way. Viserion didn’t seem to be bothered by it.

“You may have work to do before tomorrow. They know we will come, so be careful. You’re powerful, but not invincible, and I’m not sure this time we will have a Red Priestess to bring us back to life if we’re shut in the skies.”

“You’re really planning to burn it to the ground?” Arya Stark had followed him.

“Why, you don’t agree?”

“No. In fact, I think you’re right. It’s the only way forward. Sansa is somewhere in the Vale, and I’m not going to let someone marry her against her will.”

“I’m lucky you were not in King’s Landing during our wedding.” He turned his attention back to Viserion. He remained quiet. Arya’s presence didn’t seem to bother him.

“How can you ride him?”

“I don’t know,” he lied.

“Do you think Jon could ride one of them?”

“Maybe, if the queen allows him.”

“But, I mean, he’s a Targaryen. He can fly one. When Aegon came to Westeros, he was riding Balerion, and his sisters Visenya and Rhaenys had their own dragon, Vhagar and Meraxes. So he must be able to ride one.”

“Surely, but there’s a lot to dragonlore we don’t understand yet and that we may never understand. Not all Targaryens were dragonriders, and not all dragonriders were Targaryens.”

“I’d like it though, if Jon could ride one.”

“It wouldn’t bother me much, I have to admit it. He would certainly make a better use of a dragon than most people.”

“He could almost do everything with one.”

“Be careful, Arya. Things don’t always end well for dragonriders. Rhaenys and Meraxes died when Meraxes received a scorpion bolt through the eye. Dragons are powerful, but not invincible. They can be killed.”

He hoped this would not happen.

“Make sure you don’t die. When I find her, I don’t want to tell Sansa that her husband died. She
would never forgive me.”

Arya left him and he spent some more time with Viserion. He felt a strong bond between him and the dragon. He wondered how the beast managed to know where he was and to find him at the right moment. This couldn’t be a coincidence. The likeliness of such an event happening was too small for it to be a coincidence. Something brought Viserion to him and made the dragon save him. Tyrion didn’t know what it was, and for once, he didn’t think he cared to know why. He had dreamed to have a dragon for a long time, and now he had one. He wouldn’t complain about it. What bothered him the most were his origins, now that he knew them.

It was still difficult to cope with the fact that he was the son of Joanna Lannister and Aerys Targaryen. He hadn’t dared to tell anyone yet. The queen didn’t know one of her dragons was being ridden by her half-brother, and Jon Snow didn’t know that Tyrion was his half-uncle. He wondered how the maesters would manage to arrange their family trees.

It was strange, but he had felt a bond with Jon Snow and Daenerys Targaryen the moment he met both of them. Did he manage to get along with them because they shared the same blood? Tyrion doubted it. He never managed to get along with Cersei, despite the fact they had the same mother. Perhaps Jon Snow and Daenerys Targaryen were simply kinder than Cersei ever was to him. The three of them were somehow strangers, people who were cast aside by the world, one because he was a bastard, the other because she was an exile, and the last because he was a dwarf. And yet today here they were, the queen of the Seven Kingdoms, her Hand and Lord of Casterly Rock, and the King in the North. They had gone a long way.

Tyrion looked through the space between tents towards the Gates of the Moon, whose towers could be seen from where he stood. He thought about the ruins of Harrenhal and that he had no wish to do the same as Aegon, but then he remembered Sansa, held prisoner somewhere past these mountains, forced into another marriage, his daughter being held prisoner as well, and then all his doubts vanished. If one burned castle, or two, or three, were the price to pay to get Sansa and Joanna back, then he would pay it, and gladly. A Lannister always pays his debts, and Harrold Arryn would know what it meant soon enough.

That night, Tyrion dreamed he was back in the Westerlands, near the Sunset Sea. There was a small cottage in front of him, an old house that threatened to fall into ruin. To every noble man in Westeros, it would look like a miserable place to live, a place that was unworthy of a rich and powerful lord. To every lord, it would look like a ruin, but not to Tyrion. This place was where some of his best memories remained buried.

He walked in. There wasn’t much inside. A table, a few cups and plates, some chairs. There was the couch, of course, and the hearth. Tyrion shivered. It was cold. Snow was falling outside. Winter had come upon the Westerlands, just like in the Vale.

“You always forgot to put wood into the fireplace. You were a lazy husband, except in bed.”

“Yes, I was.” He didn’t turn to face the origin of the voice that came from behind his back. “What kind of a husband am I?”

“The kind who loves his wife. The kind who’s ready to do everything for her,” she replied.

Tyrion scoffed. “Look at what happened to you, and now to Sansa. I couldn’t protect you, I couldn’t protect her, I couldn’t protect my daughter. I’m a dwarf. It doesn’t matter if I can ride a dragon, I cannot protect the people I love. I can’t even protect Jaime. He’s in a dungeon somewhere in King’s Landing, and he’s probably going to be killed, and there will be nothing I can do to save him.”
He looked at the fireplace, then back at the couch, to days that were gone and that would never come back. He thought about Sansa, about all the nights they spent together, her head on his shoulder or his chest, her fingers intertwined with his own. He thought about the night of her sixteenth name day, the night when they truly became man and wife. The most beautiful night of his life. He thought about the day she came back to Winterfell and showed him their little daughter. The daughter she named after his mother, the woman who died by bringing him into the world.

“She loves you, Tyrion. Don’t ever give up on her. Find her. Find them.”

Yes, Sansa loved him. Tysha may never have loved him, but Sansa did. That was the one thing he could never doubt. He closed his eyes and saw her face, her beautiful blue eyes, the long red hair, her high cheekbones. There was only one other woman he had ever found so beautiful, and he couldn’t remember how she looked like.

He opened his eyes and looked over his shoulder. She was gone. He walked outside and looked around. Far away, he saw a shape walking away.

He woke up, shaken by an Unsullied. “The Royce man wishes to speak with you.”

Tyrion stirred himself and blinked a few times. Had Nestor Royce changed his mind?

Surprisingly, Nestor Royce was found into the command tent. He rode all the way into their camp, saying he wanted to surrender. Tyrion didn’t need to wait for a very long time before the Keeper of the Gates of the Moon gave an explanation. He showed a raven’s scroll.

“I just received this. Harrold Arryn is dead. He was murdered during his wedding night. They found him lying in his own blood, a bolt shot from a crossbow in his neck. Sansa Stark disappeared, she is nowhere to be found.”

Tyrion read the message. It was just like Nestor Royce said, except for one little detail. Someone else’s body was found in the room with Lord Arryn’s body.

“I get that Littlefinger was still alive,” he said. He didn’t wait for an answer. “I guess now we know who tried to kill me and to take away my wife and my daughter.” It was too bad that Baelish wasn’t still alive. He would have liked to kill him, after he made him suffer.

“I don’t know who organized all this, my lord. I swear, I have no idea of what happened in the North.”

“Well, now you know. Littlefinger tried to kill me. I see this raven comes from Lord Vance Corbray. His men were at Winterfell when my wife disappeared, and strangely none of them were to be found afterwards.”

“Look, Imp, Lord Arryn is dead, and he had no heir. Yohn Royce is away, and there’s no one else that the Vale could rally behind. I don’t trust Corbray. He will try to seize the Vale for himself, and I don’t want that. So let’s make a deal. I kneel for your queen, I let you pass through the Gates of the Moon and make sure the mountains are free for you to travel everywhere you go. In exchange, you let me and my family live, you confirm me as Lord of the Gates of the Moon, and you deal with Corbray.”

“You want to be Lord of the Gates of the Moon? That’s a first in the history.”

“Lord Baelish gave me the title when he was still alive.” Now Tyrion understood. Nestor Royce had been loyal to Baelish because he gave him a title. “Let me keep it, and I’ll serve your queen loyally.”
“Our queen,” Tyrion specified.

“Our queen,” Nestor Royce reluctantly said.

“Nothing will happen to your family or to you, you have my word, but for the title, it will be to our queen to decide. You accept or I burn the Gates and there will be no castle left for you.”

“Alright. I accept.”

The Vale was now open to them. However, there was something else Tyrion needed.

“Now, tell me everything. Where are my wife and my children?”

“I don’t know. I swear. Corbray offers a handsome reward to whoever will find Sansa Stark. He blames her for killing Lord Arryn. He doesn’t mention her daughter. If I were you, I would find them both quickly, for when he finds them, Lord Corbray will not hesitate to kill them. He says they can be brought to him alive or dead.”

Chapter End Notes

As we are nearing the very end of the story, I wanted to explore the kind of relationship Tyrion might have with Arya as his sister-in-law. Safe for the brief discussion they had after Arya unwillingly almost killed her sister, they didn’t interact much, but Sansa’s disappearance gives them an opportunity to get closer as they now share a common goal, and to know each other a little better.

Please review

Next chapter : Trystane
And now we see how Trystane and Margaery fare in King's Landing. As you will see, the city is a mess, like always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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He never thought he would see this during his life. A map of King’s Landing, with pieces indicating armies positioned everywhere. Stags, roses, suns pierced by a spear and portcullis occupied strategic position all around the city. The capital of the Seven Kingdoms had turned into a warzone.

King’s Landing was a roughly square-shaped city, encircled by walls, with the Blackwater Rush at the east and the Blackwater Bay at the north. Seven roads made their junction here, and seven gates built into its walls opened the city to these roads. Three hills overlooked the city. Aegon’s Hill, also named Aegon’s High Hill, was home to the Red Keep. The Great Sept of Baelor once stood upon Visenya’s Hill, and Rhaenys’s Hill was topped by the Dragonpit. Of the three structures, only the Red Keep remained intact, the Sept and the Dragonpit now lying in ruins.

“It should have worked,” Mace Tyrell said.

“Well, it didn’t,” said Trystane, allowing the exasperation to pierce his voice. “You said you could take Rhaenys’s Hill, and you didn’t. Quite the opposite, in fact. How many men have you lost?”

The Lord of Highgarden stammered. “Hundreds.”

“Hundreds? Can’t you be more specific?”

“We are still counting…”

“How many?” Trystane asked again, his temper flaring.

“Between five hundred and one thousand men, my prince,” he reluctantly recognized.

Trystane looked over the map. Roses, stags and suns occupied Aegon’s Hill and Visenya’s Hill. After the chaos that followed Tyene’s trial, the city had quickly been divided in two sides. The first side was being led by Trystane and Lord Tyrell. They had under their orders all the Tyrell forces, the Dornishmen who remained loyal to Trystane, a few troops from the Stormlands and the City Watch, almost ten thousand men. The rebels, or the Dornish rebels as most of the people of King’s Landing had come to call them, were composed of the Dornish troops under the command of the lords who turned against Trystane after his cousins’ death. They were led by Anders Yronwood who commanded nearly eight thousand men and controlled Rhaenys’s Hill. Their positions on the map were represented by portcullis, the symbol on House Yronwood’s banner. The portcullis on Rhaenys’s Hill showed who held that position on the map. Trystane and Lord Tyrell’s men also controlled other key points of the city, including four gates, the harbor, and Fishmonger’s and Cobbler’s Squares. Yronwood held the Dragon Gate, the Iron Gate and the Old Gate.

Trystane seized a rose piece on the map and threw it on the floor in anger. “One thousand men, lost
“I couldn’t know these savages would take us from the back,” Lord Tyrell said.

“Well, they did.” Trystane moved a portcullis from Rhaenys’s Hill and placed it on Flea Bottom. “I warned you. This is not a plain. This is a city. Men can hide everywhere to ambush you. You cannot fight like it was a common battlefield.”

“A decisive assault without drawback was our only chance…”

“For what? For a disaster? For an humiliating defeat? For a slaughter?”

They had fought for days to take control of Cobbler’s Square. This strategic point, once an important marketplace, was disputed by the loyalists and the rebels. Today, a combined assault of Trystane’s and Lord Tyrell’s men succeeded to take the Square. An hour later, the Gate of the Gods was falling too, in line with Trystane’s plan to surround Lord Yronwood’s men until they were entrapped on Rhaenys’s Hill. The next steps would be to take control of the two remaining gates, cutting the rebels from any supply lines, then starving them to death while his own men would remain well fed, helped by the stocks being kept inside the Red Keep and the provisions the Reach could send them. Taking the three remaining gates wouldn’t be an easy task, he knew it, and keeping them and all their other positions would be even more difficult, but it would be less risky and cost fewer lives than a full scale assault on Rhaenys’s Hill. Mace Tyrell decided otherwise.

After they took Cobbler’s Square, Trystane directed his men towards the Gate of the Gods, but Mace Tyrell decided to follow his army’s initial movement and to throw them against Rhaenys’s Hill, sending them into a suicidal charge along the Street of the Sisters. They didn’t meet heavy resistance until they were deep inside the hill, far from their allies positioned on Visenya’s Hill. Then they were met by a full wall of Dornish spears that stopped them in their progress. They engaged them, the spears of Dorne able to contain the Tyrells due to their raised position. In the meantime, another group of men, a mix of Dornish soldiers and criminal gangs, emerged from Flea Bottom, followed the Street of the Sisters and took the Tyrells from behind. The slaughter was general. Very few escaped. Trystane now suspected that Anders Yronwood allowed them to take Cobbler’s Square and led them into this ambush. Everything was too well prepared. He couldn’t have organized such an ambush within minutes. Trystane hadn’t found the defense lacking at the Square, far from it, but perhaps this was also part of Yronwood’s plan, to let them believe into a difficult fight followed by a general retreat and bring them to run into the trap. Well, it worked very well. They lost a thousand men, and fights had started again at Cobbler’s Square. Trystane’s officers couldn’t guarantee him they could hold the position, and without the Square they would lose the Gate of the Gods. Weeks of fight and hundreds of dead, all for nothing.

“Lord Yronwood cheated. He’s not fighting like a knight,” Lord Tyrell declared.

“Maybe because a knight couldn’t win if he fought in a city.”

Trystane knew by experience that fighting in the open field was very different from fighting in the streets of a city. The Sons of the Harpy made his life a nightmare in Meereen, and Lord Yronwood was doing the same here. Battalions kept their positions and defended them to the death. They tried to remain on the main streets, as alleys were far too dangerous. Every once in a while, men wandered in the deserted alleys of King’s Landing and never came back. Sometimes they were found slain, the throat slit, looted from their weapons and everything of value they had. Criminals, grouped together as gangs, sometimes attacked soldiers who travelled by groups of two, five or even ten men. Today, however, for the first time, these gangs had taken part to the civil war that tore the city apart. Anders Yronwood seemed to have found a way to convince them to rally his cause. Maybe he even provided them with weapons, or they may simply have used those they stole in the last few weeks.
Perhaps it was a temporary alliance and they only participated to the ambush for an opportunity to loot the dead soldiers. Men of the Reach had more riches on them than Dornishmen. In all cases, the situation was getting out of control and Trystane hardly saw how they could manage to surround Yronwood and his allies now. With the loss of a thousand men within a few hours, their numerical advantage was now reduced to nothing. They could never hope to trap the rebels on Rhaenys’s Hill now.

“Lord Yronwood sent reinforcements to Cobbler’s Square,” the Warden of the South stated, revealing something Trystane was already aware of. “To keep it, we would need reinforcements as well.”

“Reinforcements that wouldn’t be needed if you hadn’t sent your men to a certain death,” Trystane sharply retorted.

“This wasn’t my fault!”

“Then whose was it?”

They locked eyes. Mace Tyrell was furious, and Trystane was too. The man boasted about his victory at Ashford and his almost victory during the siege of Storm’s End. The truth was that Mace Tyrell had very little to see with the victory of the Tyrell forces at Ashford, which was mostly the work of the now deceased Randyll Tarly, while the siege of Storm’s End he led was a loss of time that allowed the Starks and the Lannisters to take King’s Landing and to murder his king. Dorne lost many more men than the Reach during Robert’s Rebellion and actually tried to protect their king, while the Tyrells wiped their asses before Storm’s End. Mace Tyrell was a man who taught himself as a great man, a great general, and he was neither of them. If only he acknowledged his limits as a commander, it would be easier to work with him, but instead he insisted on his own strategies, leading them to huge mistakes and catastrophes like the one that happened today.

“Do you have any suggestion to defeat Lord Yronwood, my prince?” he asked on a tone of defiance.

“And you, do you have any?” Trystane asked in return.

He never knew if Lord Tyrell had an answer or not since at this moment a young squire entered the small council room, exhausted.

“My lord, my prince, Visenya’s Hill is under attack.”

“What?” Lord Tyrell said.

“Visenya’s Hill is under attack,” the squire repeated. “They say they won’t be able to hold it.”

“Nonsense. We have a strong garrison there. We fortified the hill. If the rebels can hold Rhaenys’s Hill, then we can hold Visenya’s.”

“We can’t, my lord. Not with all our men who died today. Many are injured. And they’re attacking us with thousands of men.”

“Thousands?” Trystane asked, all surprise.

“Yes, my prince. Thousands of them.”

“Impossible! They would need to empty Rhaenys’s Hill,” Lord Tyrell interjected. “They would never do that.”
“Why wouldn’t they?” Trystane said. “They know we will not attack it again, not before some time. They can leave a small garrison there and send the bulk of their forces against us on one point with few risks. Their men are all together at one place, while ours are dispersed around the city. I suppose they took Cobbler’s Square?” he asked the squire.

“Yes, my prince. Ser Dickon is asking for reinforcements. He says if he doesn’t have assistance soon, he will be forced to abandon his position.”

Trystane pulled his hand through his hair. Cobbler’s Square had fallen. He had many detachments all over the city to keep the gates and other strategic points. He couldn’t order the companies guarding these points to go to the rescue of Visenya’s garrison. However, if Visenya’s Hill fell, the companies guarding these positions would be vulnerable, separated from the bulk of Trystane’s men, and easily cut to pieces by Yronwood and his men. He had to save Visenya’s Hill, or else he might find himself in a situation similar to that of Yronwood only a few hours ago. So he took a decision and called for a knight who was at the door.

“Send the Dornish garrison of Aegon’s Hill to Visenya’s Hill.”

“All of them, my prince?” the knight asked, all surprised.

“All of them, the whole garrison,” confirmed Trystane. The knight ran to carry out his order. Trystane indicated to the squire to leave as well, and he ran too to go back to Visenya’s Hill.

“You’re sending all your men to Visenya’s Hill?” Mace Tyrell asked.

“All those who are on Aegon’s Hill, yes. About one thousand men should be enough, and your own men here should be enough to make sure Lord Yronwood doesn’t take two hills in a row with the Red Keep along it. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have other duties to attend.”

Trystane left the small council chamber and Mace Tyrell and walked down into the depths of the Red Keep, crossing the path of several men in green armor. He paid no attention to them as he entered the dungeons. A man in a dark office, lit by a single candle, was writing at his desk when he arrived. His name was Beron, and he was the chief guardian responsible for the castle’s dungeons. He lifted is eyes to look at Trystane.

“Again?” he asked.

“Yes, again,” replied Trystane. It had been quite a few times they exchanged the same words when Trystane came down.

Beron shrugged. “As you wish, my prince.”

The chief guardian seized a set of keys that hung to the wall. As he walked out of his office, the candle still burning behind, he took a torch in the corridor. The door giving access to the dungeons was one made of thick wood, with a small window that allowed to look inside through bars made of steel. All you could see through the bars was a line of torches with cells between. If you looked well enough, you could see a wall at the end of this corridor. The guardian inserted one of the keys in the lock. He turned the key and the door unlocked. One push was enough to open the door. He entered, followed by Trystane, and locked the door again behind them. No door was ever left open or unlocked in this place.

They walked along the dark corridor. They heard people snoring, others wailing or crying. Some pleaded for help. At the end of the corridor, they turned on their left and followed a second corridor. They turned two times on their right, then another time on the left before they arrived before another
thick door. It was identical to the first one that gave access to the dungeons, only there were two locks instead of one. The guardian unlocked them and locked them both again once they were on the other side. They followed a narrow stairway that led them to the second level of the dungeon. They passed through another door with two locks before they arrived.

The first level of the dungeons was for common criminals who were placed together in common cells, some shackled and some not, some more heavily shackled that the others. The second level was made up of fewer and smaller cells, destined to highborn captives. The cells had very small windows with bars, but let little light go in. It wasn’t there that Trystane was heading, so he and Beron continued their way through three corridors. Then they had to go through one door with three locks, another stairway, stepper and narrower than the first, and then two more doors. There were the third level and the black cells. Apparently, Tyrion Lannister briefly sent the Grand Maester there during his tenure as Hand of the King. Myrcella had told him about that.

The thought of his beloved brought again painful memories. He thought that killing the people responsible for her death would make things easier for him, but it didn’t. It didn’t ease the pain, quite the opposite. He felt it more acutely than ever. The black cells were even smaller than those of the second level, and without window. Whoever ended up here was doomed to spend days without a single shade of light as long as the king or the queen wanted. However, this was still not Trystane’s final destination.

They arrived at a door with three locks again. On the other side was another door with four locks. There, Beron stopped.

“Waiting here as usual, my prince?” he asked.

“Yes, I am.”

“Better that it stays that way. I’ll be right back.”

He unlocked, opened and locked again the door, leaving Trystane alone, like every time. The prince of Dorne sat behind a simple table, and there he waited, like always. After a waiting that lasted several minutes, Beron finally came back with Goza. The guardian responsible for the fourth level of the dungeons was fitted for it. His face was scarred in many places, and so were his arms, and he was missing one eye. He sat roughly before Trystane.

“Any news?” the young prince asked.

Goza grunted, his only cold eye on Trystane. “Nothing. Dornish people are quite resilient. I’m torturing them for days and still they say nothing. I kill their friends right in front of their eyes, and they say nothing. I’m beginning to wonder if they are men.”

Trystane exchanged a look with Beron, then stared back at Goza. The man who was responsible of the torture in King’s Landing was so twisted and deformed that Trystane was wondering if Goza was human at all. To hear him ask if Dornish people were human was kind of ironic.

“How many died today?” Trystane asked, dreading the answer.

“Two, but I still have about fifteen of them left. Though I’m starting to doubt we will ever get anything out of them.”

Trystane sighed. “Do whatever is necessary. We need to know what Lord Yronwood is preparing.”

“Aye.”
Goza walked away back to the fourth level. Beron locked the door behind him, like always. “This man scares me, and normally nothing scares me,” the chief guardian said.

“You’re not alone,” Trystane said. “Let’s go back to the surface.”

Like always when he walked back to the surface, a sickening feeling grew inside Trystane’s belly. His father had ordered people to be tortured before, but Trystane never did before he arrived in King’s Landing. What was worse in all that was the fact he had his own people tortured, men who took Lord Yronwood and his allies’ side. They were made prisoners since the war inside King’s Landing started. He was fighting along the Tyrells against his own countrymen.

Back to the surface, he wished a good day to Beron, for what good it did.

“We see each other tomorrow, like always?” he asked Trystane.

“Like always,” Trystane replied with a flat voice.

Trystane walked back to the small council chamber. He had to think about another strategy. On his way, he got information about the fight going at Visenya’s Hill. The two armies were still fighting over the hill. None managed to get the advantage so far. The battle was at a standstill.

Trystane looked at the map, trying to see a way to get out of this situation. They lost their small numerical advantage with the many Tyrell soldiers who died on Rhaenys’s Hill. Darkness was closing on them now, and if Anders Yronwood managed to make some kind of alliance with the criminal gangs of King’s Landing, then huge problems were to be expected. These criminals, even if some of them were only poachers or thieves, knew how to hide in the city and when to attack the people when they expected it the less. Movements between points of battle and strategic positions, even in the main streets, would get difficult. Trystane already abandoned Flea Bottom long ago, ordering the City Watch to help them in their fight against the rebels. King’s Landing was now a battlefield with two main enemies, while small groups tried to feed on the leftovers.

He could remove forces from less important positions. When he thought about it, the Mud Gate was almost useless, though there was of course still the danger of not controlling masses of refugees trying to get into the city. He could probably reduce the garrisons at non vital positions and assign them to taking the remaining gates still not under their control, then his plan of starving the enemy should work. For that however, he first needed to make sure Visenya’s Hill would remain in his control.

He was thinking about the number of men he would have to move when Margaery Tyrell walked in. He was surprised to see her. She almost never left her rooms since she came from Storm’s End.

“Lady Margaery. I’m glad to see you out of your chambers,” he told her.

“Thanks, Trystane. I couldn’t remain behind the same door forever.” She indicated the map with her chin. “What’s the situation?”

“Difficult.” That was understatement.

“You remember that after your cousin killed Lord Ashford, you came to see me and asked me to make sure by father’s men would remain quiet, so that we could avoid an escalation of tension between our two kingdoms?”

“Yes, I remember.”

“And I succeeded, temporarily. I managed to convince the men of my country to wait, to trust you,
and they did. And now here we are today, fighting together.”

“Yes,” Trystane acknowledged.

“Fighting against your father’s bannermen.” She wore a sad expression. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault.”

He said nothing more. Margaery Tyrell had nothing to blame her for. Her father may be arrogant and prone to make huge mistakes, but Margaery had done nothing wrong since she arrived in King’s Landing. Trystane even found a friend in her, in some sort of way. He managed to have a healthy friendly relationship with her, just like his uncle Oberyn and Ser Loras Tyrell did before they died. However, to the opposite of his uncle and her brother, they never went as far as to sleep together. The thought had never crossed Trystane’s mind until today, truth be told. Myrcella was still fresh to his mind. In some moments he still believed she was alive. Myrcella was the woman he loved and nothing less. Margaery was a friend, and nothing more. As for the queen he would marry after the war, she was his future wife, nothing more and nothing less.

“I believed I had no role left to play in this game,” Margaery said. “I had lost everything, and I didn’t see the usefulness to do anything. I believed no matter what I did, it wouldn’t change anything. Because I couldn’t save my own brother, or my friends. I couldn’t save my husband from his mother and himself. But I was wrong. I still have a role to play in this war. There’s still plenty I can do to stop it before it’s too late and more people die.”

“If you have a solution, I’m ready to listen,” Trystane told her.

She didn’t say anything for a moment. “There is one, but it comes with a price.”

“And what is it?” he asked, still looking at the map to find a winning strategy.

“You.”

He slowly turned his head toward her. “I beg your pardon.”

“She’s telling the truth, my prince.”

The sweet voice of Varys was unmistakable. Trystane stared at the man who stood at the end of the small council chamber, his face hidden in the shadows but the shape of his figure very clear.

“How long have you been there?” Trystane asked, angry.

“I just arrived, and so did they.” He pointed the opposite direction. Trystane turned his head again.

Margaery had opened the door. Four guards in the colors of House Tyrell walked in. Their swords remained in their scabbards, but they had their hands on their handles. They were ready to draw.

He looked at Margaery. Her face was one of guilt and apologizing.

“You’re betraying me?” Trystane asked her, unable to believe what was going on right now.

“No, Trystane. I’m saving you.”

“How? By turning me over to Lord Yronwood? By having me killed?”

“No. I chose these men myself. They are loyal to me. They are to bring you to the harbor. There’s a small boat waiting for you. You’ll use it to reach a ship that will bring you back to Planky Town.
From there you’ll be able to rally Sunspear.”

“You’re forcing me out of King’s Landing?” She nodded. “Why?”

“Because your men turned on you. After you sent them to Visenya’s Hill, they defected and joined the rebels. They turned against our men. The Hill just fell. I received the information right before I came here. We lost many men, and the City Watch gave up on us. Its men joined Lord Anders or disappeared in the alleys of the city.” The news choked Trystane out of his breath. “We are outnumbered. My father and his lieutenants don’t believe we can hold any position for long. The Red Keep is isolated.”

“I beg you to listen to reason, my prince,” the eunuch said, leaving the darkness. “Lord Yronwood accepted to lay down his sword and to convince his fellow Dornishmen to do the same if we sent you away from the capital and you never came back.”

“He talked to you?”

“I organized a meeting between him and Lady Margaery about a week ago.”

Trystane looked at Margaery Tyrell again. She said nothing. She only kept the same contrite expression. Anger flared in his mind. “You prepared this for a long time. You plotted to overthrow me all this time.”

“This was a plan for in case things would go horribly wrong. I only planned to use it in last resort, and I’m afraid it’s time to use it now.”

“You betrayed me.”

“No. I’m trying to put an end to this bloodbath and to save your life. Anders Yronwood doesn’t want to kill you. He knows he would incur your father’s wrath if he did that, and that Daenerys Targaryen would help him to destroy House Yronwood until nothing is left of it. He wants to humiliate you, show to the world that you were unable to maintain peace in King’s Landing, unable to rule, and to let everyone remember that you murdered your cousins.”

“I didn’t murder them.”

“You killed two of them in front of many witnesses, and the third died in very strange circumstances when you were present. Lord Yronwood only wants to humiliate the Martells. He wants to take his revenge.”

“Revenge for what?” It immediately dawned on him. “His grandfather.” He looked at the ceiling.

“He didn’t forget how your uncle Oberyn killed him.”

“That was so long ago. I have nothing to do with that.”

“Your brother neither.”

Trystane felt his heart pumping more blood. “What do you mean?”

“I don’t know, Trystane. Maybe there is more to your brother Quentyn’s death than you believe, but I’m not sure.”

No, that couldn’t be. Quentyn died in an accident while he was a ward at Yronwood. Was it possible that Lord Yronwood murdered him? To avenge his grandfather? Her father would certainly have
known if that was the case.

“Lord Yronwood knows that if he keeps fighting with the rebels, he will lose everything,” Lady Margaery explained. “Daenerys will execute him and hunt his house forever. Unlike in the First Dornish War, Daenerys will not be alone like Aegon and his sisters were. She will have the support of your father and of many other houses to destroy the Yronwoods and their allies. Lord Yronwood only joined the rebels some time after the fights began. By helping to bring back the peace and by punishing the Dornish who rebelled first, he will reinstate himself and keep his seat on the small council. His only condition for his help is your departure. You will be branded a kinslayer, Trystane, you will be seen as a coward, but you will be alive. Your father already lost his first son. Don’t make him lose the second. Anyway, there’s nothing left for you here. All your men turned on you.”

Trystane wandered his eyes from Margaery to Varys to the Tyrell guards. “I suppose I don’t have a choice.”

“No, you don’t. I’m sorry Trystane. I’m tired of all these deaths, of Cersei, the Sparrows, the Dornish or even my father’s men trying to control this city and killing everyone who stands in their way. I’m done with it. If any of your bannermen turn against the Martells in Dorne, I’ll convince my father to help you if that is your wish.”

Trystane couldn’t believe it was happening. All his men, all the people who came from Dorne, turned against him. How was it possible? “Why did they desert?” he asked aloud.

“For the same reason Robb Stark lost half of his men after he executed Rickard Karstark,” the Spider said. “You’re not their prince anymore in their eyes.”

“It’s time to go, Trystane, before it’s too late,” Margaery said.

He stared at her. “I will not forget this.”

“I know. I’m sorry, but that’s the only way to prevent more people from dying and to prevent you from dying.”

He scoffed. “I’m surprised you care so much about me.”

“It’s not only for you and the people that I’m doing it. I’m doing it for Tommen.”

“Tommen?” He didn’t understand. “What does Tommen Baratheon have to see with that?”

“His sister wouldn’t want you to die, and neither would he.”

Trystane said nothing. The words didn’t come out. Finally, his feet brought him to the Tyrell guards who led him out of the small council chamber, then out of the Red Keep.

As he travelled the silent city thrown into the dark, he thought about his father who sent him to Daenerys with a mission. He failed. Everyone turned on him. He kept his face well hidden under the cloak he wore, to avoid people from recognizing him. The guards who escorted him wore similar cloaks to hide their weapons and their armor. Not that they were in any danger. Fires could still be seen on Visenya’s Hill far away. The Dornish were probably still asserting their control over the place. This would keep them too busy to notice five people at the other side of the city going to the harbor.

Like Margaery promised, a small boat was waiting for him and the men escorted him. They took the boat and rowed to a large ship that was waiting for them in the bay. The ship had Redwyne sails. Trystane was welcomed by the first officer of the ship and given his own cabin. Then the captain
gave the order to set sail, and Trystane Martell left King’s Landing like a thief in the night.

Chapter End Notes

And Margaery becomes a player again. How that will play in the end remains to be seen.

Please review

Next chapter : Sansa
Sansa XXXIV

Chapter Notes

Let's see how Sansa fares after the brutal (but probably well deserved) death of Littlefinger.

We discover who are the people who saved her.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

SANSA XXXIV

The house was half in ruin. Part of the roof had collapsed, the chimney was threatening to fall as well, and the door had been smashed for what looked like a long time. Sansa waited outside, standing next to the woman with blue eyes and long black hair. The half-opened door slammed completely open as the man with white hair and yellow eyes came out.

“No one’s here. It will do for tonight. I’ll go and fetch some wood.”

Without another word, he walked away. Sansa attached her horse to a pole and the woman who rescued her did the same. She walked inside the house and Sansa followed her. The interior was no better than the exterior, but Sansa wouldn’t complain. One week and a half ago, she could have become as Littlefinger’s unwilling mistress. The thought of it made her sick. She wouldn’t complain about her situation. If she had any reason to complain, it was about her daughter.

“Still thinking about her?” the other woman asked, as if she read into her thoughts.

“I’m worried,” Sansa answered.

“I understand. I’ve been in your position before, but contrarily to me, you have no reason to be worried. Because your daughter will not die.”

“How can you say that, Kinvara?”

The High Priestess, the woman who saved her from Baelish and Harrold Arryn back at the Vale, had been poking around since they entered, looking for food or anything useful. She stopped her searching and looked directly to Sansa.

“Because I know it.”

“How can you know that? By looking into a fire?”

“I only know. You have to trust me.”

“Trust you? You… you serve Daenerys Targaryen, a queen who wants to defeat my cousin. Why should I trust you?”

“Because your husband and I serve the same queen now.”

She already told her that. “How can I be sure you’re telling the truth?”
“You’ll be sure soon enough, once you see him again.”

“When?”

The woman smiled. “Soon.”

Sansa sighed in exasperation. “How can I know that you won’t kill me?”

“If I wanted to kill you, I would have done it a long time ago, Sansa.”

“Like you would have killed Littlefinger a long time ago, I suppose. You waited for our wedding night to kill him.”

“I needed to wait for the right moment. And considering I saved you from being raped by two men, I think you could show me some gratitude, Sansa. I know what it is, being forced to lay with men you don’t want, and believe me when I say you don’t want to experience it.”

“He said he would kill my daughter!”

“He was lying.”

“How can you know that?”

“Because I know the men like him. They will say anything that serves their interests. He said that because he wanted to live, nothing more. Your daughter is still alive, somewhere, and we’re going to find her.”

“How?”

Kinvara made a pause before she answered. “First, we’ll get you to safety.”

Again, this woman avoided the question. “Why would you help me in the first place?”

“Because I do what my lord commands. And Daenerys Stormborn promised your husband to save you both, your daughter and you.”

The other priest, Geralt, came into the room at this moment with a load of woods. He dropped it on the floor. “You should talk louder, this way you’ll be sure every fat lord in the Vale hears you.” He picked their three gourds. Kinvara previously emptied them into a cauldron where she was tossing away some vegetables now. “I’ll go and fill these.”

Again, Sansa was alone with the other woman. Like every time they stopped, Kinvara proceeded to prepare some stew. She must have prepared their escape very carefully, for they had more than enough provisions for a long journey. Sansa saw her toss several vegetables in the cauldron and boil them all together. She had never known much about cooking. They had cooks everywhere she lived, and never needed to bother how the food she ate was prepared. As Lady of Casterly Rock, she had to oversee the kitchen’s staff, but nothing more. She seldom went there and left the stewards to take care of most of the matters there.

Kinvara filled a bowl and gave it to her. She filled two others and began to eat her own while she left another one for Geralt. Sansa ate with appetite. The stew was good, and its warmth made her feel better.

“It’s a chance we were there to help you. If you had tried to fend for yourself, I don’t believe you would have survived one day,” the woman told her.
Sansa didn’t feel flattered by the remark. “Well, it’s more my sister’s thing. She’s better at surviving in the nature on her own,” she replied.

Kinvara nodded, while continuing to eat. “Your mother should have taught you tricks to survive alone.”

“My mother is dead,” Sansa replied sharply.

“I know. I’m sorry. I know it’s not easy to lose your family.” For a moment, she said nothing. “That stew you’re eating, Sansa, a long time ago, my own mother taught me how to do it. She died not long after.”

Sansa found herself pitying the woman sitting in front of her all of a sudden. “I’m sorry.”

The priestess pushed it aside. “It was a long time ago. I barely remember her. I was very young when it happened, far younger than you. This stew is one of the very few things I remember from her, mostly because I had to make a lot of it after she was gone.”

The priestess kept picking at her stew with a spoon, while looking in the flames that kept the content of the cauldron hot. She often did this.

“I don’t believe my mother thought that I would ever end up in this kind of situation. I don’t think she ever believed I would need anything for this kind of things,” Sansa tried to explain.

“Of course not. When you’re highborn, you have to worry about what you will eat, what you will wear, and what you will do today. I wasn’t highborn, Sansa. My worries were quite different. I had to worry whether I would have something to eat and wear every day. At six, I had to work only to make sure my family could survive. That’s the reality of the common people. We don’t have servants. When we have nothing to eat, we must find it ourselves, or grow it. When we have nothing to wear, we must make it. When it’s winter and there’s a hole in our walls, we have to repair it ourselves. There’s not someone else to do it in our place. We have to hunt and farm for our own food, to gather wood to build our own fire, to clean the place where we live ourselves. When we need something to survive, we must get it, one way or another. That’s the way of the world. Your mother never had to face that kind of situation. She never lacked of anything.”

Kinvara put aside her stew and looked straight at Sansa. “I know I seem rude, Sansa. You worry about your daughter, and I understand that. I’ve been there, me too. But your daughter is not going to die. You will see her again. And even if you didn’t, you have a life better than most of the people in this country, so try to enjoy it.”

“How could I enjoy it? I lost my daughter, I almost got raped by two men, all my family is in danger. I lost my parents, two of my brothers. All the people I care about are dead or in danger.”

“You think this is any different for anyone in this country? You were almost raped, but I can tell you that more than three women out of four in your land didn’t have the chance to escape this treatment like you did. Everyone in this country lost people they love. Some lose everything, but you haven’t. You still have a family who’s alive, and a husband who’s ready to do anything to find you, and not because you are his wife, or because your marriage made him rich, or because he needs you for an alliance of any sort, but because he loves you. Very few women have this chance. You lost people you loved, I know, but everyone in this country lose people they love every day, whether it is to war, to disease, to accidents, or because they are killed by someone. You have more than almost everyone else. So even if you lose Joanna, you shouldn’t stop living for this. Trust me, your fate could have been much worse.”
How encouraging. “I was there when my father died. I begged Joffrey to spare him, and instead he called for his head. He had him killed right in front of me. Does everyone go through that?”

“Do you believe in a god, Sansa, or in gods?” Kinvara asked after a moment.

“I worship the Seven, and the Old Gods,” she replied defiantly. The priestess didn’t seem to show any judgement.

“Do you think your gods would like you to stop living because people around you died?”

“Why do you care? They are false gods for you. You worship the Lord of Light.”

“I do, but it’s better to believe in something that is false than to not believe at all. Besides, your gods are not as false as anyone might think.”

That wasn’t something she expected from a woman who served the same god than Melisandre, the woman who burned Shireen Baratheon alive. “How can you say that?”

“Because different faiths can share many similarities. Do you pray often?”

“I used to pray often.” Now she prayed less.

“Prayers can be useful, and very helpful. Though some say that if you offend your brother, then a prayer will suffice to get your pardon. First apologize to your brother, and then do your prayer.”

Sansa frowned. These words were familiar to her. “Where did you hear this?”

“Book of the Mother.” She smiled wickedly.

“I thought…”

“Following the Lord of Light doesn’t mean I cannot read the holy texts of other faiths. And there are passages in the holy texts of my own faith that are quite similar to this one. Each faith tells its followers to be happy and to enjoy life. I suggest you do it, when you’re reunited with those you love.”

Sansa shook her head. “You seem so certain that I will see those I love again.”

“You will, and you will see all of them again. Trust me. Now, if you’ll excuse me.”

Kinvara stared into the flames, deeply absorbed by whatever she saw in. Sansa took a closer look at her while she was in her trance. The High Priestess of the Red Temple of Volantis wasn’t particularly beautiful when you looked closely at her, but she wasn’t ugly either. Sansa witnessed her talent as a singer during the wedding. She wore plain clothes, more befitting a peasant than a noble woman. She said herself that she wasn’t highborn, though her language betrayed her level of education. To the simple eye, to the person who looked at her without getting past the surface, she was an ordinary woman. Sansa thought so when she saw her for the first time. At first, she was only a servant, then a naïve servant interested in Harrold Arryn, then a very good singer, then an assassin, a Red Priestess, and finally the High Priestess. Appearances could fool many people, and Sansa was fooled like everyone else.

She brought her hand to her neck, where the red stone was kept in place by the chain. That was her main protection right now. Kinvara gave it to her back at Runestone, before they escaped. Thanks to it, they walked past everyone they came across as they proceeded to leave the castle. Whether they were servants, soldiers, lords or ladies, they let them pass without giving them much attention. The
necklace changed Sansa’s appearance. She didn’t want to believe it first, but after she reluctantly put the chain in place around her neck and looked at her in the glass, she saw that it was no lie. Back in the room where Kinvara killed Petyr Baelish and Harrold Arryn with a crossbow, Sansa saw a perfect stranger staring at her. The woman who looked at her in the glass was about twenty years older than her, with curly blond hair, green eyes, a square face and a bosom more generous than hers. That was the appearance she had since their escape. According to Kinvara, as long as she wore this necklace, she would have this appearance for anyone who looked at her. Only those with magical powers could see through it.

Sansa was still unsure of what to think of the High Priestess. She had been shocked when Kinvara told her she was a Red Priestess, but even more so when she was told that she was in fact the leader of the Red Priests, something like a High Septon for them. Sansa had some doubts about the woman. She was rude and sometimes looked exasperated by her, but at the same time Kinvara saved her from the people who captured her, and more. Two days after they left Runestone, a patrol of men with the sigil of House Corbray had come upon them. It just happened the knight who led them was present at her wedding. He didn’t recognize Sansa, for she was hidden by the disguise created by the necklace, but he did recognize Kinvara. Her song had made quite an impression. Kinvara and Geralt had fought the six men and managed to kill them all, keeping her safe.

Geralt was quite different from his High Priestess. He spoke very little, only when it was necessary, and always with a rough and grave voice. He was very well-built and strong. Sansa saw him snap the neck of a man without effort. He reminded her of the Hound in some way, especially with the many scars he was bearing. He always had two swords with him. Sometimes he fought with the two of them in each hand. Other times, he didn’t hesitate to slit the enemy’s throat with his dagger. Sansa had tried to engage a conversation with him during the first days of their escape, but without success. As a result, she ended up mostly talking with Kinvara.

If she understood well, Geralt was a Red Priest, but he didn’t look like the sort who would preach to people. He seemed to be Kinvara’s personal shield, though from what Sansa saw, the High Priestess knew how to defend herself. When they were intercepted, she stabbed a man in the heart without hesitation, and there was also something strange that happened. A soldier was charging her, his sword brandished over his head, ready to kill her. She just raised a hand and the man had let his sword drop on the ground, placing his arms before his eyes, as if something blinded him. Geralt had killed him two seconds later, bringing his sword down on his hip, cutting his legs from the rest of his body.

Their group didn’t make for a very happy company. As if to emphasize this, Geralt just walked in, dropped the now full flasks and walked out after taking the bowl Kinvara prepared for him. He went to the door, standing guard like he did every night. Sansa never saw him sleep when she thought about it. Kinvara didn’t sleep much either. She spent most of her nights staring at the flames, like she was doing right now. Sansa wasn’t sure if she liked the woman. After all, Littlefinger was dead and Sansa escaped her captivity thanks to her, but despite the fact she tried to comfort Sansa, there was something in the woman’s behaviour she didn’t like. It was as if she was warm and cold with Sansa at the same time, as if she cared about her, but despised her, or rather saw her as inferior or worthless. She didn’t understand this behaviour. The only other person who had a similar way to behave in her presence was… the Hound. Sandor Clegane, the man who cared for her, but also who mocked her because she still behaved like a little girl who was waiting for her knight in shining armor to come and rescue her. Was that the same with Kinvara? But why would she care for her? There was something very odd with this priestess, and she had a way to speak with Sansa that left her dumbfounded.

“Kinvara, may I ask you a question?”
“You may.” The High Priestess didn’t lift her eyes from the fire. Sansa decided to go forward with her question all the same.

“You said that you’ve been where I was before. What did you mean by that?”

Her gaze remained on the fire, but she answered to Sansa all the same. “Most women get pregnant in their life, Sansa, whether they are married or not.”

“You have children?”

“Long before I was High Priestess, before I entered the orders, I was someone else. And yes, the girl I was back then had a child.”

“What happened to him?”

A long silence followed. Finally, Kinvara turned her head to look at Sansa. “She’s gone.”

“It was a girl?”

“Yes.” She turned back her attention towards the fire.

“What happened?”

Sansa saw the priestess close her eyes, then inhale and exhale deeply before she replied. “The girl I once was lost everyone she loved and everyone she cared about a long time ago. But her daughter, her baby, she didn’t lose her. She abandoned her.”

Sansa’s eyes widened in horror. Before she could say anything, Kinvara spoke again.

“Don’t judge this too quickly. The girl was alone, without anyone to help her. She had a choice. Whether she left her baby to die, or she died with her baby. She made her choice, and she lived. Her daughter didn’t.”

“Couldn’t you ask for help?” Sansa asked after some hesitation.

“There was no help available. She was alone, I’m telling you.”

“What about the father?”

“He never knew. Even if he had been aware of her existence, I’m not sure he might have done anything. Sometimes, destiny demands some sacrifices.”

The thought of a father abandoning his children revolted and disgusted Sansa. Kinvara looked at her again.

“This daughter didn’t even live for a year. Yours will live much longer, believe me. She will not die.”

An idea came to Sansa’s mind. “Is this why you’re helping me?”

The High Priestess had already gone back to looking at the flames. “I do what my lord commands.” Kinvara smiled. “We are close. We must leave now.”

“Now? I thought we were stopping for the night.”

“So did I, but the Lord of Light just showed me another way. Come.”
The Red Priestess quickly grabbed what she brought with her and walked outside the ruined house. Sansa followed her. The other priest was leaning against the trunk of a tree, staring at the horizon, probably looking for anything unusual that could suggest a danger. His superior interrupted his trance.

“Geralt, we’re leaving.”

“Already?” She didn’t give him an answer. He just nodded and prepared the horses. Kinvara placed her bags on her own horse, then turned to Sansa.

“You must give me back the necklace.”

“Why? I though it was necessary to protect me.”

“True, but you don’t need it anymore.”

The palm of her hand was waiting. Sansa didn’t believe this was a good idea to do as she was told. She still had this odd feeling about the High Priestess. When she looked at her face, Kinvara made a sign that meant she could trust her. She said that repeatedly since they met, and so far Sansa had to admit the two priests had been very helpful, but she couldn’t shake the feeling there was more to it. Kinvara’s explanations didn’t satisfy her. Her instincts told her she couldn’t trust this woman. Her mind, however, and every rational part of her being, told her she had no reason to mistrust her. So Sansa removed the necklace and gave it back to the priestess.

As soon as she was free of it, she felt as if a weight was lifted from her. For the first time in more than a week, she didn’t have the necklace around her neck. She felt lighter than before. She didn’t have a glass to look at her, but she supposed she looked again like herself. She climbed on her horse and prepared herself for departure. Geralt was about to take the lead of their small group.

“Wait, Geralt. You will follow me this time.”

When Sansa turned her head to look at Kinvara who just spoke, she saw an entirely different person. This woman noticed her dumbfounded expression and placed her hand on her neck. Sansa saw the necklace she just removed, and then she understood. Kinvara had gone from a peasant looking young woman to a woman in the thirties with thick red robes. Her black straight hair that fell behind her back was replaced by brown curly hair falling over her shoulders and her eyes, blue at the origin, were now an intense green. She shot a wicked smile to Sansa and rode forward. After a moment of hesitation, Sansa followed suit, and Geralt closed the march.

As they progressed through the land, a light snow kept falling. Sansa tightened the cloak around her shoulders. That reminded her of her time in the Neck, back when she always felt cold and sick. She had thought that she wasn’t used to the northern weather anymore, but now that she looked back to it, she supposed her state might have been simply caused by the pregnancy. This time however, it was definitely the weather. Winter had come upon the southern kingdoms. She wondered if the snows had reached Casterly Rock yet.

They rode slowly. Kinvara and Geralt showed no sign of strain or that they felt cold. They just kept riding, without talking. Darkness slowly settled. Thankfully, the moon was high and plain, which gave them a good view around them. The path they followed led to a small forest. They had done less than a mile through it when Kinvara stopped. Sansa followed her example, and so did Geralt.

“It’s here,” she simply said.

Geralt instantly drew up one of his swords while going on his feet, just like Kinvara. Then nothing
happened. Sansa didn’t like it. She didn’t dare to leave her horse.

A rock flew and Geralt stopped it with his arm. Cries and shouts of war came from all around them. Torches were lit and moved toward their position. Then a great light surged and blinded Sansa. After it disappeared the instant that followed and her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness again, she saw the enemy, about half a dozen men, fleeing away from one side. On the other side, it was a different story. Geralt was fighting, cutting down every man who dared to approach him. About ten of them were already lying on the ground.

“Stop!” roared a booming voice. The other attackers stood their ground and remained in position. They kept their weapons ready, but didn’t dare to advance again, except for one. He held a torch high and came through the bunch of men who assaulted them. They all wore furs and helmets with two horns. Most of them had gruffy beards. They reminded Sansa of some of her father’s bannermen that she saw in her childhood, those who lived in the far North, close to the Wall. Geralt was about to stop him.


The savage man looked at the Red Priest. “The white wolf knows how to fight.” Then he looked at Kinvara, then finally directed his torch towards Sansa. At the light of the fire, she thought she saw smile. “The girl grew up.”

He kept smiling at her. While looking at him, Sansa found something familiar about this man. And then she remembered the day she saved Ser Dontos Hollard, and who she met for the first time right after she convinced Joffrey to spare him. Most importantly, she remembered who was following him.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
“Five days of march, that’s it?”

“It is,” confirmed Grey Worm.

Tyrion looked at the falcons positioned north-east to their army. They were close, very close.

“We leave at first light tomorrow,” Tyrion declared.

“Yes, my lord.”

After Grey Worm walked out, Tyrion was alone in his personal tent. An army of thirty thousand men was assembled by Harrold Arryn and now marched against them. The Lord of the Vale had more time to raise an army this time, and he also brought some of his men from the North back when he returned home. As a result, he had a stronger army in number than Tyrion had. Too bad the young man couldn’t live long enough to lead it into battle.

On their way through the Vale, Tyrion had received the surrender of many lords. The sight of a dragon discouraged many of them to resist. Lord Vance Corbray had called for every lord in the Vale to take arms against the foreign invaders, but so far, there were as many of them who dropped the sword than those who raised it. Tyrion didn’t lose his time. He didn’t organize any siege against those who refused to surrender. He only devastated their lands on his way, allowing the hill tribes and the Dothrakis to satisfy their desire for plunder, while sparing the lands of the lords who kindly bent their knee. He also forced the lords who accepted to swear fealty to Daenerys Targaryen to provide men for his army.

Tyrion Lannister was now at the head for an army strong of twenty thousand men. If the alliance to free the North and fight the White Walkers had been uneasy with Lannisters, river lords, Northerners, Knights of the Vale, wildlings and even Hightowers, this one was wildfire ready to blow at any moment. A third of the army was made up of Unsullied. They were the ones who caused no problem and helped him to keep the other factions from each other’s throats. The Dothrakis made for another third of the men he commanded. They were wild and difficult to control, and Tyrion almost regretted each time he gave them leave to ravage the lands of a resisting lord. The hill tribes were barely better. They were undisciplined, ready for a fight at any moment, looking for trouble among themselves, but also with the soldiers of the Vale and the Dothrakis. Three thousand hill tribe men had been difficult to control in the Riverlands, and now Tyrion had four thousand with him. As for the few men from the Vale who fought in his army, no more than one thousand, they got along with no one, but since their situation was precarious, they kept for themselves and tried to avoid hill tribes, Unsullied and Dothrakis all alike.

After the Gates of the Moon fell, their column was attacked by some men of the hill tribes. The
Unsullied stopped them and made one prisoner. Lucky for the prisoner, since his name was Shagga, son of Dolf. Had it been the Dothrakis he fell upon, they would have killed him without second thought. Instead, Tyrion reunited with an old friend, as much as he could be called an old friend. Through hard negotiations, as far as they could be called negotiations with a leader of the Stone Crows, which included a few insight jokes concerning the difficulty to feed Unsullied’s cock to the goats, Tyrion convinced Shagga to join him, and to convince as many tribes as possible to fight with him against the Knights of the Vale.

Tyrion gained the help of the hill tribes by promising them lands in the Vale. Not every land, but some of them. The lords who initially refused to surrender on their passage would be the main contributors. Tyrion knew he promised a long time ago to the hill tribes he would give them the Vale, and a Lannister always paid his debts. Shagga was quick to remind him his promise when they met. However, Tyrion countered that since he accepted his father’s money in exchange of returning to the Vale, he somehow gave up his claim to the fertile lands of the Vale of Arryn. Tyrion knew he couldn’t give the whole Vale to the hill tribes, but certainly he could give them a part of it. And when he showed Viserion to Shagga, the leader of the Stone Crows understood it was better to not upset Daenerys Targaryen and her new Hand. The other leaders, even Timett son of Timett, seemed to understand it too. Chella wasn’t there to see him since she died some time ago. Her sons now led the Black Ears, and just like her they wore necklaces of ears, though none had as many as she had.

The twenty thousand Unsullied, Dothrakis, men of the hill tribes and the Vale would meet the army of Vance Corbray in approximately five days. It could be four or six, depending on the speed of their armies and the weather, but they would meet very soon. Tyrion knew the Knights of the Vale favored battle in open field, in plains or valleys, for it was there they had the real advantage. In the mountains, where the country was more appropriate for ambush, surprise attacks and hiding, the hill tribes were in better position.

Overall, however, Tyrion wouldn’t say that Lord Corbray had the better hand. There was disorder in the Vale since the death of Harrold Arryn. Many lords who gave up the fight and swore fealty to the new queen did so because they didn’t trust Vance Corbray. Vance Corbray’s army might seem united when his was a mess, but it wasn’t the case. Corbray would have his own problems to deal inside his army as he marched against Tyrion. Furthermore, the discipline of the Unsullied couldn’t be matched. They would do as they were told, no matter what it was. The same couldn’t be said about the men fighting in the army of the Vale. Dothrakis were unruly, but didn’t fear death, and neither did the hill tribes. Two third of the army might be unaccustomed to winter, but the hill tribes and the men of the Vale with them didn’t have this problem. Almost all of Tyrion’s army was made of seasoned warriors, people used to fight, while a large part of Corbray’s men would be green boys. Even better was the element of surprise. Tyrion had studied the characteristics of his men very closely during the last few days, and he thought he knew how to get the better out of them. He also knew the forces and the weaknesses of the forces of the Vale. Corbray didn’t know how the Dothrakis or the Unsullied fought. As for the hill tribes, he talked with Shagga and Timett and had a good surprise in reserve for whoever would come on their way. And he had Viserion, of course. Not to mention the two Red Priests who followed the army. If they were as powerful as those who fought at Winterfell, then the progeny of the Andal invaders was about to realize that the Seven wouldn’t protect them.

The sun disappeared from the horizon for quite some time. The nights were longer, coming sooner and ending later. Tyrion should have gone to sleep, but he didn’t. His sleep was plagued with nightmares about the people he loved. He saw Jaime being beheaded, or even burned alive. He saw Sansa being raped by Harrold Arryn, or Joanna being carried into the sea by the man he thought to be his father for a long time. The worst of all had been when he dreamed that he ordered Viserion to burn Jaime himself. Rather than face this, Tyrion decided to drink, read, and look at maps and think about strategies and tactics. It gave him more rest than nightmares. Sometimes he invited Shagga to
drink with him. Damn, he missed Bronn and Pod. Sometimes he dreamed about them too, seeing their deaths again. He also consulted the two priests, Jolee and Juhani, in case their fires told them anything.

He stared into the fire that was lit in his tent.

“I wonder how they can see anything into the flames,” he wondered aloud.

Back in his childhood, he would light fires in the bowels of Casterly Rock and imagine his father or his sister burning in it. Sometimes he imagined the fire came from the mouth of a dragon, so much that he had the impression an actual dragon was there with him. His fascination for them might come from his real father. The shape of the dragon appeared, the flames licking the outline of his figure. There was someone on his back. Tyrion first thought that was him, and that he imagined himself riding Viserion, but he realized the person on the dragon had long hair flying in the air. Then the outline of another figure started to appear, and as soon as Tyrion blinked, it was all gone. He rubbed his eyes. He had to be very tired.

“Congratulations, Tyrion. Not only you talk to yourself now, but you see things that are not there. You must be short of ideas to think about something else than Sansa.”

Saying the word was enough to feel a weight adding on his shoulders. He tried to occupy his mind with anything to not think too much about Sansa and Joanna. They could be anywhere. He tried to get answers from the lords and landed knights he met on their way, but none could provide any information. Littlefinger covered his tracks very well.

He returned his attention to the map, imagining everything that could happen on their way to Gulltown, any way the battle could go, trying to foresee the enemy’s actions. He ate a little and drank much as he did so. It was straining for his mind, but Tyrion Lannister worked on his mind for over thirty years and he would be damned if it wasn’t strong enough to think of war and battles instead of a wife and child. At some point, he began to doze off.

It was the timely arrival of one of Grey Worm’s lieutenants that saved him from slumber.

“Shagga says he needs to speak with you,” he told Tyrion.

“Shagga? I thought he and his men were scouting ahead of us. What does he want?”

“Speak with you.”

Tyrion sighed. “I see. I won’t have more clarifications.”

At least, no matter what Shagga wanted to see him for, it would keep his mind occupied and away from thoughts of his wife for a little while. The encampment was largely asleep safe for the men standing guard. Fire camps and torches lit the spaces between the tents. Shagga was waiting for him at a corner between two alleys.

“So, mighty Shagga son of Dolf, what is it that is so important to take Tyrion Lannister out of his bed?” he quipped.


“I know, I know. A Lannister always pays his debts. There’s no need to remind me of what I owe you again.”
“You owe me more.”

Shagga stepped aside, inviting Tyrion to turn to his right. Tyrion shook his head, exhaustion taking its toll on him. He turned on the other alley and saw a group of Stone Crows standing with torches. But it wasn’t them who attracted his attention. It was someone in the middle of them. Before he could say anything, she rushed and threw herself at him, burying her face in his shoulder.

“Sansa.”

“I thought I might never see you again. There were people who told me you were dead.” She was crying.

He pulled a little and took her face into his hands. That was her, no doubt. He wasn’t dreaming. She was there, tears falling from her blue eyes along her cheeks, of joy or sadness he couldn’t tell.

“That’s all right. I’m here. I haven’t been far from dying, but I’m not dead.”

She made a nervous laugh, just like he did. Then she kissed him. Tyrion was taken aback by the kiss. Not that it was unusual for his wife to kiss him, but she just came out of nowhere when he expected her the least. Once the moment of surprise was gone, he returned the kiss and for the first time in months, Tyrion Lannister felt good, happy. For a moment, time slowed down and it was as if they were alone and the rest of the world didn’t exist. It was not meant to be last, for a great laughter exploded. Tyrion had to break their embrace and looked to Shagga to see him laughing to death.

“Well, I suppose I truly owe you a debt,” he shot at him. “Where did you find her?”

“It would be more appropriate to say that we found you.”

Tyrion realized at this moment that Sansa hadn’t been the only one who wasn’t a Stone Crow around. Another woman was standing in front of them, all dressed in red, her green eyes fixed on him.

“What are you doing here?” Then he noticed the presence of the Red Priest Geral next to the High Priestess Kinvara. “And I could ask you the same question. Shouldn’t you be in Essos right now?” Geral was banished by Daenerys after he killed someone during a parley at Moat Cailin.

“Be careful of what you say, Imp. If I was in Essos, your pretty wife might have been raped by a brothelkeeper,” the scarred priest retorted.

Tyrion turned to Sansa. She shook her head. “Nothing happened. They... they helped me to escape Runestone. They’re the ones who killed Harrold Arryn and Littlefinger.”

Tyrion stared back at the two priests. “You’re lucky my wife is safe and sound,” he shot to Geral. “Come,” he told his wife, and they left everyone else behind.

As soon as they were back in his personal tent, Tyrion gave Sansa some mulled wine to soothe her. He also took some for himself.

“Sansa, are you sure everything is alright?” he asked her.

“Yes, I’m fine.” She was shaking. “It’s just... I’m so happy to see you, but... No, I’m not fine at all. Joanna... I don’t know where she is.”

It was as if someone just dropped a bucket of cold water on him. “Let’s start with the beginning. Tell me what happened.”
And so Sansa began her tale, from the troubles at Winterfell until Shagga found her not far away from here. She told him she was separated from Joanna when she left the northern soil. Ever since, the only information she got about their daughter was what Petyr Baelish deigned to tell her, but she didn’t know if he was saying the truth. She told him about the wedding, and her near rape by Littlefinger. She almost broke into tears when she arrived at this part of her tale. She then went on with her rescue by Geralt and Kinvara and the days they spent riding until they were ambushed by Shagga’s men. Tyrion could see that Sansa was deeply affected by all this, but what scared her the most was that she had no idea of where Joanna was, or what might have befallen her. Littlefinger said before he died that he gave specific orders for Joanna to be killed if he came to pass away. When she told him that, Tyrion felt the envy to bring Littlefinger back from the dead only to torture him before he killed him again. And he would kill the man himself, the Old Way if necessary.

However, that wasn’t his main concern right now. His wife just escaped a second marriage. Harrold Arryn was lucky he was dead. But more than that, he had to keep his mind clear to find his daughter. Baelish could have hidden her anywhere, even in a brothel. The thought of his daughter growing up in this kind of place angered him. He visited more than enough whores in his life to know this was no place to raise a child.

“Sansa.” He knew that was a lot to ask from her, after she went through such an ordeal, but he had no choice. “After you left Winterfell, after you and Joanna were made prisoner, do you remember anything, even a small detail, something that might give you an idea of where Joanna might be?”

Sansa remained still for a time, not talking. “I don’t know. After we left Winterfell, I never saw her again. I don’t know where they brought her. She may still be in the North for what I know.”

“No. Baelish would keep her close to him, somewhere he could use her. She’s the heir to Casterly Rock. She’s too precious for him to keep her in the North. She must be in the Vale.”

Did he try to convince Sansa or himself, he wasn’t sure, but surely Littlefinger wouldn’t leave Joanna in the North. He had no allies there, and the White Walkers were closing on Winterfell at this time. Furthermore, except for the Vale, there was no place where Littlefinger truly had power now. He must have hidden her somewhere in the Vale. There was no other option.

“There’s something you must know, Tyrion. I heard conversations while I was their prisoner. Apparently, they had help. The Knights of the Vale, I mean. They had help. They weren’t alone in all this.”

“What do you mean? Someone from inside Winterfell helped them?” he asked.

“No. Well, maybe. I don’t know. I’m not sure they needed help from the inside. They were already in. But I heard them talk, and they said that Rolph Spicer and Serion Lannister helped them.”

“Serion Lannister and Rolph Spicer?” Tyrion asked very quietly.

“Yes. I don’t know how, but I heard them say that they had to thank them, or that it would never have been possible without them.”

Tyrion made an effort to remember certain things. Images came back to his mind, images of the day when he died. “When I was ambushed on my way to Winterfell, I saw some of my own men fighting amongst each other.” He closed his eyes, damning himself. “Among the men I was bringing back with me, some were serving the Lannisters of Lannisport.”

Serion Lannister, the eldest son of Reginald Lannister, Lord of Lannisport, had developed a certain hostility toward Tyrion after he stopped a plot that would have allowed him to marry his brother to
the daughter of another lord against his father’s wishes. Tyrion hadn’t considered the heir to House Lannister of Lannisport as a major threat, but he knew Littlefinger had a talent to use the feelings and interests of people to do his dirty work. After all, he did use Arya Stark to get rid of Lysa Arryn.

Arya. He forgot about her. He went to the entrance and ordered one of the guards to bring Arya Stark immediately. She and Tyrion had the same determination to save Sansa, after all, and he should have sent someone to fetch her as soon as Sansa came back.

“Arya is here?” Sansa asked, surprised.

“Yes, she came with me.”

“And Bran? Jon? How are they?”

“They are well.” At least they were, the last time he saw them. “They’re fighting the White Walkers with the help of Daenerys Targaryen.”

Sansa looked at him for a moment without speaking. “So, it’s true? You serve her now?”

Tyrion sighed. “She saved Winterfell. The castle was under attack, and about to fall. She arrived just in time with her army to save it. She saved all your family, Sansa. And she sent me here so I could find you.”

“But, what’s going to happen to Jon?”

“He will join the Night’s Watch again once this is over. Anyway that’s what he wanted to do. Daenerys agreed to it. And don’t worry, she’s not going to do anything to you or any Stark. She’s different from Cersei. As long as we accept her as the queen, there will be no problem.”

Sansa sighed. “Well, I suppose anything is better than Cersei.”

“Sansa!”

His sister-in-law had arrived. She walked to Sansa and the two sisters hugged.

“You’re here,” Arya said.

“Yes, I’m here,” Tyrion’s wife replied.

“Is everything all right? Where is Joanna?”

Sansa didn’t answer. Tyrion did. “We don’t know yet where she is. She and Sansa were brought in two different places.”

“But we’re going to find her.”

“Of course, we will.”

“What if…?” Sansa didn’t finish her sentence. She couldn’t finish it. Tyrion approached and took her hands into his.

“We’re going to find her, Sansa. There’s no one who will get between us and our child.”

“And I’ll kill everyone who does,” Arya added. On this, Tyrion allowed himself to laugh a little.

“We may have track. Sansa heard conversations while she was a prisoner. It seems some of my
bannermen took part to her kidnapping and the attempt of murder against me. More specifically, the Spencers and the Lannisters of Lannisport.”

“Lannisters? People of your own family tried to kill you?”

“They are a cadet branch, distant cousins who rule the city of Lannisport. They’re like the Karstarks for your family. I will send a raven to Genna and tell her to make inquiries, maybe prepare an intervention. If the Spencers had a hand in all this, then I might have to make a re-enactment of the Rains of Castamere.”

He looked to Sansa. She looked exhausted. He was too. Arya, on the other side, seemed fresh and ready for battle.

“I think it would be better for Sansa to rest,” he said.

“Aye, you’re right,” Arya agreed. “You’re tired, aren’t you?” she asked her sister.

“Yes, I am,” Sansa replied after a moment. She was breathing heavily, still taking a sip of wine from time to time.

“Do you want me to stay? I could stand guard for tonight,” she offered.

“No, Arya, it’s alright. You can go back to sleep.”

“Very well. Just ask if you need anything. We’ll talk more tomorrow.”

Arya hugged her sister one last time and she left. Tyrion was alone with his wife. “There are a few things I must do, Sansa. I will be back soon,” he told her.

“No, please. I… I just came back. I don’t want to lose you again.”

She was distressed. Who could blame her, after everything she went through, and the uncertainty concerning their daughter. Tyrion was worried as well, though he was very happy all the same to see his wife again. He cupped her cheeks with both his hands and looked straight into her eyes.

“Everything will be fine, Sansa. I promise.”

Again, tears fell from her eyes. “I was afraid I might never see you again.”

“I feared the same.” He kissed her tenderly on the mouth. “Come. You must rest.”

He led her to his bed. It wasn’t made for two people, but he wouldn’t let her anywhere far from him. He climbed into the bed with her, without caring to change his clothes. She buried her face into his chest and brought her arms around his neck, as if she was afraid he might somehow get away. There were other things Tyrion could have done tonight, with everything he just learned. He had to warn Genna at Casterly Rock, but also Daven in the North, about the betrayal of his bannermen. He also had to thank Kinvara and Geralta, but he decided he would do that tomorrow in the morning. He had been so afraid that he could never see the woman he loved again, and now here she was, and she needed him. He brought his hand to the back of her head. For the first time in what seemed to be forever, he slept with his wife. He kept an eye on her for most of the night. He supposed he was afraid too that she might disappear when he would wake up in the morning. Finally, he dozed off, for real this time. When he woke up, she was still there. He found his wife. Now he would find his daughter.
So, this was a chapter many people were waiting for. I hope it was worth the wait. I might not have extended on the reunion as much as I initially planned to, but from now on, Tyrion and Sansa are going to stay together. So every time you see a chapter told from their perspective, expect time for the power couple of this fanfiction.

Please review

Next chapter: Jon
They had stopped on the top of a mountain. The dragons were resting, and so were the men and women who travelled on their back. Their party was a mix of very different people. With Jon on Rhaegal had come Ser Beric Dondarrion, Thoros of Myr, two Northerners and two Free Folk warriors chosen by Toregg, Tormund’s eldest son. Now that his father was dead, he had taken the leadership of the Free Folk army, or what was left of them, though there were people who opposed his authority. That was the way of things among the Free Folk. With Daenerys Targaryen on Drogon had come mostly Red Priests, including Revan and Melisandre. Two other priestesses followed them. Ser Garlan Hightower, Lord Dickon Tarly and one of his men completed Drogon’s crew.

It had been almost two weeks now since they left Highpoint. Revan said they weren’t far from the place. Jon was surprised by the knowledge the Red Priest had of the lands north of the Wall. Even the Free Folk with him were impressed. Despite this, Jon wasn’t sure at all. They were going somewhere no living man had gone for the last eight thousand years. He would feel safer if Ghost was with him. He was forced to leave him behind at Highpoint.

They would only stop for an hour, no more time. It was decided they had to reach the site where the first White Walker was created as quickly as possible. So far, they hadn’t come across any wight or White Walker. That could either be good news or bad news. Jon ate the mush they were given for the trip, light snow falling in it. It kept people alive, but it didn’t keep the belly full nor had any taste. He ate worst in his life.

He was sitting with Beric Dondarrion and Thoros of Myr. Arya didn’t have a very good opinion of them after she met them in the Riverlands, but they had fought with them against the common threat. Most of their Brotherhood was gone now. They were the first men from the south of the Neck to come in the North specifically to fight the White Walkers, unlike all the others who first came for other reasons. Tyrion and Sansa had come to free Winterfell and Arya, before they knew his sister wasn’t at Winterfell. Daenerys Targaryen had come to invade the North and conquer it. The Brotherhood Without Banners were the only ones who came for and only for the White Walkers. And they paid the price.

“At first, we wanted to protect the people,” Beric explained. He didn’t eat his mush. “That was our task, our reason to fight. And then, some of us started to kill the people. We tried to stop this, by hanging the traitors, but all it did was to make people flee. There isn’t much left from the Brotherhood Without Banners. I wonder what will be left of it after this.”

“With some hope, more than what would be left had the White Walkers swarmed through all the Seven Kingdoms. No matter how many of your men died, they died for a reason, with honor,” Jon said.

“Yes. I suppose we must take comfort in that. The Brotherhood will probably not exist anymore after
this is all over, but at least it will have existed for a reason. And maybe I’ll find out why the Lord brought me back six times.”

Jon turned toward Thoros of Myr. “You truly brought him back six times?”

“Yes,” Thoros replied, taking a goofy gulp of his flask of wine.

“And only by saying a few words?”

“Yes, but in fact, it wasn’t me who brought him back. It was our Lord. Just like he brought you back, Jon Snow. There’s a reason for it. I don’t know what it is, but there is one.”

“There’s always a reason, even when we believe there are none.”

Melisandre had joined them. She was dressed in a very similar way to when she and Jon spoke in the winch cage at Castle Black. Jon had stopped trying to understand how she could be so lightly dressed and not feel cold.

“Well, my lady, as gorgeous as ever,” Thoros told her.

She acknowledged the compliment with a small nod, but nothing more.

“I suppose you two have a lot to talk about. Come on Thoros, let’s give them some space,” Lord Beric said.

The two leaders of the Brotherhood Without Banners walked away. Jon stood up, leaving his bowl near the fire to keep it warm.

“What do you want?” he asked her.

“I wanted to apologize.”

“For what?”

She pulled on a face that meant everything. “You know for what?”

Jon stared away. He hadn’t forgiven her, and he didn’t think he could ever forgive her. “I’m not sure I’m the one you should apologize to. You should apologize to all those who are dead, but you cannot because they are dead.”

“It was my fault.”

“Aye, it was.”

An awkward silence followed, that Melisandre broke. “I thought I knew what my Lord wanted from me, but I was wrong. I don’t know what he wants. I receive his signs, but I cannot be sure of their meaning. I try to interpret them the best I can, but sometimes I make a mistake.”

“How many thousand of people would still be alive had you not misinterpreted your Lord’s will? How many people have you burned because you thought your god wanted this? Can you say that it was his will now?”

“I can’t. Perhaps I made mistakes. Perhaps the Lord of Light wanted me to do these mistakes so I could realize my errors when the time was right. I don’t know.”

“What kind of god would do something like that?”
“You know the answer, Jon Snow.”

Jon sighed. The one we’ve got. He didn’t know what the Old Gods or the New wanted from him, but he refused to believe they would expect him to burn children alive.

“I wanted to thank you,” Jon said. He never had the opportunity nor the courage to tell her before, since he did everything to avoid her, but now that they were talking, and considering what might be coming, it may be Jon’s last chance. “For helping at Winterfell. You brought me back from the dead, but this time I guess you saved my life. It was you, wasn’t it?”

She nodded without saying a word. When Jon had fought the Night King, he felt his forces vanish, when a wave of warmth had gone through him and gave him what he needed to destroy the leader of the wights. He had suspected it for some time, but now he knew where it came from.

“Just so that you may know, I haven’t changed my mind. For me, you’re still exiled,” he told her.

“You’re no longer the king, Jon Snow.” She looked over her shoulder, and Jon followed her gaze to Daenerys, his aunt, who talked with Dickon Tarly, Garlan Hightower and another Red Priestess.

“Aye, but many lords in the North will continue to obey the decisions I took. Don’t expect them to welcome you.”

“I do not plan on staying after this battle is over.”

“Where will you go?”

“Wherever my Lord wants.”

“What if you don’t know what he wants?”

She smiled sadly. “I’ll do my best. I may go with Revan, if he would have me.”

Jon looked again behind him, seeing the said priest standing near a cliff with another comrade.

“Who is he?” Jon asked her.

“The man who saved me.” Jon looked back at her, utterly surprised. “I wasn’t always Melisandre of Asshai, Jon Snow. A long time ago, I was no better than a whore. Revan came and saved me. Without him, I would never have met the Lord of Light.”

He looked more carefully from where he stood to the back of the Red Priest. He seemed to be engaged in an important conversation with his fellow priestess. “Who is he exactly?”

“No one knows. He comes when people need him, and goes where the Lord is telling him, just like me. Just like all of us.”

Jon watched the scabbard hanging at the man’s belt. Beric Dondarrion and Thoros of Myr had flaming swords too, but Revan’s seemed different. The fire didn’t seem… natural.

“You said he saved you. Don’t you know anything about him? Have you ever seen his face?”

“He shows his face to very few, and as I said, Jon Snow, no one truly knows him. You may try to know, if you want.”

Jon hesitated, and then he walked towards the Red Priest, leaving Melisandre behind. He had to know. Too many things were strange with this man.
“Revan. May I have a word?” he asked once he was close enough.

“Of course, Jon Snow. Meetra, leave us alone. Don’t forget what I told you.”

The Red Priestess he was talking to walked away. Her blue piercing eyes examined Jon as the woman with brown hair and a very white skin passed next to him. Jon continued his way until he stood next to Revan.

“What do you want to know?” the priest asked him.

Jon cleared his throat. “How does it come you know so much about the White Walkers? You know things that no one else knows, not even Melisandre, and I’m quite sure the other priests don’t know about it either. How?”

A silence settled, and it lasted for so long that Jon believed the man wouldn’t answer. He wasn’t looking at him. The masked face was turned towards the horizon that began at their feet and never stopped.

“I travelled a lot in my life, Jon Snow. I’ve seen many things and heard even more. You may think you know the order of the Red Priests, but you don’t. In fact, there are many orders of Red Priests. The order based around the Red Temple of Volantis is only one of the closest and better known. It’s also one of those with the most followers. But there are many societies of Red Priests, some so small and so far that very few are aware of their existence. It is said that Azor Ahai created the Red Priests in order to prepare for the return of the Others, but through thousands of years, schisms, splits and discords happened. Azor Ahai didn’t leave any written record, or if he did we have no trace of them. Writing barely existed at that time. Many of his teachings and history were lost, or changed, on purpose or not. But some circles remember his original story, and I visited them through the many years of my life. That’s how I know, Jon Snow.”

Jon wasn’t convinced. “Did Azor Ahai even exist?”

“He did, for sure. There are too many testimonies all around the world. That cannot be a coincidence. Azor Ahai truly existed, though who he was, what he did, how he died, and how he defeated the servants of the Great Other remains uncertain.”

“With dragonglass?” Jon offered as an explanation.

“It helped, for sure.”

“The Children of the Forest and the First Men battled together against the White Walkers. It was the Children who provided the men with dragonglass.”

“But why would they need Azor Ahai to defeat their enemies?” Revan asked. From the tone of his voice, he knew the truth, but seemed interested in what Jon would answer.

“I don’t know. Maybe he was the leader of the First Men.”

Revan made a small noise that Jon didn’t know how to interpret. “What do you know of Azor Ahai?”

“Not much. Only that he is a hero who was chosen to fight the darkness, and that he used a magic sword for that, a sword he plunged through the heart of his wife, Nissa Nissa. Melisandre believes the darkness was the White Walkers.”

“Indeed. The legend varies from place to place and depending who tells the tale, but you summarized
the common points they almost all have. That doesn’t mean this is true, though. The Others invaded this country for the first time eight thousand years ago. The texts who speak of Azor Ahai in our holy faith are only old of five thousand years. Do you believe in this legend?”

“I don’t know. It seems drastic to kill the love of your life to forge a sword.”

Revan snorted. “If you want my opinion, this legend is very far from the truth, a result of tales that were modified through the centuries until almost nothing was left of the truth.”

Jon was surprised to hear a Red Priest talk in this way about a legend that was at the core of his religion.

“There’s another version of the story of Azar Ahai that I heard one day, Jon Snow. It may only be a variant of the story, but I think there might be more truth to this one than the one you heard about.”

“We don’t know who Azor Ahai was,” he continued. “He may have been a slave, a master, a sailor, a fisherman, a carpenter or a soldier. It seems that he was born in Essos and that he had lived all his life there. Then one day the servants of the Great Other came. The Shivering Sea froze, allowing them free passage on the main land. They began to slaughter the people and to turn them into monsters. Azor Ahai, like many others, seized a sword and fought them. The fight was long and difficult. Many people died, but in the end, the living prevailed over the dead. Those you call the White Walkers were repelled and sent back where they came from. Essos was free of them. After all was over, Azor Ahai only had one wish, to rest. It was then that news came from across the Narrow Sea, from another land. They said the Others had come there too, and that they killed everyone there. Word of it reached the ears of Azor Ahai.”

“He did what he had to do. He set sail for this other country he had never set eyes upon. There he met the First Men and the Children of the Forest. The two people hated each other. They had been at war for a very long time and didn’t trust each other. Azor Ahai convinced them to join their forces, and they fought the dead together. And just like in Essos, the Others were driven back and defeated.”

“Only to come back eight thousand years later,” Jon completed.

“Yes,” Revan agreed after a moment. “Why do you think Azor Ahai did this?”

“What?”

“Why? Why would he travel the entire world to come here, to a land he never set eyes upon, a land where he knew no one, to fight an enemy who was already defeated in his homeland? If you learned tomorrow that Ramsay Bolton was alive and taking control of Asshai, would you go there to stop him?”

“No,” Jon conceded.

“No. Then why Azor Ahai would?”

“Maybe he knew Essos wouldn’t be safe as long as the White Walkers were still breathing.”

“Indeed. Azor Ahai wasn’t the only one who heard of what was happening in Westeros. Many were the people in Essos who knew, and many were fully conscious that the Others would remain a threat as long as they wouldn’t be totally exterminated. But Westeros was far away, and many probably reasoned that by the time the Others and the wights would come back, then they would be dead. Most men don’t want to worry about problems that don’t affect them, or they prefer to ignore them until they are forced to face the truth. Azor Ahai was the only one to go to Westeros. All the others remained behind. Why?”
Jon didn’t answer. There was no answer to that question he could give, aside from saying the man was honorable. He didn’t think this would be a satisfying answer.

Revan resumed. “Azor Ahai didn’t fight the Others alone, you know. There were people who helped him. Back in Essos, among them was a warrior, the person Azor Ahai saw as his equal. The person he could always rely on. The person who later would become his wife.”

Jon was surprised. “Azor Ahai was married?”

“According to the tale, yes, he was. He met his wife during the war against the Others in the east. When the war was over, he only wished to live with her for the rest of his days. The day he heard about the great war in Westeros, his wife told him she was pregnant. It was at this moment that Azor Ahai decided to leave for Westeros. He didn’t go there to save Essos. It was for his son that he did it, and his children and their children after them. He didn’t want them to live in a world that would be constantly under the threat of the dead. So he left his wife with their son in Essos and set sail for the west. He fought for a very long time, until the day when he had the chance to destroy the Others once and for all. But he didn’t seize his chance.”

“Why? He had done so much to fight them. Why would he give up at this moment?”

“Do you know how long the Long Night was?”

“Forty years.” Every child in the North knew that.

“Forty years. And Azor Ahai spent most of this war here, in Westeros. The war against the dead was far longer in the west than it was in Essos. While Azor Ahai fought the dead, his son grew up. He wasn’t there for his birth, his first steps or his first words. The son grew up without his father. He became a man, got married, and even had children of his own. In the end, when Azor Ahai finally could end all of this forever, he was so tired and missed his son so much that he walked away. He left Westeros and sailed back to his homeland. Without him, the Children of the Forest and the First Men couldn’t destroy the Others. They were reduced to build a wall and to create a permanent organization to defend it. The Night’s Watch was created at this moment.”

Revan looked at Jon then. “Why did you think the sworn brothers of the Night’s Watch cannot take a wife or father children?”

Jon’s eyes widened in surprise. “That’s the reason?”

“Yes. Family stopped Azor Ahai from doing the right thing. Bran the Builder didn’t want that to happen again.”

Jon echoed the words of Maester Aemon. “Love is the death of duty.”

“Indeed.”

“Did he get to see his son?” Jon asked, curious.

“He did. He saw his son, but he could never get to know him, or talk to him. His son died two days before he got home. They say he arrived during the funeral. He could only get a glimpse of the body before it was buried forever.” Revan sighed. “Not only Azor Ahai couldn’t see his son grow, but he didn’t finish the task he had. It was too late now. He couldn’t go back to Westeros. He missed his chance to make the world safe. Had he taken a different decision, hundreds of thousand people would still be alive, and we wouldn’t be there, fighting the greatest enemy men ever had to face.”

“What happened to Azor Ahai afterwards?” Jon asked following a moment of silence.
He created the order of the Red Priests, or what would become the Red Priests, to keep the memory of what had happened, and to be ready when the enemy would come again. And just like Brandon the Builder with the brothers of the Night’s Watch, Azor Ahai decided that Red Priests couldn’t marry and couldn’t have children. He remembered the lesson. If you want my opinion, the story of Nissa Nissa comes from the fact Azor Ahai had to sacrifice the people he loved in order to defeat the dead, but not the way people usually see it.”

Revan looked straight at Jon. He could feel the intensity of his stare behind the mask. “Don’t repeat the same mistakes than Azor Ahai, Jon Snow. This time, we must deal with the Others, definitely.”

Jon nodded. He couldn’t agree more. However, something came to his mind. “You believe this story is true?”

Rean shrugged. “I think it is more believable than the common legend, but again, it is difficult to know for sure what happened eight thousand years ago.”

Jon’s gaze wandered to his scabbard. “How does it come that your sword can burn with fire?”

Revan released a very quick chuckle. He detached the sword from his belt but didn’t put it out of the scabbard. “This sword, Jon Snow, was the last sword ever made by the blacksmiths of Valyria.”

He looked at the priest. “The last one?”

“Yes. It came out of the forge a few minutes before the Doom, and someone managed to smuggle it out of the city before it was too late. This is the last relic of the Valyrian civilization. There will never be another sword like that ever made.”

“It’s Valyrian steel then.”

“Yes.”

“How did you get it?”

Valyrian steel swords were rare and costly. Only the most wealthy and powerful families in Westeros had one, and they kept it like a treasure. Since the destruction of Valyria, their value had increased tenfold. How could a Red Priest put his hand on one?

Before Revan could reply, a great roar was heard.

“They know,” Revan said. He unsheathed his sword immediately and it burned like hell immediately. Revan ran towards the origin of the noise, and so did Jon. A large bear was fighting against Beric and Thoros. Their flaming swords were dancing in the air. They had managed to hit the bear, and his fur was on ablaze, but he kept moving. His eyes were blue.

Revan reached the bear before Jon. It was occupied to fight the two other men and didn’t pay attention to the Red Priest who stabbed him in the back. A horrible cry escaped from the bear, and he burst into fire a moment later, turning into ashes. Behind the carcass appeared dozens of wights.

“They’re here! The dead are here!” Jon shouted.

Wights ran at them, their weapons brandished. Longclaw and the three flaming swords cut through the air, slashing the enemies, rendering them inanimate. One the wights swung a club at Jon. He ducked and swung his sword on the back of the wight, reducing him to rubble. Beric, Thoros and Revan were setting fire upon all the dead they came across. More were coming.
A large burst of fire came from behind Jon, destroying all the wights that were coming at them. He turned to see Rhaegal unleashing hell upon the dead. Not far away, Drogon was doing the same for another group of dead men. Jon realized the dead were coming from everywhere, from all the pathways that led to the top of the mountain. They must have encircled the mountain as they stopped. The falling snow prevented them from seeing the ground, so they didn’t see the enemy coming. Ser Garlan and Lord Dickon fought, the Valyrian steel of their sword rendering the dead inoffensive. Daenerys remained near Drogon, protected by the three men of the Reach who came with her. Jon saw that one of the Free Folk had already been killed.

“We must leave!”

The others near him understood. Thoros and Beric drew back, but Revan didn’t. Instead, he sunk his sword into the ground, and a wall of fire came out from it, cutting any access to the dead from one side of the mountain.

Daenerys had already climbed on her dragon, and she was helping Lord Dickon Tarly to climb as Ser Garlan kept fighting the dead. Melisandre wasn’t far and proceeded to climb as soon as Lord Tarly was on Drogon.

Jon went on Rhaegal’s back while the dragon kept throwing fire at the dead, keeping them at bay. He helped Thoros and Beric to climb, and then the man of the Free Folk. The two Northerners were about to climb as well, but one of them was stabbed in the heart and fell on his knees. The other one plunged a dagger made of dragonglass into the wight who just killed his friend, which cause the wight to stop moving. The dead kept coming from this side. Jon tried to move Rhaegal around so that he would target the dead from this side and allow the Northerner to climb him, but he wasn’t fast enough. By the time Rhaegal was in position to blow fire upon the wights, the other Northerner was dead too.

Jon looked at Drogon. Everyone was on him, safe for two people. There was a Red Priestess in the snow, and Revan was protecting her, killing all the wights approaching her.

“RHAEGAL, VALAHD!”

Daenerys’s shouts came through the battle, and Jon felt Rhaegal taking flight. He tried to stop him, but his reflexes when it came to directing a dragon were still too slow. He couldn’t stop him, and the dragon flew away, leaving Daenerys, Drogon and all the others on the ground, surrounded by the dead. Revan grabbing the priestess he saved towards Drogon while the dead were closing on them.

Chapter End Notes

This is not the end. New chapter to be uploaded tomorrow.

Please review

Next chapter : Daenerys
Daenerys XII

Chapter Notes

A short chapter, taking place right after the previous one. A battle chapter. Very action packed.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

DAENERYS XII

She continued to look through the sky as Drogon flew towards their destination. Snow fell, reducing the visibility. Rhaegal was nowhere to be seen.

They barely managed to escape. Drogon received injuries from the wights as the two last priests climbed on him. Daenerys could feel it was harder for him to fly. The quality of the flying was the same, but her child struggled to maintain it. Hopefully, the swords and clubs of the dead didn’t cause major injuries. She wished she could make Drogon land so she could check on his injuries, but they had to find Rhaegal and Jon Snow first.

Wind whipped her face. She may be immune to fire, but not to the cold or the wind.

“We shouldn’t be far,” Revan said not far behind her.

“Do you think Jon Snow will manage to get there?” she asked him.

“He should, unless something unexpected happens. Let’s be ready for anything. The Others know we’re here. They wouldn’t have sent so many of their creatures after us otherwise.” The Red Priest turned toward his partner he saved before they took off. “Are you fine, Bastila?”

The priestess with brown hair brought together in a bun, allowing a short ponytail, looked back at him. She was holding to Drogon with her right hand while the left maintained a pressure on her leg.

“It’s not too bad, and it’s healing. I will be able to fight,” she replied.

All the others who were on Drogon with her were gripping at anything to not fall. It had been like that for two weeks, and she could feel it taking its toll, especially on Dickon Tarly and Garlan Hightower.

She searched the sky again, still unable to find any trace of Rhaegal and the people he carried. She was worried about Jon Snow. He was all the family she had left, and she barely began to know him. She didn’t want him to die.

During their journey to the Lands of Always Winter, Daenerys had kept trying to know her nephew better. He answered to her questions, and even shared some anecdotes with her, but overall he didn’t speak a lot. However, he kept advising her on how to make sure the northern lords would accept her and obey her. He seemed more concerned with making sure she could rule the North than about knowing her. She regretted that he kept his distance.

There was something she wanted to tell him. She wanted to tell him while they stopped to rest, but right when she was about to speak with him, they were attacked by wights, and the battle that
followed prevented her from talking to him. Now he was somewhere out there, and she didn’t know what his situation was. When was the last time she felt so concerned about someone? She was never concerned that much about Viserys.

Her thoughts turned towards Viserion, actually in the Vale with Tyrion Lannister. Her armies didn’t manage to break into the Vale up to now, and she hoped one of her dragons would be enough to turn the tide and bring the Vale to her. It was the only kingdom that didn’t recognize her queen. Even the North bent the knee when she arrived at Winterfell, though she had to fight to free the North from the threat of the dead. That was the price to pay to be queen. You didn’t do what you wanted, but what had to be done to protect your people, no matter who they were.

The wind got stronger, and Daenerys had to place her hand before her face to protect her eyes from the snow that hit hard. She saw this phenomenon before. It was at Winterfell, when she arrived into the battle. She knew what it meant.

“We’re very close,” Revan shouted. “Melisandre, Bastila, Meetra, now!”

Daenerys felt a great wave of heat spread, and the storm weakened. Her vision improved, and after the moment, as the heating wave created by the Red Priests continued to spread, she saw a mountain appear.

“That’s it! We’re there!” Revan shouted.

Daenerys recognized the place a moment after the Red Priest. She saw it in the vision that Brandon Stark showed her. The place where the White Walkers were created. The site was somewhere at the feet of the mountain. She had Drogon fly in circle around it, searching for the place where the sacred site was, and also for Rhaegal.

The answer didn’t come from her eyes, but her ears. The ground was still difficult to distinguish from this altitude, so she ordered Drogon to fly lower. Still, she heard Rhaegal before she could see him. His roars echoed, and Drogon answered it with his own shout. Daenerys tried to follow the roars of her second child, and as she did so, she began to see the ground.

It wasn’t Rhaegal that she saw, but scattered individuals, all heading into one direction. Something told her these were not living things. Drogon flew over a ridge, and once they were on the other side, she had a very good view of the whole scene. The sacred site was there, different, but it was there. Obelisks had turned white, and the weirwood was gone, but she recognized the shape and the symbols. It was there without any doubt.

This time, she saw Rhaegal, and she also distinguished two flaming swords, but also several other shapes. There were far more than the people Rhaegal carried. The dead were here. Rhaegal was blowing fire all around him.

“We have to help them. Prepare yourself,” Daenerys shouted to the people behind her. Drogon dipped, flying towards the sacred site. Daenerys would destroy it and land next to Jon Snow and his men to help them.

“Your Grace, it’s useless,” Revan shouted.

“What?”

Before she could do anything, Drogon had already unleashed his fire upon the site. Then he threw his fire at a group of wights, clearing a space in which he could land. Daenerys looked at the sacred site. The obelisks and the altar at their center were intact. No damage was done.
“Your Grace, the power of this place is strong. A simple burst of fire will not be enough.”

It was true. Revan explained it to her during their journey. In the heat of the situation, she forgot about it. She turned to Melisandre and the other Red Priests.

“You know what you have to do.”

With these simple words, they all got off Drogon’s back. Wights were coming from everywhere around them. As soon as everyone was on the ground, Drogon blasted fire at the coming enemies. Ser Garlan and the knight who accompanied Lord Tarly remained at her side, ready to protect her. The Lord of Horn Hill for himself ran to join the battle, just like Revan. Jon Snow and his men were busy fighting a legion of wights and two White Walkers. One seemed to have just arrived. He thrust his sword inside the belly of Thorsos of Myr. His friend, Lord Beric Dondarrion, tried to rescue him and stabbed the White Walker with his flaming sword. It had no effect. The White Walker seized his sword with his hand, and it was reduced to shards. Then he stabbed Beric Dondarrion too. This time, he wouldn’t come back.

Jon Snow was dealing with the other White Walker. Dickon Tarly rushed towards the one that just killed Lord Beric, engaging him into another duel, while Revan unleashed his flaming sword upon coming wights, reducing them all to ashes. Rhaegal kept throwing his fire at the enemies that were coming, just like Drogon, but more dead arrived to replace those who fell. In the meantime, Melisandre advanced towards Jon Snow, flanked by both Meetra and Bastila.

The woman from Asshai raised her hands. A moment later, Jon Snow deflected a blow from the White Walker he was fighting to his right, then smashed his sword across his face. The White Walker exploded into thin pieces.

Daenerys considered the options she had. She could choose between Rhaegal and Drogon. It wasn’t an easy choice. No matter what she decided, one of them would be left vulnerable. She had thought about it and come to a logical conclusion. She barely hesitated.

“RHAEGAL!” Her green dragon looked at her. She thought about the altar surrounded by icy obelisks and pointed them to the dragon. “DRACARYS!”

Rhaegal unleashed his fire on the site right away. From this angle, it was a little difficult to see, but Melisandre’s necklace was glowing. Rhaegal’s fire was continuous. It never stopped. Melisandre was increasing the power of Rhaegal’s fire with her magic, making it stronger and longer. The obelisks started to melt down.

She crossed the eyes of Jon Snow, and for a short moment, she thought she saw him smile. It seldom happened. Then he went back to battle and disappeared behind Rhaegal’s large frame, most likely defending her child from the enemies that came from this side. In the meantime, the two other Red Priestesses began to fight the wights, their swords ablaze with fire.

Dickon Tarly’s fight against the second White Walker was quick. He thrust his sword right where the heart of a living human would have been, and the White Walker disappeared like his comrade when Jon Snow defeated him.

Rhaegal’s fire had almost melt half of one of the obelisks. Even for Daenerys, the place started to get hot with Drogon’s and Rhaegal’s fire, not to mention the three flaming swords that danced in their limited space. Wights kept being destroyed, and other wights kept coming after them. Was there a limit to their numbers? Daenerys had seen their army at Winterfell, but she wondered if they could truly move so many wights from Winterfell to this place in this limited amount of time.
She could only watch. For once, she wished she knew how to wield a sword, for she felt useless in this melee. All she could do may be to direct her dragons’ fire in the right direction, but they already did it well on their own.

She noticed something strange. Among the chaos, Melisandre was the only one to not fight aside from Daenerys. Her necklace kept glowing, more intensively than ever, but it wasn’t what caught Daenerys’s attention. Melisandre’s hair was getting shorter, and whiter. Her face changed too, turning more round and losing its charm. Wrinkles appeared on her face, on her hands, and her head turned bald. Daenerys had seen many strange things in her life, and that was one of them. The necklace glowed brighter than ever. It looked as if it was burning.

The flaming swords were getting brighter too. The intensity of the fire around the blades increased, and it seemed the swords no longer needed to make contact with the dead to destroy them. The blades were longer thanks to the fire that became an extension of the weapons.

Melisandre’s necklace flashed, and the burst of fire from Rhaegal tripled. Obelisks were shattered as the fire reached the altar. The Red Priests raised their swords and a gigantic wall of fire in a semi circle surrounded their group. Some wights tried to step through it and ended like so many of their fellow beings. Garlan Hightower looked as impressed as she was as they looked at what was going on.

Then it all ended. The wall of fire, Rhaegal’s fire and the glow of Melisandre’s precious stone on her neck, all disappeared in an instant. And the altar was gone too, replaced by water. It was all that was left of it.

The important is what is at the core of the site. This is where the Others create themselves, the source of their power. Once it is destroyed, they won’t be able to create more of them.

The altar was at the core of this place, and it was gone. Cries came out from everywhere, and Daenerys saw the wights all running at them again. The ring of fire kept them at bay, but many had come in the meantime, and now they all rushed towards Daenerys and her allies. Garlan Hightower and Dickon’s man braced for the upcoming fight. Melisandre collapsed, her beauty gone, replaced by the body of a very old woman.

Revan sunk his sword into the ground, and just like at the mountain, it erected a wall of fire. It didn’t surround their group, but it created a barrier the wights had to get around. Drogon reduced to ashes a large group of dead men running towards him.

A shattering cry pierced the air. Daenerys looked at Rhaegal, and she saw something she had hoped to never see again. A spear had come through his green neck. It didn’t look like a conventional spear, like the ones Drogon received in Meereen. This one was white and looked like it was made of ice. She had seen one similar before, at Winterfell, when a White Walker tried to throw it at Drogon. Viserion and Tyrion saved her this day.

Today, they didn’t. They were far away in the Vale, and a second spear went straight through Rhaegal’s stomach. In an agonizing screech, her child threw short flames, and collapsed on the ground.

“Rhaegal!”

Ignoring the battle that raged all around her, she ran to him, but before she could do anything, a sword went through Rhaegal and his body burst in flames.

“NO!”
Revan’s sword reduced Rhaegal’s to ashes. He looked at her for a short moment, then turned his back. A White Walker was there, and Jon Snow wasn’t far. A gauntleted hand grabbed her arm.

“Your Grace, we must leave, now!”

The voice of Ser Garlan Hightower went through one ear and left by the other. Daenerys couldn’t detach her eyes from what was left of Rhaegal. She had hatched him herself. He was her child, one of the only three children she would ever have.

“Your Grace, we must go!” the knight repeated.

All around her, wights were coming, and kept appearing everywhere. *Fire and Blood*. Rhaegal’s blood was spread all over the ground.

Reluctantly, Daenerys let herself being dragged by the knight of House Hightower. She saw Drogon still sending fire upon the dead. She realized that she needed to do something to make sure another one of her children wouldn’t die today. People were already starting to gather around Drogon. Jon Snow was rushing towards them, hacking a few wights on his way. She found herself praying that he wouldn’t die today.

She helped to get everyone on Drogon’s back. Melisandre’s body remained unmoving, and it was to be assumed she was dead. There was only one person still breathing who didn’t come back to Drogon.

“Revan!”

A Red Priestess shouted as the masked man kept fighting the wights. Everyone was on Drogon’s back except for the Red Priests now. Daenerys wondered if Drogon could carry them all.

“Go, I’m staying!” the priestess with a ponytail told her comrade with short hair.

“Bastila…”

“Go! We’re going to hold them off.”

The land shook at this moment, and Drogon had a hard time maintaining his stance. Lord Tarly barely managed to remain on his back and almost slipped to the ground.

“Go, we don’t have much time.”

The priestess they called Meetra climbed on Drogon as the other priestess swung her two swords lit with fire at all the enemies who dared to approach her. Drogon helped by spitting more fire and reducing the number of foes. Still, one or two sometimes managed to get close enough to hit him, and Drogon would toss them away with his legs or his wings. They wouldn’t be able to hold much longer. They had to leave, now.

“VALAHĐ!”

Drogon ran forward and made a few steps, crushing more wights until he took off. Daenerys looked down to see Revan destroy the White Walker he was fighting, and the priestess Bastila making her way to his position, positioning themselves back to back.

As they did so, the land shook again. Even in the air, they could feel it, and gases came out from the mountain, and a red streak began to pour from its top.
“Bran was right. The mountain is a volcano,” her nephew said next to her.

“Yes, he was right.”

Drogon kept flying, putting more distance between them and the mountain now in eruption. Daenerys looked one last time to the receding remains of Rhaegal. They succeeded, but the price had been high. Was it worth it? She looked at the people who came back from this expedition. Jon Snow was among them. She would have to take comfort in it.

Chapter End Notes

So, many people died, as it should be expected. Even with dragons, the Lands of Always Winter are hard to survive.

A recurring theme in Game of Thrones, I think, is how people’s deaths are often useless and pointless, because let’s face it, the wars in the south are stupid and turn around a bunch of rich people fighting for crowns and thrones. At least, they look stupid when compared to the real threat in the North and the fighting taking place there. As a result, thousands of people died for no reason through the series, when they would have better served had they fought the White Walkers. In this chapter, it is quite the opposite. Each death was meaningful. We could even say that Melisandre found absolution with her last actions.

I hope you liked it. It may seem short, and perhaps Daenerys is not the best POV for a battle chapter, considering she’s mostly a spectator (Daenerys cannot do much in battle when she’s not on the back of a dragon), but I hope you liked it. And after all, battles happen quickly.

Please review

Next chapter : Sansa
I'm sorry for how late this chapter is being uploaded. A lot of stuff happened in my life recently and I was caught in all this, neglecting this fanfiction. I'm truly sorry about it.

And I'm sorry about what happens in this chapter. Many people will hate me and certainly want to kill me at the end. We see that Tyrion and Sansa have found each other, but there is still a distance separating them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The beast unleashed its fire upon the routing enemy army. Whatever forces Vance Corbray brought into battle proved to be powerless against the discipline of the Unsullied, the savagery of the Dothrakis, the ferocity of the hill tribes, the despair at the sight of Knights of the Vale fighting their own countrymen, and the destruction unleashed by a dragon. The great army Harrold Arryn gathered and that Lord Corbray led into battle disbanded like the lords who ran away from Joffrey’s court as soon as he declared he was done for a day.

Even without the combined forces that attacked the army of the Vale, the dragon would have been enough to destroy it all. He spat fire on the enemy, sparing no one, causing most of the men to run away. Sansa could hear the cries of some of them along with the shock of swords as she stood upon the hill, watching the battle from afar. It was the first time since the battle of Moat Cailin that she witnessed an engagement between two armies. Mira was at her side the last time. Today only five Unsullied soldiers kept her company. She didn’t think they had no tongue, but they certainly didn’t know the language of Westeros. As a result, they just watched the battle from afar. Tyrion had thought it would be better to leave her in the care of Unsullied rather than Dothrakis or men of the hill tribes.

Her husband was fighting and so was Arya. Like always, Sansa had to stand aside and watch as an observer while the people she loved risked their lives. At least Arya wasn’t in the vanguard, but she fought alongside the hill tribes. Tyrion and Sansa wanted her to fight with the Unsullied, or with the men of the Vale who were part of their army at worst, but Arya would have none of it. Finally, Tyrion yielded, but at the condition Arya wouldn’t be part of the vanguard.

Tyrion had spent the evening preceding the battle to reassure her. Arya survived White Walkers and worse, and even Tyrion survived two battles, including one where he was part of the vanguard. Sansa had countered that he didn’t take part to the battle the first time since he was knocked out by his own men, and the second time he almost got killed by Ser Mandon Moore. The scar the kingsguard left was still there, visible to everybody. At least, Tyrion risked less this time. He wasn’t on the field, a sword or an axe in hand, but on the back of a dragon. As long as he didn’t fall, there would be no problem.

The dragon kept chasing the men who were running away, and so did the Dothrakis. However, Dothrakis didn’t spit fire on the fleeing army. Sansa had been shocked and more utterly surprised than she could ever be when Tyrion told her he could ride a dragon. The day after they were reunited, he explained her everything that happened since she was kidnapped at Winterfell. He
explained how he died, and even showed her the scars that the arrows left, how one of Daenerys Targaryen’s dragons brought his body and how the Red Priestess Kinvara brought him back to life. He also told her about the Second Battle of Winterfell, how he climbed on the back of one of the dragons and found out he obeyed his orders, and that he saved Daenerys Targaryen from a White Walker during the battle, ending up as her Hand and being sent to the Vale to submit the region.

Sansa couldn’t understand why Kinvara didn’t tell her that she brought Tyrion back from the dead. She would have trusted her sooner. Why didn’t she tell her everything, including Tyrion’s special bond with the dragon? Sansa had wanted to ask questions to the High Priestess, but the morning after she reunited with Tyrion, Kinvara was gone, and so was Geralt and two Red Priests who followed Tyrion’s army. They told no one where they went. It was as if they vanished in the nature.

What had caused an even greater shock to Sansa was to discover that Tyrion was a Targaryen. When he first told her that he was the son of the Mad King, Aerys Targaryen, and that his mother had an affair with him, Sansa didn’t want to believe him. But it was obvious that her husband wasn’t joking. She knew when Tyrion was joking, and he definitely wasn’t this time. Then she recalled something she read at White Harbor, while she was pregnant with Joanna, something concerning a visit Lord Tywin’s wife made to King’s Landing with her two older children, and Tyrion was born next year. There had been an accident at this moment, some comment the Mad King made towards the lady Joanna. When she shared this information with Tyrion, he just replied, *I suppose that now we know when I was conceived, all bitterness.*

They didn’t talk much about it thereafter. She supposed Tyrion didn’t want to discuss the topic, and truth be told Sansa was very hesitant to bring it up. If learning that her husband was a Targaryen and a dragonrider was a shock for her, then what could it be for Tyrion to learn that all his life he wrongly believed that Tywin Lannister was his father.

Sometimes, Sansa thought that Tyrion was avoiding her. He came to her as soon as she asked for him, or whenever she needed him, but he seemed distant considering the time they spent away from each other. At night, she would rest her head against him, but he always hesitated to wrap her into his arms or to wander his fingers through her hair like he used to. He even hesitated to touch her. More than once, he seemed about to tell her something, but didn’t.

She hadn’t asked him what this was all about. In fact, they avoided the subject of this lingering awkwardness between them. They talked about Joanna and how to find her. He also told her about Daenerys and reassured her that everything would be fine, that she would allow them to keep Casterly Rock and wouldn’t touch to the Starks or the Lannisters. He also worried constantly if she was well, if she had everything she needed, and if she wasn’t too much mistreated back when she was a prisoner. It had been difficult for her, but she told him everything that happened, including the near rape. It wasn’t easy for her to talk about it. Most of the time, she tried to forget it. At night, if the memory made its way back to her mind, she would move closer to Tyrion and take comfort in his presence. She repeated to herself that it was all over, that Littlefinger and Harrold Arryn were dead, that it was all in the past and she didn’t have to be afraid anymore, but it was difficult to not be afraid with the lingering thought that Joanna was still in danger.

*If I die, your daughter dies. My men will kill her the moment they hear of my death.*

The words haunted her. She told Tyrion of her worries. Although he tried to reassure her, saying that Littlefinger would never kill the heir of Casterly Rock for Joanna was too valuable, she could feel the fear through his voice. He was just as afraid as she was.

The battle was over very quickly. Sansa had spent her childhood reading stories of great and handsome knights, and the Knights of the Vale had been a part of that childhood. Their courage,
their honor and their valor were praised in songs, in stories and in history books through all the
Seven Kingdoms, and yet they could do nothing against a dragon, castrated soldiers and savage men.
Sansa now saw with her own eyes what the true valor of the Vale was, and it amounted to nothing.
They were cowards playing with swords and thinking themselves to be heroes. The closest man to a
hero on this battlefield was flying in the air, showing to the entire Vale that Ronnel Arryn had been
right to welcome a dragon instead of fighting him.

Sansa just stayed there while the men chased after the enemy. However, she didn’t remain still for
long since the dragon flew in her direction. She tightened her grip on her horse’s reins, just in case he
would panic. Sansa noticed that horses were nervous near the dragon. She was afraid as well. Tyrion
might try to alleviate her fears, no matter what the fear was, it only partially worked. The fact Tyrion
tried to keep her away from the dragon wasn’t about to make her feel more confident around the
animal.

They landed not far from her, but far enough all the same. Tyrion had to walk a little after he came
down the beast. Her guards let him pass without saying a single word. They barely seemed to notice
his presence, let alone the presence of the dragon. Did Unsullied truly fear nothing?

“The battle is over. We have won,” Tyrion told her as he approached. “Though I suppose you
already suspected as much.”

“Yes, I did,” she said.

Again, he seemed about to say something, but didn’t. “I just… wanted to make sure you were
alright. I have to go back. War business.”

“Tyrion, wait.” He had almost turned his heels but turned back to face her as soon as she said his
name. “I will come with you.”

He nodded. “Very well.”

He spoke to the five Unsullied in Valyrian, and they followed them. He also said something to the
dragon as they walked by him, and he took fly. Sansa couldn’t speak nor understand Valyrian, and
according to Tyrion there were several types of Valyrian, so she had no idea what he talked about.
The war council meetings were hard to hold, as Unsullied, Dothrakis and the men of the Vale spoke
different languages. The task was complicated by the accent of the hill tribes men, making their
language difficult to understand even for some Vale lords. They always needed someone to translate
everything that was said. Most of the time, it was an Unsullied. Some had been trained to speak
various languages. Tyrion sometimes spoke Valyrian with the Unsullied, though she could perceive
he was struggling.

“So, how was it, to ride a dragon into battle?” she asked him.

“Easy enough. My Valyrian is quite poor, but Viserion seems to understand everything I say, and
he’s following my orders.”

Tyrion always addressed the dragon in Valyrian. When he spoke to him, she thought she could hear
the word Viserion, the dragon’s name. Tyrion always called him that way, but Sansa had a hard time
calling the dragon by his name yet. Tyrion seemed so familiar around the creature, but she just
couldn’t. Sometimes, she thought that the dragon was looking at her, and she didn’t know if she
ought to be afraid about it. That wasn’t as if it was Lady who stood before her.

“Are you never afraid of him?”
“Not really. To be true, he is very nice for a dragon. Drogon is way more scary, and bigger. I suppose it’s fitting that I end up with the smallest of the three.”

Sansa already found the dragon Tyrion rode enormous, so she wasn’t eager to see how huge the two others were.

They reached the battlefield. Corpses littered the ground. Some of Tyrion’s men were stripping the bodies of dead men of everything they could find that had value. The hill tribes men seemed to excel in that. There were also Silent Sisters and septas taking care of the wounded. Most bodies were those of Westerosi, with a few Unsullied, Dothrakis or hill tribes men there and there.

It wasn’t the first time Sansa walked through a field after a battle took place. She had a similar view at Moat Cailin, and since the death of Ser Hugh of the Vale, she knew what a man looked like after he was killed. Still, she knew that there were men among the victims today who didn’t deserve to die, but her pity was offset by the horrible treatment she endured in the hands of Harrold Arryn and his men. She wouldn’t weep on the fate of the Vale. If history remembered that the armies of the Vale only arrived after battles were fought or lost them to a few foreign soldiers, she was glad of it. They got what they deserved.

They met Grey Worm, the commander of the Unsullied, in the middle of the battlefield. The conversation between him and Tyrion took place in the common tongue.

“So, Grey Worm, what’s your report on the battle?”

“The enemy is gone. We killed thousands of them. Dothrakis are still after them.”

“Good, let them chase. They’re the best at this. How many men have we lost?”

“It is too early to say for sure, but I would say no more than a few hundreds.”

“Good. Let’s hope we won’t lose more to desertion. The hill tribes and the Dothrakis are not known for their discipline. What about prisoners?”

“We are gathering them. What should we do of them?”

“Let them go, all of them. At least the common soldiers. We may not have what it takes to feed them all. Strip them from their weapons and armors. They may leave with the clothes on their back and what food they can bring inside a bag, but nothing more. Bring me the knights and the lords, and their relatives. We can use them as hostages to obtain their families’ oath or to be ransomed. And I have questions to ask them. If you find Lord Vance Corbray, send him to me.”

“Yes, my lord.”

Grey Worm walked away. Tyrion kept walking around on the battlefield, asking questions to the men and the officers. At one point, he crossed the path of Shagga, a leader of one of the many hill tribes, who escorted Sansa back to Tyrion. They exchanged a few japes of questionable taste. Sansa was used to Tyrion’s sense of humor, but she could never get along with the same people that he did. He talked with other people of the hills tribes, but avoided the Dothrakis in general, although they crossed very few of them. He barely spoke to her, or even looked at her in the whole time.

“Tyrion, what’s going on?” she asked after some time.

“Well, I’m just hoping this will be the last battle of this war. I’m tired of fighting,” he replied.

“That’s not what I’m talking about. I get the feeling that you’re avoiding me since I came back.”
He stopped and looked at her, a pained expression on his face. “I’m not avoiding you, Sansa. I’m just…” He turned towards the Unsullied and told them something in Valyrian. They moved and placed some distance between them and Tyrion and Sansa. He returned his attention to her. “You’re the only one I told the truth up to now, and… I guess I’m afraid you might look at me differently.”

“Why would I?”

“Just think about it. My father burned alive your grandfather and strangled your uncle to death. And he laughed as they died.”

“That’s not much different from Tywin Lannister. And Jon is a Targaryen too. It… it didn’t change the way I thought of him.”

“Really?”

She closed her eyes. “Maybe a little, but only at the beginning. And… and you’re not Jon, Tyrion. You’re my husband.”

“All the more reason to look at me differently.”

“Well, I don’t. I swear.” He looked at her, then back on the ground. “You don’t believe me?” she asked.

“No, I… I know you think what you say, but… That’s impossible to learn something like that and not see people differently. I’m not the person you believed I was, Sansa.”

“You were not the man I thought you were when I met you either. That didn’t stop me from falling in love with you. I still love you. I don’t care who your parents are. We don’t choose them. It’s not your fault if your father was the Mad King. No more than it is Jon’s fault if Rhaegar Targaryen is his true father and that my father hid him the truth for so long. You’re my husband. It won’t change.”

Tyrion sighed. “I’m sorry. It’s just that… I thought that I was the son of Tywin Lannister all my life. I never loved my father, but I was proud to be his son, and I wanted him to be proud of me. I know that I shouldn’t have felt that way, but I did. And now, I just learned that I was never his son. That’s probably why he never loved me. He must have suspected something. He wanted to throw me into the sea when I was born, and he’s wanted me dead more often than I can count. And now, well, I don’t really know who I am anymore. Am I a Lannister? A Targaryen? Both of them?”

She approached him. “I don’t know, Tyrion, but I want to help you.”

“I’m not sure you can,” he said on a sad voice. “I just need to adjust. I’m beginning to understand how your supposed half-brother felt when he learned about his true origins. I just need time. For now, let’s focus on ending this war and finding our daughter. Everything else can wait.”

Sansa reluctantly agreed. He was right. Finding Joanna was more important than anything. They walked in the direction where all the prisoners were kept. Those who were highborn were placed apart from the others. Ser Nestor Royce was there. He was the first lord in the Vale who joined Tyrion. He spotted them arriving and gave an order to his men. Two grabbed a prisoner among the many who were there. There ought to be dozens at least, if not more. Sansa recognized the man they dropped on his knees before them.

“Lord Corbray.”

Vance Corbray looked at her, and it was obvious he wanted nothing more than to kill her.
“You. You did all this,” he accused her.

“No, I did,” Tyrion said, positioning himself between Sansa and Lord Vance. Nestor Royce remained close. “So, you’re the man who slaughtered everyone in Winterfell, betrayed a king you swore to follow, and kidnapped my wife and child?”

This was a rhetorical question. Sansa knew Tyrion didn’t expect an answer. He already knew it. His look wandered over all the other prisoners, and he walked to one of them. He seized his chin and forced the man to look at him.

“Well, look at it. Serion Lannister.” He was one of the people inside Tyrion’s army who plotted with the Knights of the Vale to kidnap her. Tyrion said Serion’s men had turned on him on their way to Winterfell. “Bring them. I have a few questions for these two.”

“Yes, my lord.”

Ser Nestor Royce did as Tyrion told him, forcing the two prisoners on their feet and pushing them forward. Sansa realized that Tyrion was heading towards his dragon, who landed somewhere next to the battlefield, far from everything.

“Sansa.”

Arya came from her right at this moment.

“Arya. Are you all right? Are you hurt?” Sansa asked her, seeing the blood on her armor.

“Aye, I am. I mean, I am well. I’m not injured.” She turned to Tyrion. “You’re still alive?”

“As you see,” he replied.

“Good. Keep it that way.”

“A Lannister always pays his debts.”

Sansa didn’t know what it was about, but before she could ask her sister or her husband, Lord Vance Corbray spoke.

“You’re the one who killed my brother, you damn whore!”

Ser Nestor punched him from behind and he fell into the mud. His stare went from Arya to the ground he splashed into. Lord Vance was then forced back on his knees to keep walking, mud and blood covering his face now.

“Say that word again, and you will pay for this, Lord Vance,” Tyrion warned.

They arrived near Viserion after some time. Vance Corbray and Serion Lannister were forced on their knees again. Everyone stood at a respectable distance from the dragon, except for Tyrion who approached and stood next to him and faced the accused.

“I present you Viserion. Daenerys Targaryen, our queen, named him after her dead brother, Viserys Targaryen. Her brother never loved her, he was stupid and cruel. She wanted Viserion to be what her brother never was. And I’d say that her wish was accomplished. Viserion is kind, far from being stupid, especially for a dragon, and he loves the queen. He is also the smallest of her three dragons, and less prone to burn someone alive when that someone approaches him. But don’t let that fool yourself. If I command him to burn you alive, he will do it without a single hesitation.”
The dragon made a big sound with his throat at this moment, as if he was approving what Tyrion said. His eyes were fixed on the two men on their knees. Everyone stood away from them, assuming they could eventually be under fire.

Lord Corbray seemed afraid and looked at the beast with big eyes, while Serion Lannister seemed to be looking at Tyrion instead.

“Don’t make us believe you can command this beast,” he spat.

“I can, dear distant cousin,” Tyrion replied. “Or else why would I have been on his back during the battle? Now, I have a few questions, and for you own sake I hope you will answer them. First, where is my daughter?”

Sansa impatiently waited. None of them answered. Tyrion had approached them as he spoke. He turned away. “Very well. In this case, let’s play a little game. I call it the Prisoner’s dilemma. Here’s how it works. If you both refuse to speak, I’ll have Viserion here roast you both alive. If one of you tells the truth and the other says nothing, the one who spoke is free and will keep his lands, his titles and everything he has. The other will die. If you both speak, I’m sending you both to the Wall. In all cases, you would be better off to speak. So, who wants to speak first?”

None of them spoke at first, but then Serion Lannister started to laugh, or at least to snigger. “Really? You expect we will talk for that? A promise to be sent to the Wall?”

“Or to recover your freedom, given your friend doesn’t speak at all,” Tyrion said.

“You really think yourself to be funny, Imp?”

“I do think that I’m funnier than you, unless you believe that kidnapping babies is funny. So tell me, where is she?”

“You ruined my plans. I don’t see any reason to talk to you. Except one.” He looked straight at Tyrion. “Petyr Baelish has been playing you from the beginning. Even when you were drinking in King’s Landing, back when your lord father was still alive, he was already plotting to overthrow your family.”

“I think we’re all aware of that now. Too bad his plans didn’t end the way he wanted, just like yours.”

“You think this is over? People mock you, Imp. Everyone does. They mock you and they hate you, you and your whore of a wife.”

Tyrion leaned toward the man. “Say that word again, and you’re a dead man.”


“Don’t test me.”

“You don’t have it in you. I am a Lannister, more than you will ever be. You spare everyone, even the assassins. You will not kill me. You will never become a kinslayer. You’re not ready to do what’s necessary.”

“We will see. You have no idea what I’m ready to do for my family.”

“You promised I would keep everything if I told you truth, very well. I will tell you the truth. You ruined my plans back in the Westerlands. Lord Baelish approached me, and he promised me
everything I wanted in exchange for my help.’’

“What did he promise you?’’

“Casterly Rock.’’

Tyrion laughed in derision. “Then you’re really stupid.’’

“You’re the one who’s stupid to believe that your daughter is still alive, and to believe you are safe. I’m not the only one who worked for Littlefinger. The Spicers did too and many more. They will kill you. Your rule will be short.’’

“What did you say?’’ Tyrion asked very slowly. Sansa heard her heart pounding inside her chest.

“Do you really think Baelish would keep the baby of the Imp and his whore? He wanted your whore for himself, I could tell. He was obsessed with her. He would never have let her live. That’s why he told me to get rid of her.’’

“Where is she?’’

“I threw her into the sea as soon as I arrived on the ship who brought me here. That was quite a sight, seeing a little baby drown.’’

“You’re lying.” Yes, he was lying. He had to.

“No, I’m not. We didn’t need that child. Littlefinger didn’t want her. All he wanted was your whore. He had me for Casterly Rock, a true Lannister, unlike you. He had no use for your baby. And now, you will never have another. He chose himself everything your whore ate when she was in the Vale. He put something in her food to make sure she would never conceive a child again. House Lannister will die with you.’’

Sansa felt Arya’s hand sliding into hers. Her legs were weak and she felt she could collapse any time. Joanna. Tyrion was looking at Serion, pure hatred on his face.

“You said the word whore far too often.’’ He then pointed Lord Vance. “And you said nothing.’’ He walked away and stopped right next to his dragon. The beast looked agitated all of a sudden. He was far from quiet as he was before.

“The game is over. Viserion, dracarys!’’

“No, my lord, please, I have information…’’

The last words of Lord Vance Corbray were drowned by the flames that engulfed both men, and the last sounds they both made were cries as the fire consumed their bodies and they struggled for the last few seconds of their lives, hoping against all odds to put off the fire. As Sansa looked at their lifeless bodies, all darkened, there were only two things she could think about. The first was her daughter. Littlefinger said she would die if he died, and Serion Lannister just declared that he did kill her. He threw her into the sea, just like Tyrion Lannister had wanted to do with Tyrion. The second thing she thought about brought her hand over her belly. She would never have children again. Littlefinger poisoned her.

Chapter End Notes
You're free if you want to hate me.

Please review

Next chapter: Gerold
GEROLD II

The blue eyes were fixed on him. His brother laid dead, a severe injury where his heart was. The ice demon brought his sword of ice down on Gerold. He seized his brother’s sword and swung it, blocking the blow before it hacked his head off. On his knees, keeping his brother’s sword up, it was difficult to hold the enemy blade away. He could feel the cold emanating from it.

The pressure was released. The White Walker brought his weapon down again. The Valyrian steel blocked one more time. Gerold couldn’t get back on his feet. He had been injured and couldn’t stand. He was forced to stay like this, one knee on the ground, parrying every blow, struggling more to keep the deadly blade away from his flesh each time.

Another blow was so powerful that he couldn’t block it. Instead of stopping the motion of the enemy’s sword, the Valyrian steel followed its motion and ended up digging into the flesh of his left shoulder. He cried in pain. The icy sword traveled along the steel until it met his fingers. He lost two. The Valyrian steel sword of House Hightower slipped from his hand, and the next moment the icy sword of the White Walker was thrust into his heart.

As the weapon was pulled back, he collapsed on the ground. Blood pouring from his chest, and soon from his mouth. He turned to Garlan, the only one in his family he had ever been close to. He was gone, and soon Gerold would join him too. It was probably as good this way. If Garlan died, what was the point of staying amongst the living? What did he have worth living for?

As his vision blurred and he couldn’t distinguish the outline of the figures, he saw the White Walker moving away and disappearing. And then another shape appeared, followed by a second, much smaller. Their appearance didn’t muddle. It got clearer. The image slowly became much clearer, until he recognized the dark-brown hair and the green eyes of Mira. The boy looked like her brother Ryon, but he didn’t have her eyes. He had his. He tried to reach them, but his forces were exhausted. His vision decreased until only Mira and his son were left, and then they disappeared too.

He woke up, panting, feeling way too warm for the place where he slept. Thick furs covered him, and a fire was burning in the hearth. Gerold removed the furs and proceeded to sit. He regretted it immediately as pain stabbed in his right leg. He looked at the bandage. It still seemed fresh. Now he regretted not only to have sit too quickly, but also to have dropped furs on the floor, for the cold replaced the warmth. He began to shiver. He took back the furs that were still on the bed and put them on.

“How the Northerners do to live there?” he asked aloud. He was all alone in the room, and as such he got no answer.

Gerold slowly dropped off his bed, trying to put as fewer weight on his injured leg as he could. He limped to the nearby chair by the fireplace and sat there. The warmth emanating from the fire comforted him a little.

They had arrived in Castle Black two days ago. The journey from Highpoint had been mostly uneventful, until they arrived on the lands of the Gift, the band of lands south of the Wall that belonged to the Night’s Watch. The moment they reached it, the wights fell upon them. The dead
harassed them all their way to Castle Black. At night, the sentries were first doubled, then tripled. Men expected the dead to crawl to them from anywhere. This slowed down their progress. When they finally reached Castle Black, they had lost over a thousand men. And the ordeal was not over.

Wights were waiting for them in great numbers at the castle. Malcolm Branfield, left in charge of the army in the absence of Dickon Tarly, who had gone north with the queen and Jon Snow, barely had the time to mount a defence position before the dead came upon them in the thousands.

For Gerold, the battle was a blur, a series of fights and duels without end. He didn’t remember much of it. All of it was a confused melee involving tens of thousand people, alive and dead alike. Malcolm Branfield had provided him with a dagger made of dragonglass not long after they met the first dead in the Gift.

“I refuse to let the husband of my niece go into battle against White Walkers without this,” the man had told him.

The only part of the battle Gerold remembered very well was his duel with a White Walker. Unlike in his dream, he wasn’t killed, Garlan didn’t die since he was far away with the queen, he didn’t wield a sword made of Valyrian steel, and the White Walker didn’t walk away from their duel without a single scar. But like in his dream, Gerald had been injured to the leg and forced to drop on one knee. Instinctively, the moment he was on the ground, he drew the dagger of dragonglass, and as the White Walker was about to deliver the final blow, Gerold buried the dagger into his opponent leg, right at the same place where he was stabbed in his own.

Then Gerold had collapsed and fainted. The last thing he saw before he lost consciousness, except for all the men fighting all around him, was the face of the woman he loved.

In his dreams, Gerold didn’t faint on the battlefield because of his injury. He was killed, and he knew he could never see his wife again, and that he would never have the chance to see his son. The nightmare ended when he saw them together, looking at him. It was the moment he was brought back to reality. He could never remember what their expression told.

An old man who traveled with their army and occupied the unofficial position of healer came to see him at this moment and removed his bandage.

“The wound is healing. I suggest you limit your efforts for another two days, ser. After that, your limp should be gone.”

This was good news. The old man left him quickly. He had other wounded to attend, and not all of them were granted a personal chamber inside Castle Black like Gerold. Gerold grabbed a stick that helped him to walk for the time being. With great caution, he went down the stairs. It took him ten times what time he usually needed. He walked to the common hall where he found about a hundred men there. He took the stew they were serving and went to sit alone in his corner. He didn’t really wish to speak to anybody right now. Since Winterfell, he avoided company.

It seemed that company didn’t avoid him though, since Malcolm Branfield came to sit with him.

“Glad to see that you’re strong enough to walk again,” his uncle-in-law told him.

“Thanks,” he replied shortly. He still didn’t really feel like talking.

“Our men who have gone hunting around Castle Black found several wights, and strangely they didn’t seem hostile. I think this may have a link with the White Walker you killed.”

“How?” he asked, completely uninterested.
“The wights started to act weird right after you destroyed it. They no longer seemed to know what to do. Some wights started to fight each other, others fell limp on the ground, and others just threw themselves on us. But they were no longer acting as if they had orders, or objectives. It was like an army without a general, but worse. We keep finding more wights in the Gift, and our men say they never fight. They claim they look like dead men, and real dead men.”

“Good thing,” he said.

“Gerold, you probably saved thousands of men when you destroyed the White Walker. You should be proud.”

Of course, he should be proud. Yesterday, when he woke up for the first time, Ser Davos Seaworth had come to see him, telling about what happened after the White Walker was destroyed. It was just like Malcolm said. The Onion Knight thought that the wights had no master to obey anymore, just like when Jon Snow killed the Night King at Winterfell.

Gerold had risked his life, endangered it. He fought not only for his family, but for the whole Realm and for their new queen, and he had defeated a foe very few could boast to have defeated. He almost gave his life to kill it. He should feel something. Pride. Happiness. Relief. Satisfaction. Exhaustion. The problem was he didn’t feel a thing. He felt hollow. It was like this since he left Winterfell.

“Still thinking about my niece?” Malcolm asked.

Gerold didn’t answer. Of course, he thought about her. He always thought about her, and about his son, ever since Garlan told about him before they marched on the Wall.

You may come in. The words haunted him. Just before they left Winterfell, he went to see her. He knocked at her door and called for her. You may come in. He had not heard her voice in months. It was still as beautiful as he remembered. He had wondered back then if she would look any different, after going through a pregnancy and bringing their child into the world. He wanted to walk in, look at her, hold her into his arms and kiss her like he used to. He wanted to smell the scent of her hair, feel the warmth of her skin against his, gaze into her green eyes. But he didn’t walk in. He turned the handle, but barely pushed the door. He was afraid, afraid of how she might react to his presence.

He had abandoned her, to obey a family that barely respected him, a family that barely gave him any value. A family that had been ready to send him in the North to get rid of a thirdborn son. That was probably the best thing his grandfather had ever done for him, to arrange his marriage with Mira, even though Gerold’s happiness had never played any role in that decision.

He only opened the door enough to speak to her without having wood and stone splitting them apart. He told her many things. He didn’t remember them all. But there was one thing he remembered saying very clearly. He loved her. I love you. These were the last words he told her, and he thought that they might be the last he would ever tell her. Back then, he wasn’t sure he would come back to her, and he wasn’t sure either if he wanted to. Now he was almost certain to go back to her, and he still wasn’t sure if he wanted to see her again. In fact, he wanted nothing more than to see her again, but he dreaded to face her.

Abandoning a woman alone with a child when he’s yours is probably one of the things I despise the most. I hope you will never meet a Forrester again, because they all want to skin you alive right now. The words of Tyrion Lannister resonated in his head. The disdain and hatred on his face had remained in his memory, very clear. And when Gerold arrived at Winterfell, he had to face the judging expressions of the Forresters too. First Mira’s sister, Talia, and then her little brother Ryon. After that, he never had the courage to face his wife, and thus he ran away. For the second time, he left her behind.
Malcolm Branfield had been kinder with him, especially after the Second Battle of Winterfell. His uncle-in-law spent some time with him on their way north when he could spare the time, and they talked about Mira. Her uncle told him several anecdotes about her, some he knew about, some he didn’t know about. There were small details about the way she slept, the way she talked or moved that came to his mind during these conversations. They were all beautiful memories and he cherished them, for he was afraid there would be no more in the future.

“Look, this war is about to end. I can feel when a war is coming to an end, and this one is about to end,” Malcolm told Gerold. “You’ll see her again.”

A long silence lingered between them, until Gerold finally asked his uncle-in-law a question. “Have you ever been married, Malcolm?”

“No. There was a time when I almost got married, but in the end, I didn’t.”

“What happened?”

Mira’s uncle let his spoon into his bowl, his stew half-eaten. Gerold had barely touched it. “Not long before Robert’s Rebellion started, my father arranged a marriage between me and Marissa Edgerton. She was the youngest daughter of her family, the third, a little like I was the youngest son of mine. It was an appropriate match. My parents didn’t intend to leave me with nothing, so for Marissa’s father it was a rather good deal. He just had to bring enough money, which he had agreed to do. I suppose I would have lived happily with her, hadn’t it been the war.”

“Why didn’t you marry her after the war was over?”

“House Branfield technically disappeared after the war. After the Battles of the Trident and the Bells, some families in the Crownlands turned against the Mad King and sided with Robert Baratheon and Ned Stark. My father wasn’t among them. He fought for his king until the end. He died on the fields of battle, and so did my brothers. I only escaped the slaughter because I was in the North when Lord Stark and his son were killed. My brother-in-law kept me at Ironrath as a guest. His wife may have been a Branfield, but he was loyal first and above all to House Stark. I spent the entire war in the North, and when this was all over and my whole family was dead, well, there was nothing left to do but to accept the situation. Elissa was married to a Northerner, so she didn’t have to suffer from the fall of our family. She tried to negotiate for our family’s lands and titles to be given to me, provided that I would swear fealty to Robert Baratheon, but Robert didn’t see it that way. Finally, Robert decided to let me live if I swore fealty to him, but he forbade me from ever coming back on my family’s lands and forced me to give up any claim on them. I was allowed to live with my sister at Ironrath. Gregor was very kind with me. He tried to talk the king into giving me back my family’s rights, but to no avail. So he made up a place for me in his household. But I was left with nothing, and now I lived far from the Crownlands. Lord Edgerton cancelled the betrothal. I had nothing left to give to his daughter, let alone to him, and he didn’t want his house to be associated with mine. And so I spent the next twenty years in the North, seeing my nephews and nieces grow. In some way, they were the children I could never have.”

“Do you miss her sometimes?”

“I can’t really miss someone I never met.” Gerold frowned. “You only met Mira two weeks before your wedding. For myself, I never got he chance to meet the woman I was betrothed to. In fact, the union was decided without me, while I was visiting Elissa. I never saw Marissa, and she never saw me.”

“Do you think your life would have been better with her?”
“Maybe, though I wouldn’t have married her without the certainty that I could provide for her and our children. The moment the lands of the Branfields were taken away from our family, I knew I could never marry.”

“In this case, perhaps I should never have married your niece.”

“Don’t say that, Gerold.”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s useless. For a very long time, I wished that my family had never died, that we never lost our lands, but it is futile to wish for something that will never happen, or to wish that things had been different. It will not change the past. You are married now, you have a son, and thus you have a responsibility towards both your son and your wife.”

“What if my wife doesn’t want to see me again? What if she hates me?”

“Mira doesn’t hate you.”

“And how can you know that?”

“Because I am her uncle. I was there when she was born, and I saw her grow into the woman she is today. I didn’t see her much after she left for Highgarden, but I know her very well. I spoke with her when we stopped at Winterfell, and believe me, she doesn’t hate you. In fact, I’m ready to bet whatever you want that the only thing she wants is for you to come back.”

“Why would she want that? She told you?”

“No.” And here he foolishly hoped for the best. “But I know this is what she wants.”

“I doubt it.”

“Do you want to see her again?” Malcolm asked him.

“I don’t know.”

“Well, you will have no choice. When you ride south, you will have to speak to her. Why don’t you want to see her again? She is your wife.”

“A wife that I abandoned, when she was pregnant.”

“Well then, perhaps it’s time for you to repair the damage.”

“How?”

“By not leaving her alone again. Look, Mira has always been the most open-minded of the children of Elissa and Gregor. If someone can understand why you left her behind, that’s her.”

“But she’s the one I left behind. Do you really think she could forgive me that?”

“The only way for you to find out is to face her. If you don’t, you will regret it for the rest of your life. You’ll ask yourself all the time what would have happened, had you just talked to her.”

Gerold didn’t reply yet. He wanted to see Mira again, of course, but there was something else that stopped him from going back to her.
“What if I can’t forgive myself?”

Malcolm Branfield looked at him for a moment. “Well, in this case, I know someone who might help you with that.”

“Really?”

“My niece.” Gerold rolled his eyes. “Listen, my boy, you are a married man and a father. You have responsibilities. Your wife has duties as well, and Mira gets it. She’s not going to turn her back on you.”

“Why wouldn’t she? I did.”

“Because she is your wife. The problems are between the two of you, and you will never solve them unless you talk about it. I can see that you’re afraid, but my niece is afraid as well. She just had a baby, she’s all alone, her husband left her, and all that in the middle of winter and a war. How do you think she feels?”

A moment went on where none of them talked as Gerold thought about it. Of course, Gerold had thought about how Mira felt about him. What he never truly thought about was how his wife felt overall. He had ridden to Winterfell to fight the White Walkers. He was ready to die for her, and he still was, but he never thought about how she felt with all these dangers around. He never asked her. He never got the chance to.

“She needs you, Gerold, as much you need her from what I can see. All this will be over soon. You’ll have the chance to see her again, and this time open the door. My niece may be keeping it closed, but it’s not locked. You only have to open it.”

Gerold was lost in his thoughts for the rest of the time they spent eating their stew. Malcolm Branfield went back to work once it was over. Gerold lingered a little behind. His injury prevented him from going to patrol. At best, he could stand guard upon battlements or around camp’s limits, but there were no battlements to guard right now, and he was dispensed of guard duty for the time being. The healer feared his wound might fester or worse, considering it was made by no ordinary blade. For now, Gerold was healing normally. Apart from two missing fingers on his left hand, he got out of this war unscathed. He had lost one on his way to Ironrath back from Highpoint, and the second after he left Ironrath, before he found the army of Daenerys Targaryen. Maybe that was the price he had to pay for abandoning his wife.

Gerold finally left the common hall and walked back to his room, slowly progressing with the help of his stick, but quicker than he had while descending the stairs. Before he arrived at the steps of the towers where he temporarily resided, he came across two men. One wore the black cloak of the Night’s Watch. He was one of the few members of the Night’s Watch who survived the Fall of the Wall and the war that followed, and one Gerold tried to avoid as much as he could. The other was older, with a balding head and a greyish beard, but he didn’t wear the black.

The two men were engaged in a conversation, but the youngest of the two stopped as soon as he spotted Gerold. He stared at the knight, giving some attention to his stick, then returning his gaze to his face.

“You’re lucky you only got injured, Hightower. This White Walker should have ended you.”

He walked pass him, not without giving a punch into his shoulder. Gerold held his stick more firmly to avoid falling on the ground. The old man remained beside.
“Gared Tuttle doesn’t like you for sure, Ser Gerold,” Ser Davos Seaworth, the Onion Knight, told him.

“I’m not surprised. Sometimes, I hate myself,” he replied to the former Hand of Stannis Baratheon.

“Don’t. If we start to hate ourselves, we will never live. And you have no reason to do so. You probably killed the last White Walker, and without Valyrian steel. That’s no small feat.”

“Yes, I know,” he replied, bored.

“You miss your wife, don’t you?” the Onion Knight asked.

“Yes, I do. It’s been months now since I saw her.” Yes, he missed Mira, but there was so much more about her that weighed down on him, and he dared not to speak about it. Not again.

“I understand. I haven’t seen my Marya in years. She still lives in our keep, alone. I didn’t have news from her in an eternity. I don’t even know what happened to her when the Dragon Queen invaded the Stormlands, but I hope she’s well. I tell myself that I would know it if she had died.” The old knight sighed. “I was a better smuggler than a knight, a better knight than a King’s Hand, a better King’s Hand than a husband. I left my family behind to serve my king, and I wonder today if it was worth it. My only consolation is that by fighting the dead, I protected her. Sometimes we must leave the ones we love behind to protect them.”

If only that was the reason why Gerold had left Mira behind. As he thought so, they heard a powerful scream through the air. The scream wasn’t human, and it came from the other side of the breached Wall.

Chapter End Notes

Gerold is a POV who arrived quite late in the story. This is only the second chapter told from his perspective. If we think about it, Game of Thrones is mostly told by powerful people, or people who live very close to powerful people. More important, it is told from the point of view of the most powerful among the powerful (safe for exceptions like Brienne and people who are POVs for first or last chapters of certain of the books).

Gerold represents the point of view of the middle-class of medieval times, if there was one. Although he is a Hightower, he doesn't wield much more power than a commander in the Lannister army like Ser Addam Marbrand. He is some sort of crossing between the emerging knight trying to find his place in the world and the landed knight who is fighting for the people he loves and the lands he owns. I think this gives value to his perspective because, unlike Davos, he's not very close to those who rule and decide, and he doesn't have much of an influence on the decisions that are being taken. That doesn't make him less valuable or less important.

Please review

Next chapter: Jon
Chapter Notes

Hi everyone.

1,000,000 words!

With this chapter, "A Shadow and a Wolf" officially becomes the first ASOIAF and Game of Thrones fanfiction on Archive of Our Own to reach a million words!

It is crazy, and even crazier is the fact that this story isn't over yet at a million words.

I want to thank everyone who followed me on this journey that started over two years ago. I could never do this without your support. Every person who read this story drives me to keep writing. You cannot imagine how I like it when I see someone is reading, kudoing, commenting or bookmarking this story. Again, I thank you all.

Now, to the new chapter that I should have uploaded two days ago.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

JON XVI

They saw the Wall long before they reached it. They were fifteen men and women and two dragons who left Highpoint for the Lands of Always Winter. They were only six and one dragon who made it back to the known lands. Jon was the only one who came on Rhaegal’s back to survive. Thoros of Myr died at the hand of a White Walker, and Beric Dondarrion was killed trying to save his friend. With them, the Brotherhood Without Banners was gone. Jon’s Northerners died at the mountain where they stopped before the final battle, along with one of Toregg’s men. The second man died at the sacred site, overwhelmed by wights. Melisandre gave her life to defeat the dead, and Revan and Bastila remained behind to cover their retreat. Only one of the four Red Priests who had gone with them came back, and she was silent as a crypt.

None of them really spoke on their way back. Jon should have been relieved. They did it. They defeated the White Walkers, and for good this time. However, a feeling lingered that everything wasn’t completely over. That couldn’t be all. Jon didn’t believe an enemy could be defeated for good only by destroying some altar. Wars were not won with a secret weapon that solved every problem, or by cutting the head of one man. He knew that magic existed, but he didn’t believe in magical solution. They only destroyed the place where the White Walkers created themselves, or reproduced, however it was called. What if they built another one, or if there was already another one somewhere, something they were not aware of? And what of the White Walkers who still wandered the land? They could be anywhere from the North to the Lands of Always Winter. The territory north of the Wall was vast and mostly uncharted. A White Walker, or many White Walkers, could be hiding there. If any of this was true, then Melisandre, Revan and Bastila might have sacrificed their lives for nothing.

Jon didn’t know Bastila. They barely exchanged a few words. However, he found himself regretting Revan. For the brief time he knew him, Jon felt the weigh this man was bearing on his shoulders and the wisdom that came with it. During their discussion before the battle, for a very brief moment, he
had the impression to talk with someone who had seen as much if not more than Maester Aemon. The man was a Red Priest. He was supposed to be a fanatic, ready to do anything for the Lord of Light, just like Melisandre, and yet it wasn’t what Jon had found about the man, no matter how little he knew about him. Jon had talked with the surviving priestess, Meetra. She spent her time in contemplated silence, like most of them, and stared in a fire whenever they stopped. She didn’t tell him much, but she seemed to have known Revan in some way. There was one thing she said that he would never forget.

“He spent his life preparing himself for this moment. He gave up everything he held dear, all that so people who never knew him and never heard of him could be safe. All that so that millions of people who were complete strangers to him could live. And now he’s gone, and he will not come back.”

It reminded Jon of a discussion he had with Qhorin Halfhand a long time ago, when he just joined the Night’s Watch and he thought he understood what it was to be a sworn brother of the Night’s Watch. Your death will be a gift for them south of the Wall. They’ll never know what you’ve done. They’ll never know how you died. They won’t even know your damn name. But they’ll be alive because some nameless bastard north of the Wall gave his life for theirs. It wasn’t a nameless bastard who gave his life for theirs. No nameless person gave his life in that war. These people all had names, whether it was Revan, Beric, Thoros, Grenn, Pyp, Asher or Melisandre.

Jon thought he regretted the death of Melisandre more than anyone else’s death. He shouldn’t. The woman committed horrible crimes, but in the end she played a vital role in the defeat of their enemy. He knew when she used her powers now. She had helped Rhaegal to destroy the Walkers’ altar, increasing his strength like she did for him at Winterfell. Now she was dead, and finally Jon found that he could forgive her. It saddened him that the woman had to die for that. She saved him, twice, and he couldn’t forgive her while she was alive.

She had looked at him before the life left her. While he ran to Drogon at the end of the battle, he looked at her unmoving frame on the ground, and their eyes met for a brief moment. Then she closed hers and they never opened again. They left her body there. She wouldn’t even have a proper burial, like everyone they left behind. Jon hoped that the volcano would consume her body forever, preventing her from returning as a wight. The thought of a possible wight with powers like Melisandre’s sent chills along his spine.

Drogon followed the Wall, flying east, until they came upon the breach. From where they flew, high in the sky, Jon could see Castle Black, or what was left of it, along with many tents south of it. Their army made it. The banner of the three-headed dragon flew over the Wall. He allowed relief and some joy to ash over his worries and doubts for a moment. Things were getting better.

Daenerys led her dragon downwards. There wasn’t enough space for Drogon in the courtyard of Castle Black, so instead she landed south of it, outside its walls, between the castle and the large encampment for their army. They all climbed down, Jon, Daenerys, Meetra, Garlan, Dickon Tarly and his man Rikerd. They were the survivors, the only people left alive to tell about what happened in the Lands of Always Winter.

People gathered around them. They were all silent. No one dared to say a word. Jon supposed their men expected them to say something, but he couldn’t think of something to say about what happened. Finally, it was Drogon who broke the silence and screamed. A Dothraki burrowed under furs stepped forward and turned toward all the people behind him. He said something, spoke in his own language that Jon couldn’t understand. Then he drew his arakh and roared in a very bad Westerosi.

“Our queen is back!”
All the Dothrakis followed suit. They all shouted one name. Daenerys. Many other Westerosi did the same. The Northerners hesitated, but then some of the Free Folk joined the shouting, and a few Northerners imitated them. Soon, everyone was shouting Daenerys’s name. Jon looked at his aunt’s face. She betrayed no emotion as she was proclaimed queen by all the Seven Kingdoms.

Later, they were all together in one of the largest rooms of Castle Black that survived. The two Hightower knights, Garlan and Gerold, Lord Dickon Tarly, the Red Priestess Meetra, Jon, Daenerys, Ser Davos Seaworth, Toregg the Tall and Eddison Tollett. They told each other of the events that happened on each side of the Wall concerning the dead.

“Well, let’s hope these fuckers are gone for good,” Edd said once Jon was done relating the events that happened.

“It may be too soon to cry victory but judging from the wights we came upon in the Gift recently, I’d say whatever controlled them is gone,” Ser Davos said.

“There might still be White Walkers alive somewhere,” Jon pointed out.

“No, there are none,” Meetra declared and everyone looked at her. “The dead marched on the Wall because the servants of the Great Oher ordered them to. They received their orders from them and only from them. If they do nothing, it’s because they have no orders anymore, and this means the Others are gone.”

“But wights kept attacking us back there, in the north. They were still a danger.”

“Yes, but there were still Others to command them. There was at least one where we were, and Revan destroyed it while we flew away. Ser Gerold Hightower must have eliminated the last two days ago. That’s why the dead are doing nothing now. The last Other who could control them is gone. Without someone to control them, they are only walking dead without purpose, lifeless moving bodies without goals that will wander the land until they are burned or what’s left of their bodies fall apart.”

“So you say it’s over?” Daenerys asked the Red Priestess.

“Yes, it is, your Grace. Evil is vanquished.”

“Good.” That was all. The greatest enemy the Seven Kingdoms had ever known was defeated, and all Daenerys could find to say was good. Jon couldn’t find something else to say either. “Now that this is over, I believe it would be better to send back home the southern armies. Many are not accustomed to winter and they are longing for home.”

“We still need men to defend the Wall and rebuild it, and to hunt down the remaining wights,” Jon said. “I think it would be too presumptuous to believe we have already won. There’s a risk that the enemy could still be out there.”

“Jon Snow is right,” Toregg said. “I will believe the dead are gone when we haven’t seen them for another eight thousand years.”

“I agree,” Ser Davos intervened. “It would be better to keep some men. We need a few thousand, at the least. The Northerners and the Free Folk won’t suffice. Too many of them died in the war. We will also need supplies to last through winter…”

“We will provide what you need,” the queen interrupted, “but most of my men will go back home nonetheless. Someone told me the Northerners don’t like strangers on their territory, and I saw he was right since I arrived in the North.” She shot a look at Jon before she continued. “A long war just
came to an end, but this is only the beginning. It is easy to win a war, but it is far more difficult to rebuild when the war is over. I will give you all the help that you need, and I will make sure that the Wall is properly manned. I will not turn my back on you like the Baratheons did. Now, are there any news from the south?”

“Yes, there are. Tyrion Lannister wrote from Gulltown some time ago. Harrold Arryn is dead and most of the Lords of the Vale have bent the knee.”

“Most of them? That means some still resist.”

“According to Lord Tyrion, only minor lords who don’t have the means to fight you. They are merely small pockets of resistance. All the powerful lords have surrendered. Yohn Royce sent his pledge from Eastwatch-by-the-Sea.” The Lord of Runestone, one of the most powerful and influential men in the Vale, had managed to keep Eastwatch-by-the-Sea despite the attacks of the White Walkers ever since the Fall of the Wall. If he bent the knee, no one in the Vale would dare or would be able to resist for long. “The other lords of the Vale who are in the North did the same, and the army Harrold Arryn raised is gone. It seems that all the Seven Kingdoms are yours, your Grace. Tyrion Lannister is asking you to meet him at the Gates of the Moon. He is gathering the Lords of the Vale there.”

“Did he tell you if he found his wife and their child?”

Jon listened attentively to the answer. “The Lady Sansa is safe. She managed to escape from Harrold Arryn and Petyr Baelish who held her prisoner. However, there are no news from Joanna Lannister. She’s still missing.”

Jon was relieved to hear that Sansa was alive and well, though the news that her daughter was still missing were distressing. Jon hoped she had nothing. Sansa faced more than enough ordeals in the last years. She shouldn’t have to lose her daughter as well.

“There is also word of some trouble in King’s Landing between the Tyrells and the Martells,” Ser Davos continued.

“That’s no surprise. The Reach and Dorne have a history carved with blood,” Ser Garlan Hightower said.

“I will deal with this,” Daenerys declared. “I will head for the capital and stop by the Vale on my way to meet Lord Tyrion. In the meantime, the Dothrakis will head back to the south. They have no place this far north. I will order every house to give some men to keep the Wall and progressively call them back home.” She turned to Toregg. “I know the Free Folk are living on the lands of the Gift. I expect you to help in the defence of the North and to respect the laws of the Realm.”

“We will,” Toregg said after a moment. Tormund’s son had been present when Mance Rayder died, and the war against the dead had softened his resolve to not bend the knee, but Jon expected this to cause problems in the long term. You couldn’t expect the Free Folk to change that much.

“My men and I will stay in the North,” Ser Gerold Hightower said. “My place is there now, anyway, and I have some matters to settle before I go back in the Reach.”

No one opposed his decision. Volunteers to stay in the North would be rare. The rest of the meeting was spent deciding how many men would be dispatched along the Wall and how. When it was over, Daenerys asked Jon to stay. She needed to talk with him.

She looked at him for a moment without saying anything, her face expressionless. When she finally
spoke, it was with a detached voice.

“So, it’s over.”

“Aye. It’s over,” he repeated.

“What are you going to do?” He was surprised by the question.

“Just what I told you. I’ll say my vows again and join the Night’s Watch like I did years ago.”

She kept looking at him, her face betraying nothing. “Do you have to?”

“Your Grace?”

“I’ve been thinking about it, Jon.” He was surprised that she called him only by his first name. Previously, she always used his full name, Jon Snow. “You are the only family I have now. I would like you to come back to King’s Landing with me.”

Jon was caught off guard by this. That was the last thing he expected. “Your Grace, I do not understand.”

For the first time today, he thought he saw some emotion on her face. “Back in the north, before we went to the place of the White Walkers, before the battle, I wanted to tell that if I was to die, then the Iron Throne would be yours. I still believe it. I want you to stay by my side and help me rule the Seven Kingdoms. I tried to rule by myself in Slaver’s Bay and I failed. I cannot rule alone. I need help.”

“You have advisors for that, and Tyrion Lannister is your Hand. You told me you trusted him.”

“Yes, I do, but he’s not my family. You are. I need you by my side, Jon.”

Her eyes were pleading him to accept. She was being honest. She really wanted his help. “I can’t.” He shook his head. Stannis once offered him to be Warden of the North, and he refused. He wouldn’t accept a similar offer today. “I can’t. I’m needed here.”

“The dead are gone.”

“We don’t know for sure. And even if they’re gone, who is to say they will never come back? I swore an oath to protect the realms of men. I have to uphold it. I thought I was released from it when I died, but I was wrong. Melisandre said she didn’t know why I came back, but I think I do. I am the watcher on the walls, the shield that guards the realms of men. I tried to be a king and I couldn’t even defend my own country. My uncle Eddard Stark went to King’s Landing to be Hand of the King and he died. Robb marched on the south and he died too. My family was never meant to rule the Seven Kingdoms. We were meant to protect them, and that’s what I intend to do, here. Your place is in the capital, your Grace. Not because it is your right, but because you deserve it. You just saved the Seven Kingdoms. We would never have won against the dead without you. Without you, we would all be dead. You’re the queen, and I’m a sworn brother of the Night’s Watch. My place is here.”

She looked at him for a long moment. “There’s no way to change your mind?”

“No.”

She smiled sadly. She seemed disappointed. Not angry, but disappointed. “Well, it is true what they say about the Starks. They remain true to their word. We have that in common. Just know that you will always be welcomed in King’s Landing.”
“I cannot speak for the future Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch, but as I am concerned, you’ll be welcomed at the Wall anytime.”

She frowned. “I thought you were Lord Commander.”

“I left the Watch and came back. If I am to be Lord Commander again, it will be my brothers’ choice.” No Lord Commander had been elected after him. Edd was just accepted by the other sworn brothers without discussion, but the Lord Commander needed to be elected.

She nodded. “A Targaryen in the North and another in the south. We will be everywhere.”

She looked at him for a very long time, sadness plain. Right now, Jon wanted to go back with her, but he made a promise to stay at the Wall. He had to make sure things were truly over. Azor Ahai left before he finished the work, and it cost the lives of hundreds of thousand within the last few years. And Jon wasn’t dumb, he knew many Northerners still wanted him for their king. Joining the Night’s Watch again was the only way no one would try to use him against his aunt.

“Farewell, Jon Snow.”

She made it to leave the room, but before she did, Jon told her one last thing. “Dany, I’m sorry for Rhaegal.”

She turned back to look at him. “Dany? It’s been a long time since someone called me that?”

With a last smile, she left, for good. Jon left as well some time later and walked toward the Wall. He looked at its top. He remembered his first nights patrolling it. He was assigned one mile of it to guard, and the watch commander told him to walk along this mile to keep his blood from freezing. Tyrion Lannister had joined him and pissed off the edge of the Wall during one of his guards, right before he left. How could Jon have known back then that the little man would marry Sansa and become the Hand of the Queen for his aunt? It was also there that his uncle Benjen stood with him the first time he went to the top of the Wall, and before he left for a ranging to never came back. According to Bran, he was still alive out there, somewhere, kept alive by the magic of the Children of the Forest. It was also at the top of the Wall that he spoke of Ygritte to Sam before Mance Rayder attacked and Ygritte died. She died in his arms, an arrow shot between her breasts because she hesitated when she had the opportunity to kill him. So much had happened here. There had been tragedies, but there were also good memories. He made friends, met good people, and although some were gone, they had died for a reason, not for a king or for glory, but for the people south of the Wall, so they could live because nameless bastards, priests, farmboys and singers gave their lives for them. That was Jon’s home, and it would always be his home.

The men had begun to erect new barricades, but they were still in the early works, so it was easy for Jon to walk through them. It was a day without snow, and after the long journey on dragon’s back, the wind that struck his face felt like a light breeze. A red figure stood with her back turned on him. For a moment, Jon believed it was Melisandre, but he quickly realized that instead of the long and flaming red hair of the woman who brought him back from the dead, this one had very short brown hair. She was the only priest to survive the Lands of Always Winter. Jon walked to stand by her side and looked to the north, to the real North. Not far from there, he burned Ygritte's body. All that happened so recently, and yet it seemed like a lifetime ago.

“If it wouldn’t bother you, Jon Snow, I will stay at Castle Black for the time being,” she told him.

“I won’t say no.” After seeing what the Red Priests could do, he wouldn’t turn down their help.

“They say that life and death are engaged into a battle that never ends. The Others are gone, that I’m
certain, but the Great Other will find a way back. Somehow, he will come back, stronger. Perhaps in another form. Perhaps this time he will not be wielding a sword or bringing winter down on us, but he will come back, and we will have to be ready.”

“We’re fighting an enemy that’s not going anywhere,” Jon summarized, thinking again of the words of Qhorin Halfhand.

“Right. He will always be there.”

“Why are you doing this? Giving your lives for people you don’t even know?”

“Why do you?”

Her blue eyes stared at him. “I don’t know,” he confessed. “It seems to be the right thing to do.”

“We serve the light, Jon Snow. Our duty is to spread it, for where there is no light, darkness settles, and it stays. The only way to stop the world from turning into ashes is to shed light upon the darkness so it retreats in corners hopefully no one ever goes to visit.” She looked at the horizon. “Darkness had taken a hold on this country. Now light is upon it, but light can always leave. I will not allow it. I will stay, until the Lord tells me otherwise.”

A long silence followed.

“Do you think Revan is truly dead?” Jon Snow asked her.

“This time, I’m afraid he is,” she said in a heavy voice. “But this is not the first time he disappears only to come back when we need him the most. I’m not giving up on him, not yet. The Lord of Light may still have plans for him, just like he has for every one of us.” That was a change from when they talked during their journey.

“Who was he, really?”

The Red Priestess Meetra turned to look at him. “I think you already know, Jon Snow.”

She walked away and went back to Castle Black. Jon stood there alone and stared at the horizon, mountains and forests ahead of him. Could Revan have survived? They didn’t see him die. He even destroyed the White Walker he fought as they flew away. Meetra just told him he knew who Revan was. Jon had a mad, stupid idea of who Revan might be, but it couldn’t be true. No, Meetra was wrong. Ygritte and Melisandre had been right all along. You know nothing, Jon Snow.

Chapter End Notes

It seems the enemy was defeated for good, but let's remember nothing is ever certain in Game of Thrones, and like a small man once said, "Every time we deal with an enemy, we create two more."

The dynamic between Jon and Daenerys is not the same as in the show. When I started writing this, Season 7 had not aired yet and I didn't plan for a Jon/Daenerys pairing. The nature of their relationship is more a brother/sister rather than lovers, even if among the Targaryens, the distinction is sometimes hard to make.

As for Revan, he will not appear again in this story. Initially, he was only supposed to
be a cameo, like most of the Red Priests with names of Star Wars, Harry Potter, Black Mage and Witcher characters, but he ended as quite an important character due to my fascination for this Star Wars character. I ended giving him quite an important role. I tried to keep him in the back stage, but I'm afraid I failed and couldn't resist to make him important for the story. And for those of you who have theories about the true identity of Revan in this story, everything will be revealed when the epilogue is uploaded, along with a few other mysteries.

Please review

Next chapter: Mira
“We will leave in the morning,” Talia told her. “You feel ready for this?”

“I made the journey with Rodrik inside me. I think I can do the same with him in my arms, especially if there are no dead left.”

She looked at her son, who was sleeping peacefully as she carried it with her. She and Talia were heading back to her chambers. Mira had recovered from the delivery, though she still had to be careful to not overextend herself according to the maester’s recommendations. She wished Ortengryn had been there to help her deliver. He would have loved to bring a second generation of Forresters in the world.

“I thank you, Talia, for organizing everything.”

“It’s normal that I do it, Mira. You’re taking care of Rodrik. You don’t need to be bothered by departure preparations. Can I hold my nephew for a moment?”

“Of course.”

She carefully gave Rodrik to Talia. It was a welcomed relief for her arms. She didn’t realize that carrying a child over a whole castle could take a toll on your arms. Though she didn’t complain about it. Rodrik had been a light for them all in their darkest hour.

They were about to leave Winterfell, Mira, Talia and their remaining men who didn’t die in the war and who didn’t leave with Lord Glover after the Third Battle of Winterfell. Ironrath was occupied by their men again, and the Glovers had claimed again Deepwood Motte. They had chosen to remain in Winterfell while the war against the dead still raged, but now that the White Walkers were defeated, Mira and Talia had agreed they could go back home. It should have been a time for rejoice, but neither of the two sisters felt very joyful in truth.

They arrived at Mira’s chamber. Talia placed very carefully Rodrik in his crib. Mira looked at her son, envying him. He didn’t know about everything that happened all around him. She wished she could just sleep like him and not care about problems, although she knew it was a luxury she would never be able to allow herself in the future.

She and Talia left Rodrik to sleep and went out into the corridor.

“Is there any chance that he may come back?” Mira asked.

“I don’t think so. He made himself very clear.”
“How could he leave like that?”

“How could he leave like that?”

“Don’t blame Ryon too much, Mira. He’s been through a lot. Sometimes, it’s easier to run away, like for Asher.”

“But Asher had no choice, he was exiled. Ryon… He didn’t have to do this. He could have stayed with us. How could he flee when things were finally about to go back to normal?”

Talia looked away for a moment before she refocused her attention on her sister. “Ryon was there when Ethan was killed, Mira. He was there too at Asher’s wedding, when Mother died. He’s lost everyone, and he’s not even ten. For him, things will never go back to normal because they were never normal. I don’t think he could have come back and lived with us, not with the ghosts of everyone else.”

“I know.” Mira sighed. “It’s not easy for anyone. We lost so many people. Who could have guessed that our parents, Ethan, Rodrik and Asher would all die when this war began? Ironrath will never be the same. And now that Ryon is gone…” Mira looked at her sister. “Please tell me you’re not going to leave you too.”

“I won’t. I will never be far, Mira, even after I’ll be married. You will never be alone. And don’t forget, you have Rodrik.”

That was a small consolation. If only she didn’t have to think about Gerold each time she looked at her son. Rodrik also made her think of Ryon. He had only been a baby when she left Ironrath, and in her mind he was still that little baby she left behind when she rode for Highgarden. Perhaps that was why his departure was so hard for her. She couldn’t believe that the little baby who made her mother so happy, the first baby Mira held in her arms, was gone and would never come back.

The news of the final defeat of the army of the dead had arrived yesterday, and Brandon Stark, who came back from Highpoint and was acting Lord of Winterfell for the time being, announced it in the Great Hall. The news was welcomed by loud cheers. The war was over. But the merriment Mira and Talia felt was short-lived, for this morning they found Ryon’s chamber empty with a note left on his pillow.

With his childish handwriting, Ryon told them that he was leaving with Beskha for Essos. The news had been shattering. They couldn’t send their men after him, nor could they stop him from leaving. Ryon was officially Lord of Ironrath after Asher died, and he had full freedom to leave the North if he wanted. Their men had to let him go. He gave them the order just before he left, along with an order to not warn his sisters before they found his note.

The words he left hurt. He said he could never live again in the North, not after everything that happened, and that he was heading for the Free Cities to live like Asher did. He said that everyone was gone and that he had no reason to stay here. Mira would have thought that she and Talia meant something for their little brother. Apparently, they didn’t mean enough. Mira had been away for so long, and Ryon was separated from Talia for a very long time as well when he was a prisoner of House Whitehill.

Ever since they were reunited, Mira noticed how often Ryon was with Beskha. He even ate with her, most of the time apart from them, and seldom talked to his sisters. Perhaps it had been partially their fault. When Mira learned she was pregnant, she focused her attention on her baby and Talia helped her. They drifted away further from Ryon. Their little brother, as far as they knew, spent his days training with Asher’s friend. The woman had taken a liking on Ryon, and somehow she had become his big sister, more than his actual sisters.
Now Ryon was gone. Mira hoped he would come back. Perhaps it was only a folly of childhood, but she didn’t think so. Ryon himself had given orders to their men to not tell Mira and Talia about his leaving before they found his message. Mira felt that she had lost her last brother. She would head back to Ironrath tomorrow with the last sibling she had left, her little sister Talia, who grew taller every day and would get married soon.

“Do you think Father and Mother ever thought that this could happen to us?” Mira asked her sister.

“I don’t know. But I guess… Mother lost her family when she was quite young. Perhaps… perhaps she feared it, and that’s why she so desperately tried to kill Ludd Whitehill.”

“Gerold took care of him in the end.” Mentioning her husband was difficult for her, but she kept doing it all the same.

“I don’t think we can foresee that kind of things. I don’t think we can be prepared to lose all our family. How can we?”

“We can’t,” Mira replied. “We can’t.”

She tried to imagine losing her son, and she couldn’t. How could Sansa be feeling right now, her daughter’s fate being unknown? Mira tried to imagine her state if she was in her situation, and it was impossible.

“What are you going to do about your husband?”

“I don’t know, Talia. I guess… I should just hope that he comes back.”

“And what will you do if he does? I mean, how will you know that he’s not coming back because you’re the Lady of Ironrath now?”

*My family gave me this army because they believed that I could become Lord of Ironrath.* Gerold’s words played in her mind. Now that Ryon was gone, the laws of succession made Mira the Lady of Ironrath. Once again, Mira found herself at the head of what was left of her family, the first lady of House Forrester, something she never envisioned nor wished for. The Hightowers got what they wanted in the end.

“I guess we will have to find out,” Mira finally, unable to think of something else to do.

In truth, there was little they could do, even if they wanted. She and Gerold were bound for life and made their vows before the altar. Their marriage was consummated. Rodrik was the undeniable proof of it. Even if there was still a High Septon in King’s Landing or that a Council of Faith could be summoned, they couldn’t declare an annulment.

They could try to stop Gerold from ever entering Ironrath. Her father’s men would most likely stand by her decision, especially after the Hightowers abandoned them the first time, but nothing was guaranteed. The men of House Ironrath were exhausted by the recent conflicts and if the Hightowers decided to take matters in hand and to seize Ironrath by force, Mira doubted they had the strength to fight them. Of course, they could ask the help of House Stark, but even if the Wardens of the North stood for House Forrester, the Hightowers would be supported by Daenerys Targaryen without any doubt. The North had resisted the advance of the new queen in the beginning, to the opposite of the Reach that sided with her almost at the very moment she landed in Westeros. Both on military and politic grounds, Mira didn’t see her winning.

The only way to keep Ironrath out of the claws of House Hightower was to convince Gerold’s family to give up any claim on the castle by somehow agreeing that Mira was Lady of Ironrath and
that Gerold wasn’t its lord, but she didn’t see how or why the Hightowers would agree to this. And to keep Gerold out of Ironrath, he and Mira would need to agree on some arrangement that would make them live apart. That wasn’t something Mira wanted.

She knew her husband well, or so she thought. They had spent a lot of time together, and they even had a son. She also knew how much pressure he received from his family. And she didn’t think he married her for Ironrath. If that had been the case, he wouldn’t have nearly killed his eldest brother after he slapped her in the face.

Mira knew what family could mean for someone. She had endangered Lady Margaery’s position in King’s Landing with her attempts to help her house. Somehow, she wasn’t afraid of her husband. She still resented him for leaving her with Rodrik, but if the sound of his voice had been any indication at Winterfell, he was truly sorry for what happened. The Book of the Father taught not to forgive up to seven times, but to seventy-seven times. Certainly, she could give her husband a second chance. If not his family, she could give him that chance, for she knew the Hightowers would want Ironrath and that it was all that interested them.

Mira had come to realize that the whole problem could be summarized to her relationship with her husband. Rodrik was a Hightower, and there was no way around it. With Ryon’s departure and all her brothers dead and without children, she would be the last Forrester to rule over Ironrath, no matter what happened. From there on, all that mattered was a reconciliation with her husband.

“I’ll need to talk to him, Talia. There’s no other way.”

“Alright, but I don’t like it,” her sister said bitterly.

“It’s not as if we had a choice. We cannot kill him. And I forbid you to do so,” she added as a warning.

Talia frowned. “You still love him.”

“He’s my husband, and the father of my child. I know you didn’t see him at his best, but if you had known him when we lived at Oldtown, you would understand.”

“If you say so, but I warn you, he won’t get Ironrath so easily. I’ll have my word to say.”

“He won’t get Ironrath, Talia,” Mira reassured her, placing a hand on her shoulder and speaking firmly. “Ironrath belongs to us, and it will be ours as long as we live. And one day, it will be Rodrik’s. The Hightowers won’t take it from us.”

They shared a smile and remained together for a little while longer before Talia went back to oversee the preparations for their departure.

Later in the evening, not long before the dinner was served, Mira went to see Brandon Stark. Sansa’s little brother seldom left his rooms. Meera Reed was one of the few people to see him. Even at dinners he only stayed the minimum time required and retired to his chambers early in the evening. He was nowhere to be seen either during breakfast or lunch. He reminded Mira of Lord Leyton Hightower who was seldom to be seen as well, remaining at the top of the Hightower most of the time.

Mira was welcomed inside the apartments of the Lord of Winterfell. Sansa’s brother was waiting for her, and Meera Reed was with him like always. He smiled as soon as she entered.

“Lady Mira, I’m glad to see you.”
“Thank you, my lord. Lady Meera,” she made a sign toward the daughter of Howland Reed, now the Lady of Greywater Watch. The young woman, who was about the same age as Mira but much smaller, forced a smile on her lips.

“Please, sit,” Lord Brandon told her. He shifted uneasily in his chair. Sansa told her that her brother used to climb to walls and that he loved to run and ride. The boy he was back when he lost the use of his legs must have been utterly broken.

The acting Lord of Winterfell turned toward Meera Reed. “Could you leave us alone a moment, please?”

“Of course. We won’t see each other ever again soon, so why not start now?”

She stormed out of the room and left Bran with a hurt expression. He forced himself to smile again after a moment and looked once again at Mira. “Please excuse her. She had a lot to deal with recently.”

“Yes, I know what happened to her father and her brother. I don’t blame her,” Mira replied. Sometimes, she wanted to snap as well. It was a chance that she learned to retain if not conceal her emotions while she was in the Reach.

“Me neither. She had a lot to bear on her shoulders. We all had. Look at me, the Three-Eyed Raven. And you now, the Lady of Ironrath. I’m sorry for Ryon.”

She nodded to acknowledge his support. “We’re leaving for Ironrath tomorrow, my lord. I came to thank you for granting us your hospitality and a refuge in these difficult hours. I also want to assure you that my family will not forget your kindness, and that we are all very grateful. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. My family did their duty, and I’m glad you survived you, your sister, and your son. How is Rodrik?”

“He’s fine, and growing up.”

Brandon Stark smiled again. “Take care of him, and make sure that he’s prepared for when the time comes. I wasn’t ready when the war started. My parents should have prepared me better, but instead my lady mother wanted me to stay a child as long as possible. My lord father was better. He always said that winter is coming.”

“Winter is coming,” Mira echoed. Indeed, the Starks were always right.

“He led me to see an execution not long before he headed south,” Brandon Stark continued. “He told me that the man who passes the sentence must swing the sword, and he forced me to look at the man he beheaded. That man… he ran away from the Night’s Watch because he had seen the White Walkers, and we didn’t believe him. If we had, I wonder if everything could have been different. My father may never have gone to King’s Landing, and maybe all this war would never have happened.”

“No, indeed. Things would have been very different.” She thought of all the people she lost, all the people who might have lived had the North prepared for the invasion of the dead instead of warring in the south.

“Are you upset, Mira?” he asked.

She frowned. “Upset? Upset about what? About you?”
“No, about Ryon and the fact that he left.”

She closed her eyes. “I am. I didn’t see it coming.”

He nodded in understanding. “Meera is upset too.” He sighed deeply. “I’m going to tell everyone at dinner, so why not tell you now. I’m leaving, me too.”

“Leaving? Where?”

“I’m heading north. I’m returning north of the Wall, truth be told.”

“You can’t do this!” she exclaimed, perhaps a little too loud.

“I have to.”

“Why?”

“I have to.” He didn’t give her further explanations.

“You can’t do this. You are the Lord of Winterfell.”

“No, I’m not. I already made it clear to Daenerys. Sansa is going to be Lady of Winterfell and Wardeness of the North. She’s capable of that, I know it. She will be far better to rule than I am.”

“How can you say that?”

“I know it, that’s all.”

“But you can’t abandon your family.” Not you too. “You have sisters and you have a brother too, and they need you.”

“I know what you think, Mira,” he told her. “You think I’m not caring for the people I love, like Ryon.” As much as she would like to deny it, she couldn’t, for it was the truth. “But I care about them, and only that is a reason for me to leave.”

“How is it? You’re abandoning them, right when the war is over, right when you could all be together again.”

“We won’t be together again, Lady Mira. We’re no longer children. Jon is back at the Wall, and soon he will make his vows again. Arya cannot stay in one place for long. She will never be a lady and live in a castle, no more than my aunt. And Sansa… she has a husband, and a daughter, a life at Casterly Rock. No one needs me, but I’m needed north of the Wall.”

“For what?”

“To make sure the Long Night never comes back.”

He was stubborn. Mira had heard people saying that Brandon was close to madness, and she could understand their claim.

“How will you do that? You can’t even walk.”

He didn’t seem affected by the remembrance of his crippling. “Meera will accompany me to Castle Black, and from there I’ll have other people to help me. Don’t worry. I risk nothing, not now that the White Walkers are gone. I will leave soon. I will only stay for the time needed to organize everything for when I will be gone.”
She sighed. “That’s why Meera Reed looked so upset?”

“Yes,” he admitted on a regretful tone.

“Well, I hope you’ll be happy north of the Wall.”

“I’m not looking for happiness, Mira. I’m looking to be useful. I’m trying to do my duty.”

She almost scoffed. “If people only do their duty and are never happy for it, what’s the point to live? I wish you good luck, my lord.”

She stood up and left, but as she closed the door Brandon Stark told her one last thing.

“He doesn’t care about Ironrath, Lady Mira. He’s coming back for you.”

She walked away back to her chambers, where Rodrik was waiting for her. Ryon abandoned her, and now Bran was abandoning Sansa. Were families destined to be torn apart in times of peace and in times of war all alike? Mira and Talia lost four brothers, five if they included Josera Snow who died inside these walls when the White Walkers attacked Winterfell. Sansa and her sister Arya lost three brothers. Margaery lost Ser Loras. Who didn’t lose a brother yet?

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked the discussion between Bran and Mira. I am closing all the story arcs with these last chapters, but there is still one chapter left for those two characters to close their arc for good.

I think there’s some sort of fatality in Game of Thrones that we get to see in our world too, though at a much smaller dramatic scale. Childhood is a time of innocence for most characters, at least those who grew up in wealthy and noble families, where brothers and sisters grow up together, but when war breaks childhood ends and they all must go separate ways in order to survive and to help their family. The same thing keeps happening today, families get separated as children grow up, though most of the time they have more time before it happens since our societies are more stable, at least in occidental countries.

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
Tyrion XXXVI

Chapter Notes

Now that the White Walkers are defeated, Daenerys reinforces her hold on the Seven Kingdoms, and Tyrion is there to help.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

TYRION XXXVI

The Gates of the Moon were larger than the Eyrie, but even they weren’t large enough to welcome all the lords of the Vale, powerful or not. Tyrion had sent the order to all the lords and knights who held some lands, even the thinnest, to come to the Gates at this date and to swear fealty to Daenerys Targaryen, or else their lands and titles would be taken away from them and given to loyal subjects of the queen. Most had complied and rode day and night to arrive in time.

Now he stood before the Gates at the side of the queen over an improvised platform, with all the lords of the Vale standing before them, surrounded by Unsullied. They had thought to hold the event in the castle’s courtyard, but it soon proved to be impractical. It was probably for the better, anyway. The view over the sky was much better this way. With Tyrion and Daenerys stood Sansa and Arya, Grey Worm, two Dothraki commanders, Shagga and Timett, and Nestor Royce represented the Vale. Like it or not, even though he resisted for a long time, he was the first lord in the Vale to bend the knee to Daenerys Targaryen. Some who were in the North had made their intentions clear before him, but they were not in the Vale right now.

“House Pryor of Pebble swears fealty to Daenerys Targaryen,” Lord Pryor declared, one knee on the ground.

“Rise, Lord Pryor, as Lord of Pebble,” Daenerys replied.

It had gone that way for an hour now. All the houses of the Vale had to swear loyalty to the new queen, one after the other, which made for a long procession. Not long ago, they were still fighting her, the queen who brought foreign invaders to their lands, but after seeing what hordes of Dothrakis, legions of Unsullied, fierce men of the hill tribes and a dragon could do to their armies, they seemed more open to the idea of allowing a woman who grew up on another continent to rule them. The presence of two dragons behind Daenerys and Tyrion who towered everyone was another convincing argument.

“House Sunderland of Sisterton swears fealty to Daenerys Targaryen.”

Tyrion watched as each lord made his oath of loyalty. All of them who before swore by the Seven they would never bend the knee before the Dragon Queen and the Imp now did it without hesitation. The Knights of the Vale, the most feared and respected warriors in the Seven Kingdoms, had been easily defeated by the men they called savages. They were men who draped themselves into pride and called it honor. Tyrion had met many like these through his life, men who thought themselves to be better than the others because they had a bloody title. Sellswords like Bronn and clumsy squires like Prodrik had more honor than they ever had, and they killed them. They kidnapped Sansa, forced her to marry another man, worked for a brothelkeeper who promised them gold, lands and titles, and took away his daughter, a baby. How surprising that they didn’t side with Cersei and Joffrey during
the War of the Five Kings. They had a lot in common.

“House Hunter of Longbow Hall swears fealty to Daenerys Targaryen.”

Tyrion looked at the men who stood by Daenerys Targaryen. He wished Nestor Royce was kneeling like the others, but the reality of politics had won over his deepest desires and made him agree with the queen to keep him by her side while she received the submission of the Vale. He was more satisfied to see Shagga and Timett on the platform. The hill tribes had bled during the War of the Five Kings and the conquest of the Vale. They had helped to defend King’s Landing at the Battle of Blackwater, and they were still despised by the whole Realm. They had earned their place and they deserved the lands of the lords who didn’t come today. Tyrion had found they had more honor than those knights kneeling before them. The same could be said of the Dothrakis. Their ways may be barbaric and violent, but they were no worse than the men of Westeros. He could still hear the complaints of Westerosi saying the Dothrakis would burn their castles to the ground, ravage their lands and rape their women. Bloody hell, the knights and the lords of the Seven Kingdoms did the same. How did it matter that the powerful came from Westeros or from Essos? The powerful would always prey on the powerless. That was how they became powerful in the first place. As for Grey Worm and the other Unsullied, even though Tyrion would loudly mock their lack of certain parts, they had his respect and even his sympathy for their discipline, their loyalty and the harsh treatments that had to go through during their training.

“House Belmore of Strongsong swears fealty to Daenerys Targaryen.”

Tyrion looked at one of the most powerful lord of the Vale who befriended Littlefinger. Ser Nestor said the man was corrupted. No wonder the brothelkeeper managed to get in the good graces of this man so easily. Tyrion wondered if he had played any part in Sansa’s kidnapping.

“House Waynwood of Ironoaks swears fealty to Daenerys Targaryen.”

Lady Anya had been one of the few who didn’t fight with Lord Corbray against Tyrion. She had removed her troops from his army as soon as she learned that Sansa was in the Vale and almost forced to marry Harrold Arryn. If Tyrion allowed his emotion to lead his choices, she would be one of the few people below him he wouldn’t burn alive.

Tyrion looked at Daenerys Targaryen, his half-sister. The thought was still odd for him, though not as much as it was before. The discussion they had yesterday had helped. Daenerys had just arrived with Drogon from Castle Black. Tyrion had been intrigued to see that Rhaegal wasn’t with her. First, he thought she might have left him with Jon Snow, but that was before they sat before a generous jug of wine and that she explained him all the events that happened in the North. Considering his current state, Tyrion had been thrilled to hear about their journey in the Lands of Always Winter and the story of a place where all the White Walkers were created, not to mention that Jon Snow was capable of riding Rhaegal. That was until she told him about the battle they had with the dead. Fewer than half of the people who went north returned, and Rhaegal was one of those who were left behind.

When she arrived at this part of the story, Tyrion noticed how hard it was for Daenerys. She really cared about her dragons. Strangely enough, Tyrion fully understood what she meant. He had quickly grown very fond of Viserion, and after losing Joanna he knew what it was to lose someone you truly loved.

“I was there when he was born. I hatched his egg myself and fed him to my breast,” she said. “I watched him grow for years. I travelled through the Red Waste, I faced the Thirteen and the warlocks in Qarth, I slaughtered the Good Masters of Astapor to save them. I worried about them all when they were young, but now… I never really thought one of them would die, not after they grew up.”
“That kind of things never happen when we expect,” Tyrion had replied.

“No. Things never go the way we want.”

“What about Jon Snow?”

Another shadow passed over her face. “He joined the Night’s Watch.”

“Again,” Tyrion sighed.

“He will be no threat to me, for sure.” She wasn’t happy about the way it ended obviously, and Tyrion discovered why instantly. “I offered him to be my heir, to follow me in King’s Landing, and he refused.”

“The Starks are not known for their ambition. I think Robert Baratheon used to say that Eddard Stark only wanted to stay in the North and bury his face in the snow. It seems he gave that to his nephew.”

“He’s more Stark than Targaryen,” she summarized. Tyrion raised his cup and drank. “Oddly enough, that might be the thing I liked about him.”

“You don’t like your family very much?” he asked.

“My father was the Mad King, and my brother would certainly have been the second Mad King had he been given the chance to sit on the Iron Throne. Ser Barristan used to talk fondly of Rhaegar. He said he was a good man, but I never got the chance to know him. Now the dragon I named after him is gone, and his son will spend the rest of his life at the Wall. I guess I’ve lost him for good.” She took a sip of the wine goblet she held in her hand. “Thank you for taking care of Viserion. I don’t know what I would do if lost him too.”

“Well, I didn’t do much, except riding him. And the Knights of the Vale have more pride than prowess into battle, so he was never really into much danger.”

“Still, I thank you.”

“You didn’t like your other brother? Viserys? Not at all?”

She looked away, lost in her thoughts. “I have some good memories of him, but there are few. I mostly remember how he used to vent his anger and his frustration on me. He said that I woke up the dragon when he did, and most of the time I had done nothing. In the end, he threatened to carve my child out of my belly. When he said that, he was no longer a brother to me. I’m not even sure if I ever was his sister.”

Tyrion nodded. “I probably never was Cersei’s brother either. She never loved me.”

“Well, she put a price on your head and the heads of your wife and your child. She didn’t seem quite different from the brother I knew, and she did burn King’s Landing.”

“Indeed. I guess madness exists in all families. Though there were times when I almost liked her, back when her children were still alive, and before my father died. She loved her children, no matter how despicable she was. That was her one redeeming quality, that and her cheekbones.”

They remained silent for a moment afterwards, both lost in their thoughts.


Tyrion detailed her the events of the Vale just like she did for the North. He omitted personal matters
and talked about the political and military events. The queen listened carefully to his advice concerning what to do with the rebel lords and those who still refused to bend the knee.

“What about House Arryn? Who is their lord now that Harrold Arryn is dead?”

“That’s hard to say. Harrold Arryn died unwed and without children, at least without legitimate children. He had two or three bastards, but the eldest is not even five and she’s a girl. Furthermore, they were all fathered on lowborn women. We would need to look further into the family tree of House Arryn to find an heir, perhaps amongst the Arryns of Gulltown or the other minor branches.”

“Is that necessary to choose an Arryn to rule the Vale?”

“Well, the family’s been ruling the Vale for thousands of years. Some claim they ruled it since the Andal invasion. They bent the knee quite easily when Aegon invaded Westeros, so it’s understandable that he spared them. He needed someone to rule the Vale, and why not keep the ancient rulers as long as they accept to bend the knee.”

“So I should just find whatever heir Harrold Arryn has and name him Warden of the East?” she asked skeptically.

“You need a Warden of the East, I agree, but he doesn’t have to be an Arryn. And considering how hard it might prove to find Harrold Arryn’s heir, and the fact he was one of the few lords to openly defy you until the end, I suggest you choose someone else to rule the Vale for you. Aegon did the same when he destroyed Harren the Black and gave the Riverlands to the Tullys, and when the Gardeners were gone he gave Highgarden and the Reach to the Tyrells. Why not do the same now? You could remind every house that you have the power to take away their lands if you want.”

They discussed for a long time about how to deal with the Vale and its lords, and also about how to send a strong message to everyone in Westeros that rebellion would not be tolerated.

“How is your wife?” Daenerys asked once they were done. The jug was almost empty. Tyrion had drunk most of it. “I would like to speak with her.”

Tyrion looked at the floor. “You may if you want, but I warn you, she’s not been feeling very well lately.”

She had an understanding expression on her face. “You haven’t found your daughter yet?”

Tyrion gripped his goblet. “She’s dead.” He explained everything he hadn’t told her, all the information they got from Serion Lannister and Vance Corbray before he burned them.

“I would have done the same had I been in your place,” Daenerys said when he was done.

“If that son of a whore was right, then Sansa and I will never have children again.”

“I’m sorry,” the queen said after a moment. “I lost a child me too, a long time ago. I should speak with Sansa. I have gone through the same ordeal she is facing. I could help her.”

“Feel free.”

Daenerys had left him to see Sansa. Tyrion didn’t know what she told her or if it had any impact on his wife. He looked to Sansa who was standing on the platform just like him as the lords kept swearing their oaths. Her face was expressionless. Her right hand was clasped around her sister’s hand. The other hand laid by her side, away from Tyrion. They didn’t speak a lot since the death of Serion Lannister. They spent time together, of course, ate together and slept together, but they barely
said something, at least nothing that was of any matter. Tyrion kept holding her in his arms during
the night, but that was it. She was grieving the death of their daughter, and Tyrion didn’t see how he
could comfort her. He had never been good at this. He couldn’t find a way to make things better. He
hadn’t been able to comfort her after the Red Wedding, and neither could he when she falsely
learned that her sister was being held by the Boltons.

When the news that Arya Stark was at Winterfell arrived, Sansa had fallen into despair. Tyrion had
managed to lift her hopes by raising an army and marching on Winterfell to save Arya Stark. But this
time, there was no way to save Joanna. She was gone, just like Catelyn and Robb Stark, and on top
of that, Sansa would never be able to bear another child. She could never be a mother again. Tyrion
knew how much it meant for Sansa to have children. This news had destroyed her, and again he was
powerless to help her. He couldn’t bring back their daughter. He couldn’t give her another child, no
matter how hard he would try. All he could do was to punish those who hurt her.

Tyrion’s mind was focused on that. A Lannister always pays his debts. He had sent instructions to
Genna to arrest the Spicers and the Westerlings and to seize their castles and their lands. She was
also instructed to arrest every man who conspired with Serion Lannister. Sansa was mourning but
Tyrion wasn’t. He would grieve the day everyone who had a part in his child’s death would have
paid for it.

The last lord, Ryan Ruthermont, just bent the knee. Finally. Tyrion had allowed himself to be carried
away by his thoughts and couldn’t tell half the houses who made an oath today. Now the time had
come. His sister stood from her improvised throne.

“You all swore loyalty to me today. I expect this loyalty to be honoured by your children and
grandchildren, to me and my successors, until the world comes to pass. Not long ago, you served a
lord who turned on his allies, kidnapped married women and murdered babies. I’m ready to forgive
your past known actions for the sake of the oath you swore today, but I’m not about to pardon House
Arryn for its recent actions. They have proved to be unreliable, traitors, and abandoned the people
who fought to save the Realm when the Seven Kingdoms needed them the most. As such, House
Arryn has lost its right to rule the Vale. I forbid any Arryn to ever serve as Warden of the East or
Lord Paramount of the Vale, or to ever marry into one of the great houses of Westeros. I forbid them
to serve in the Kingsguard or to occupy any function in the capital. I forbid them from serving or
occupying positions into the household of the future Lords Paramount of the Vale and the future
Wardens of the East, or in any other households of any Lord Paramount. And I forbid them from
ever travelling into the North again, except if it is to join the Night’s Watch, or into the Riverlands or
the Crownlands. We will not have more of their treachery where they already exerted it.”

There were a few lords who whispered, including those leading minor branches of House Arryn
who were present today, and some even started to shout, but they were silenced by the stronger noise
produced by the dragons. The complaints stopped with it. Tyrion stepped forward to speak.

“Harrold Arryn kidnapped my wife and tried to marry her when I was still alive. He killed my
daughter, a baby who hadn’t reached her first name day. He betrayed us while we were fighting an
enemy that threatened to kill all the living souls in Westeros. Before that, I was falsely accused by
Lysa Arryn of killing her husband and her son wanted to execute me without proof, for the pleasure
to see me fall for miles. You know what the great Robin Arryn kept saying during my so-called trial?
Make the bad man fly. And before that, Lysa Arryn poisoned her husband, and then she tried to kill
Arya Stark. You thought you served House Arryn after Jon Arryn died, but do you want to know
the truth? House Arryn died with Jon Arryn. For all that we know, Robin Arryn might have been the
son of Lysa Arryn and a brothelkeeper. As for Harrold Arryn, he was Harrold Hardyng before he
became Lord Protector of the Vale and he never showed that he was a lord, only a spoiled boy who
thought highly of himself because he could knock people from their horse with a stick.”
Tyrion looked at the Eyrie and pointed it for everyone who was present to look at it. “You see the Eyrie? It is said that Rolland Arryn built it because he felt the Gates of the Moon was inferior to Casterly Rock and Highgarden. Well, he was right. I spent some time in the Eyrie and it was one of the worst periods of my life. The Eyrie is worse than the Gates of the Moon. The Arryn words are As High as Honor. Well, the Arryns proved they had no honor at all with their last generations. The Eyrie was not even high enough to represent their pride or their hypocrisy. The Arryns don’t deserve the Eyrie, and you neither.”

He looked at Daenerys. She nodded, and he returned the nod. They both walked away from the platform, toward the dragons, and each climbed on their own. Drogon and Viserion rose in the air and climbed, higher, higher, always higher, until they were at the right level. They almost reached the sky. Then Tyrion flew Viserion down towards the target. Daenerys followed behind. She promised to give him the first shot.

“It’s time to take the Arryns out of the skies and to bury them under the earth. Dracarys,” Tyrion said when they were close enough.

A large burst of fire was unleashed upon the empty and frozen castle of the Eyrie. Tyrion heard another burst behind him as Drogon released his own burst of fire. Viserion turned around the small castle, setting fire upon every side. He gave a particular attention to the sky cells, making sure they didn’t escape the destruction he unleashed. Drogon did the same. The two dragons danced around the pride of House Arryn, reducing it to ashes and rubble.

When it was clear the whole perimeter was ablaze, he had Viserion stay in stationary fly and release his fire upon the interior of the Eyrie, blazing towers, courtyards, battlements, corridors and halls all alike. The snow melted first, and the marble that made the beauty of the Eyrie started to blacken, then to melt as well. There was no one inside the Eyrie. It had been emptied of its occupants for winter. All that was left to consume was stone, wood, marble and earth. And the symbol of House Arryn.

They did it for hours, most likely. When they were done, the Eyrie was a fuming ruin. Tyrion knew the Lords of the Vale were watching from below. The Unsullied were ordered to make them observe the Eyrie disappear from the face of the earth. For them, it was the end of an era when the Arryns ruled the Vale. For Daenerys, it was her Harrenhal, but without all the dead, some sort of kind Harrenhal, where all that was burned was a castle, a strong symbol, but no human being. For Tyrion, it was his revenge for everything the Arryns did to his wife, and the murder of Joanna. Since he couldn’t burn them, he would burn their castle and erase all trace of their existence.

A Lannister always paid his debt. And Tyrion Lannister was determined to pay them all, no matter the cost.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was meant to show both the continuity but also the divergence of Tyrion and Daenerys from their ancestors. Just like Aegon Targaryen who destroyed Harrenhal, Daenerys burns down one of the mightiest castles in Westeros after the house fought her, and Tyrion mirrors Tywin’s actions at Castamere and Tarbeck Hall.

However, the similarity with their ancestors is limited by the fact that the castle they destroyed was empty. Hence, no one died. The destruction of the Eyrie is more symbolic than anything, House Arryn having collapsed after the death of Harrold Arryn.
Still, it sends a strong message, similar as if the Kremlin in Russia or the White House in the United States were destroyed, but without killing anyone inside. This is in line with Daenerys' declaration at the end of Season 6 that she, Tyrion, Yara and Theon all had horrible fathers and they were going to leave the world better than they did, while remaining in line with her family's tradition an basing her claim over the Seven Kingdoms on her family's rule of three centuries.

Please review

Next chapter: Kinvara
Kinvara VI

Chapter Notes

A chapter that I really enjoyed to write. I have become very fond of Kinvara as I wrote her, and I loved to write from her POV here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

KINVARA VI

“Are you sure?” Kinvara asked.

“Yes, High Priestess. I saw it with my own eyes. The dead are no longer a threat. They wander in the lands, not knowing where they are or who they are. They are weapons no longer. The Others are gone.”

The pale face with blue eyes below short brown hair gazed at her through the flames. Meetra managed to summon enough power at the Wall to contact Kinvara. She said that magic was more powerful at the Wall than anywhere else in Westeros. As soon as she could, she found Kinvara and spoke with her through the flames they were both gazing at.

“So, all the servants of the Great Other are gone?”

“Yes, they are all gone,” Meetra confirmed.

Kinvara closed her eyes and said a prayer of thanks to the Lord. When she opened them again, Meetra was still staring at her. “You have done well, Meetra. What about the three others who were with you?”

“They couldn’t make it. I was the only one who escaped. Revan and Bastila covered us.”

“And Melisandre?”

“Dead. She’s on the other side now.”

Well, at least Melisandre gave her life fighting the servants of the Great Other. Maybe the Lord would welcome her, though Kinvara wouldn’t mind if he didn’t. The Lord of Light may forgive everything, but there were some things she couldn’t.

“What about Revan and Bastila? Do you think they made it?”

“I don’t know. I couldn’t find out what happened to them.”

Kinvara nodded. “Their memories will be honored. Stay at the Wall for now, like you planned. Darkness is everywhere, in the places we expect it the less. Be careful. The Great Other lost some servants, but he’s not gone.”

“Yes, High Priestess. I will be careful.”

The image faded and the Red Priestess Meetra disappeared. Only the flames were left. Kinvara
turned away to look at the three members of her order who followed her, Geralt, Juhani and Jolee.

“Seems like we did it,” Jolee said. He was the oldest looking of them all, tanned-skinned and bald-headed with a small white beard.

“The great threat of our time is gone,” Kinvara confirmed. “The Lord of Light showed us the path and we took it. Today, he rewards us for believing in him and in the Prince that was Promised.”

“Well, I guess it means I have nothing left to do in this damn country,” Geralt said with his casual rough voice.

“You will leave as soon as we are done here,” Kinvara told him before she looked at them all. “We will rest for tonight. Tomorrow, we shall reach our destination.”

Jolee and Juhani went to sleep, the latter without a word. The young woman had a contrite expression on her face. Geralt didn’t go to sleep, as usual. He stood guard. Kinvara didn’t sleep either. Some Red Priests were not powerful enough to spare themselves the needs of human beings like her. Jolee and Juhani were among them. While they slept, she contemplated the fire of their small camp as Geralt watched over their horses or any threat that might come near them. Kinvara didn’t see if they would meet any danger on their way, but she knew for a certainty that they would reach their destination. The Lord showed her the way.

She sat there on the ground, her legs crossed, staring in the flames, waiting for the Lord of Light to show her something, but it seemed he didn’t want to show her something yet. She kept gazing at the red and yellow dancing in front of her, calling for her god to enlighten her, to show her the future. She saw nothing.

She heard a grunt as Geralt sat down next to her. “Still staring at the fucking flames?” he asked.

“Yes,” she flatly replied.

She was used to Geralt’s rough language as much as she was used to his rough voice. Some were bothered by this in Volantis, saying he didn’t behave like a true priest, but Kinvara didn’t mind. There was far worse than talking in an unkindly way about their Lord. She had found that people who cared too much about the way they expressed their thoughts or the way other people expressed themselves were far from the Lord, but the opposite wasn’t that true.

“Can see if I’ll go back in the east?”

“I don’t need the Lord to say that you will leave,” she stated. Daenerys Targaryen’s decision was without appeal. Geralt had to leave. “I suppose you want to know who you will leave with.” He looked suspiciously at her. “You sincerely believed I didn’t know? I’m afraid I cannot provide you an answer. Only you can find it. The choice is yours.”

He grunted again and walked back to the horses from where he kept examining their surroundings. This land was barely inhabited. The most likely intruders were sheep. Kinvara went back to her contemplation, unbothered by the unthreatening environment they travelled in.

It was only near dawn that the Lord finally granted her a vision. The dragon was there, with the same young blond-haired woman on his back. She flew across the lands, green lands, fertile, lush with vegetation, full of people working them. The sun was high in the sky, illuminating the whole world with its light. And just as she saw how beautiful this land was, the sun appeared at the horizon and the vision ended.

They left right away and rode north for most of the morning. The waves crashed against the stony
shores. The soil allowed nothing to grow, at least nothing consistent enough to allow humans to live. Yet she knew people lived there. They crossed the path of several shepherds on their way, conducting their herds through the lands as the sheep ate the grass under their feet. The animals were these people’s only wealth. They fed them and dressed them both. She saw the scars left by the wars as she travelled through the Seven Kingdoms, the result of petty conflicts between high lords for a few pieces of land, an uncomfortable chair, or a hat on their heads that didn’t protect from rain, snow or sun.

Here, no trace of it. When they entered the village, no burned homes, no soldier, no sword in sight, nothing that was destroyed by the work of men. Here, men built and the nature destroyed, unlike in wars where men destroyed what the nature produced. This place hadn’t known war or violence for a while. People went about their business, probably unaware of the conflicts that tore apart the whole continent not so long ago. They were cut from the world. The village was small, much smaller than the one where Kinvara grew up. Fewer than a hundred people lived there. But the peace, the simplicity of life, the absence of oppressive lord or master, of worries other than feeding, housing and dressing your family made it a place where Kinvara wished the girl she was had been born there. But if that girl was born in this place, she wouldn’t have known the Lord of Light, she wouldn’t have found Daenerys Stormborn, and she wouldn’t have been able to fight the servants of the Great Other to protect people like them.

They rode through the village under the curious and wary eyes of the people who lived there. They certainly never saw Red Priests before, and even the horses they rode were probably a sight they seldom experienced. Kinvara and her three priests rode out of the village as easily as they rode in.

From there, a small tower was visible. She entered more than enough tall constructions in her life to tell that this one didn’t have more than four floors. Kinvara, Geralt, Jolee and Juhani headed for the tower, getting closer. For the people who lived there, it must look like a castle. For the masters Kinvara served before she escaped slavery, it was a ruin.

As they approached, the tower didn’t look better. Whatever small improvement it gained in height, it lost in appearance. It was a ruin, and not only to the masters of the east or the lords of the west. She heard barking, and three dogs came out from an open door and ran at them. The priests stopped in their track. While the dogs stopped and remained at good distance from them, still barking, a very old man, probably in the eighties, came out of the first floor as well. He had a sword at his side, but Kinvara doubted the man had ever used it.

“Who are you?” He looked at them as his dogs kept barking, obviously not knowing what to think of the intruders. “Who are you? Why are you trespassing…”

“We know whose territory it is,” Kinvara interrupted. She climbed down from her horse and her three friends followed suit. She then walked forward.

The dogs barked louder at her, but they didn’t attack. She placed a hand on Geralt’s arm as she felt his arm move to draw his sword. She looked at him, then to Jolee and Juhani, silently ordering them to let her deal with this situation. There was no need for blood to be poured today. She wouldn’t break the idyllic peace that this place enjoyed.

After she ensured her priests wouldn’t do anything inconsiderate, she made a few steps forward under the increasingly loud barks of the dogs. The old man brought his shaking hand to the pommel of his sword. She raised her hand again.

“We bear you no ill will,” she told the man. Then she looks at the dogs. “Quiet.” Immediately, they stopped to bark.
She went on her knees and approached one of the animals. Carefully, she placed a hand on his head and slowly stroked it. The dog wailed, and two others imitated him. She gave them a stroke as well.

She was brought to a time when she wasn’t Kinvara. She had another name, a family, brothers and sisters, a father, friends. A dog stood guard before her father’s shop. He barked at anyone approaching it, grinded his teeth, but he never attacked unless her father told him to. The rest of the time, he was a kind and sweet animal to those he knew. The girl she was used to be his favorite. He would whimper the same as this one did right now when she caressed him. A smile, the smile of a girl long gone came to Kinvara’s lips, and for a moment she was that girl again. She wasn’t a High Priestess, she wasn’t a servant of R’hllor, she wasn’t a young woman, she wasn’t an advisor of the Lord’s Chosen One, she wasn’t a mother, she wasn’t a slave or a whore, not a woman whose childhood was taken away from her. She was just a child.

“Who are you?” The question brought her out of her memories. She was Kinvara again. The girl was dead. She died a long time ago. Kinvara kept stroking one of the beasts, then stood up.

“Go,” she said. The three left. She was alone with the old man, the other priests behind her.

“Who are you?” he repeated, obviously afraid, his hand still on the sword.

“Don’t try that, old man,” Geralt warned him. “Or you’ll lose your hand before you can use that blade.”

Kinvara silenced him with a stare, then turned back her attention to the old man. “Please forgive me. I am Kinvara, High Priestess of the Red Temple of Volantis, the Flame of Truth, the Light of Wisdom, the First Servant of the Lord of Light, advisor to Daenerys Stormborn, of House Targaryen, the First of Her Name, the Unburnt, Queen of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynars, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Breaker of Chains and Mother of Dragons.”

The man blinked. Three people joined him from the floor at the base, a man and a woman who seemed almost as old as he was and a younger one with a fat belly. She was pregnant.

“And who are you?” she asked him.

“My name is Bryen, and this is Umfred, Grisel and Kella. We are the servants…”

“I know. I’m sorry to bring you this news, but he’s dead.”

They were all under shock. “Dead?” the young woman said.

“Yes.”

“How?” Bryen asked.

“There’s a war, and your lord died in it,” she told them.

They all seemed in distress. “What are we gonna do?” the fat woman said. “Without him, we’re lost?”

“Are you? Did you ever need him?”

“I beg your pardon?” the other old man asked.

“How much time did he spend here in the last few years?” They didn’t answer. “A few days, maybe two weeks at most if you put all the days together. And you survived. He was never there for you,
and yet you managed to live. I don’t see any difference from now.”

She let that sink into their minds. She looked at the last floor. Now that she was close enough, she could see there were three.

“I need to get in.” She made it to walk towards the exterior stairs. Bryen and the two other old people blocked her path.

“I’m sorry, my lady, but we cannot let you in.”

“I serve Daenerys Targaryen, your queen. You must let me in,” she kindly said, purposefully keeping away anything that could be perceived as a threat from her voice or her facial expression.

“Targaryen? The Targaryens are gone.”

“No more. She’s the queen now, your queen, and mine. Our queen.”

“I thought Joffrey was the king, Robert’s son.”

They definitely were cut from the rest of the world. “Joffrey Baratheon died years ago, and all the children of Robert Baratheon and his brothers are dead too. Daenerys Targaryen sits on the Iron Throne. Let me in.”

“We can’t,” the old woman stubbornly said.

She looked at them. Apart from the youngest, they all seemed determined to not let her in. She raised another hand behind to stop Geralt’s movement to draw his sword.

“Do you know what your lord was? What he did?”

She looked at each of them. Finally, the young woman answered. “I do.” They all looked at her. “I know who he was.”

Kinvara fixed her gaze upon her. “Then, do you really think that whatever it is you’re keeping is his? How would you feel if he did the same to you?”

The girl looked down at her belly, then back at Kinvara. A mutual understanding passed between them, an understanding that only women like them could share.

“Let her in,” the young girl said.

“But Kella…” Bryen began to protest.

“Let her in. There’s no reason for us to resist. He’s dead. And judging by the people she has with her, I would rather not take my chance. There’s nothing we can do for our lord anyway.”

The three old people hesitated, but finally they stepped aside. Jolee walked to Bryen and extended his hand, silently asking him to surrender his weapons. He did. The path was clear.

“I’ll go alone,” Kinvara said. She had to do this. She had to, but alone. The Lord of Light demanded it.

She climbed the outside stairs, seeing what looked like kitchens at the ground level. In the middle of her path, she came upon what looked like a small hall. She completed her climb, avoiding the cracked steps, feeling the wind growing slightly. Then she arrived at something that looked like a bedchamber. And there was what she had been looking for, near the fire.
She was a little girl again. No, not a little girl. She was a woman now. A woman with a child. The baby was cuddled in her arms, crying. She was hungry, but her mother couldn’t feed her. She didn’t eat enough and her breasts couldn’t produce enough milk for her child. She was so hungry, and her little girl was hungry too. She could end this, quickly, be done with it, but she couldn’t bring herself to do it.

Life had been good to her. Never easy, but good. She barely got the time to know her mother before she left the world, but she had a good father, brothers and sisters she cared about and who cared about her. She had friends, and they had a home. She had to work in order to eat, but at least she ate enough. More than many children.

How could everything have gone that wrong? How could she end up here, far from the place where she grew up, far from everything she loved? The knight had helped her to escape. He had been kind with her, but now she was alone, with a baby she couldn’t even feed. She couldn’t take care of her. But she couldn’t end her suffering either.

She was near the docks. She spotted a steep slope and a beach not far from there. There was almost no one. They were at the end of the day and darkness was beginning to fall. Fishermen were leaving the shore. She descended to the beach and approached the water. She tried to decide whether or not she was close enough or far enough from the water and the place where the waves crashed.

Her little daughter was still crying in her arms. She couldn’t do it. She couldn’t do it. Tears were welling her cheeks, but she couldn’t do it. She couldn’t take care of her. Slowly, she put down the only person who still mattered in her life.

“I’m sorry.” She kissed her forehead. “Mom is sorry.”

She stood up and walked away, the cries of her baby girl following her at each step. She walked at first, and then she accelerated her pace, until she ran. She stumbled in the slope as she climbed it, still hearing the cries behind her, cries she joined with her sobs. She felt something sharp cutting her hand and her knee, but she stood up and kept running, running away from the last person she loved.

The little girl she was now holding in her arms was crying, just like the one she abandoned. And just like years ago, she cried. Tears fell on the blanket around the small body.

She looked ahead of her to meet a glass, and in that glass she saw her reflection, the reflection of who she really was. For years, she was Kinvara, High Priestess of the Red Temple of Volantis, the Flame of Truth, the Light of Wisdom, the First Servant of the Lord of Light to everyone who looked at her, but whenever she looked at herself, she didn’t see Kinvara the High Priestess of R’hillor. She saw the mother who abandoned her child. She saw the person she was back then, and the person she still was. She could fool the others, but she couldn’t fool herself or her Lord.

She looked down on the small human being who kept crying. This girl too lost her mother. Kinvara caressed her shining blond hair. The difference was that her mother didn’t abandon her. She moved the back of her hand across her small cheek. She needed a mother.

She looked again at her reflection in the glass, that of a very young woman black of hair and blue of eyes, the woman she was trying to turn away from. She then looked back to the baby she was holding, who was a little calmer, then again to her reflection.

She walked out of the chamber and never looked back again. As she went down the stairs, the little girl went all silent and looked at her with big eyes. Big green eyes.
Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Daenerys
Daenerys XIII

Chapter Notes

Daenerys serves justice.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

DAENERYS XIII

“Anders Yronwood, Lord of Yronwood, do you swear loyalty and obedience to Daenerys Targaryen, the First of Her Name, as Queen of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynars, Lady of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm?” the herald asked.

“Yes, I do,” the said lord answered, one knee on the floor.

“Rise, Anders Yronwood.”

He did as Daenerys told him. The herald then called Mace Tyrell. The Warden of the South approached and knelt before Daenerys as well.

“Mace Tyrell, Lord of Highgarden, do you swear loyalty and obedience to Daenerys Targaryen, the First of Her Name, as Queen of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynars, Lady of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm?”

“Yes, I do,” the fat lord replied.

Daenerys allowed him to stand as well. Then finally came his daughter.

“Margaery Tyrell, heir to Highgarden, do you swear loyalty and obedience to Daenerys Targaryen, the First of Her Name, as Queen of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynars, Lady of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm?”

“Yes, I do.”

As soon as the former queen joined back the assembly, it was done. They all said it. Daenerys sat in the Iron Throne, surrounded by the men in the capital who she thought to be the most loyal to her. They included two Red Priests, Lord Varys, and mostly knights from the Reach. She believed them to be more trustful than the Dornish.

“Thank you everyone, for pledging your loyalty to me,” she declared. “I trust that you and your children and grandchildren will uphold the oath you just made. Now, if you would like to follow me.”

Daenerys left her throne and walked out of the Great Hall, still surrounded by all her guards. The lords and ladies who just swore to follow her did it.

When Daenerys arrived in the capital, she didn’t expect to find the city in such a sorry state, though apparently things had been far worse when Trystane was still there. War had broken out between the factions of Dorne and the Reach while she was away. In fact, according to her advisors, it was more complicated than that, for the Dornish at first were divided, but in the end they all took the same side.
against the Reach. That was when Trystane Martell left King’s Landing. After that, Anders Yronwood negotiated a truce with Mace Tyrell to put an end to the fight. A few factions from Dorne refused to lower their weapons and kept fighting. So Yronwood and Tyrell united their forces and neutralized the rebels. According to Varys, most of the people who refused to comply with the truce had been among the first to rebel against the Prince Trystane. They were all lined up in the main courtyard of the Red Keep.

They were half a dozen lords, mostly from minor houses. They were the first to take up arms and they were the last to fight after Daenerys’s betrothed escaped the capital. Now they all stood with two men holding their arms, each before a block. A third man for each of these lords stood next to the block, a sword in hand.

Daenerys stood before them. She looked at each one of them. Some were looking down, but most were staring at her in pure hatred. These were the first men in Westeros to join her when she crossed the Narrow Sea, and these men had started a civil war inside King’s Landing, all that because the man she left in charge of the city killed his cousins after they murdered Reach lords and started a fight during a trial. Here they were.

She waited for the courtyard to be full. Tyrell guards and gold cloaks kept the crowd of lords away from the convicted. When she judged everyone was there, she cleared her throat and spoke in a loud and clear voice for everyone to hear.

“You violated the laws of the Seven Kingdoms, you laid death and destruction to this city and rebelled against me and the people I chose to rule King’s Landing in my absence. For this, justice demands that you die. You have one minute to pray, then you will join your gods.”

The minute went on. Two of the condemned men kept staring at her. Either they made peace with their gods previously or thought the last moments of their life to be better spent hating her than preparing for their departure of this world.

The minute was over. Daenerys gave the sign. The two guards overseeing each man forced them on their knees and held their necks firmly on the block. The six executioners lifted their longswords, then brought them down. Six heads rolled on the ground. The entire courtyard was silent. Not a word was said.

An hour later, Daenerys was sitting again, but not in the Iron Throne. It was in the small council chamber, with her advisors. On one side, Mace Tyrell, Paxter Redwyne and Anders Yronwood. On the other side, Varys, Yennefer and Marcon, the new Grand Maester.

“I don’t intend to talk further about who is responsible and who is not responsible of the events that took place in my absence,” she declared. “The first responsible for the rebellion were treated as I shall treat every lord who violates the laws of the Seven Kingdoms and rebel against my authority.”

Only the next time, she would execute them with dragonfire. It had been her first plan with the rebellious lords today, but the courtyard of the Red Keep wasn’t large enough to accommodate Drogon. She needed a public demonstration to be seen by all the lords present in the capital and forcing them to walk all the way to the Dragonpit where her child took up residence would have been too dangerous with the chaos lingering in the streets.

“What news of the Prince Trystane?” she asked to Varys.

“For now, nothing, your Grace,” the eunuch said.

“No news from Dorne,” the Grand Maester confirmed.
“Doran Martell is probably being cautious, like always,” Lord Yronwood said. “Don’t worry about him, your Grace. No matter what you decide concerning his son, he will stay on his knees before you. I would worry about the possible repercussions of today’s executions instead. There are some people in Dorne who will not be happy about it.”

“The people who were executed rebelled against their queen,” she stated. “The punishment for rebellion is death. If your people cannot understand this, then they will understand soon enough.”

“All the same, I think it would be wise to communicate with Prince Doran,” Varys said, “to ensure that he will help us would any trouble arise in Dorne. The men you executed today chased his son from King’s Landing. I highly doubt he will take their side.”

“I do hope we can count on your help as well to neutralize any threat in Dorne, Lord Yronwood. If you want to prove your loyalty to House Targaryen, there would be no better opportunity.” She looked intently at Lord Anders.

“You have my word, your Grace.” His voice and demeanor lacked any enthusiasm, but she would settle for this for now.

“I suppose I can count on the support of the Reach too.” She addressed Lord Mace and Lord Redwyne.

“Of course, your Grace. Highgarden is loyal to you forever,” the Lord of Highgarden assured.

“Good. Now, I have an announcement to make. I delayed this decision so far because I wasn’t sure if I wanted to continue this tradition, but recent events proved that it was necessary. There will be a Hand of the Queen.”

Truth be told, she chose one long before she knew of the events in King’s Landing, but it was also true that the events that took place here in her absence led her to believe a Hand, someone officially speaking for her, could have avoided such disastrous results.

“It is quite a wise decision, your Grace,” Maester Marcon said. Despite his obvious age, he seemed quite robust and hadn’t lost all his hair yet. “All kings and queens had a Hand to assist them in the task of ruling. The Seven Kingdoms are simply too vast for the king, or the queen in this case, to rule alone, with or without dragons.”

“Your Grace, I would be willing to serve as your Hand if that is your wish,” Lord Tyrell said.

“I thank you, my lord, but you already are the Master of Coin and I would rather not add to your burden. I heard the financial situation of the Crown is dire and that we are not far from bankruptcy.”

“Huh, it is true that the Crown has a huge debt. However, if her Grace does me the honor, I will gladly assume the duties as Master of Coin and Hand of the Queen, if that is her wish.”

This one was a man of court, obviously, much like the nobles she had to deal with in Meereen. “Your intentions are all to your honor, Lord Tyrell, but I’m afraid in the interest of the Realm, I cannot have the Master of Coin disturbed by other matters than the financial situation of the Seven Kingdoms. Furthermore, I already chose my Hand.”

“Who shall it be, your Grace?” Marcon asked, his quill over a ledger he brought with him.

“Tyrion Lannister.”

“The Imp?” Lord Yronwood asked, incredulous.
“A very interesting choice, your Grace,” Varys said, with a smile on his face that was difficult to interpret.

“Your Grace, with all the respect I owe you,” Mace Tyrell began, “the Lannisters were our enemies not long ago.”

“They were also your friends not long ago, Lord Tyrell,” she retorted.

He spluttered. “Yes, I made a mistake. I realized it the day they arrested my daughter and killed my son.”

“Tyrion Lannister didn’t kill your son. Cersei Lannister did, with the help of Jaime Lannister, her twin brother. Lord Tyrion wasn’t in King’s Landing when it happened. He was in the North, fighting the dead. Ever since he bent the knee, he proved his loyalty at the Battle of Winterfell and during the invasion of the Vale. He already served as Hand before and by all accounts did quite well, considering the king in question spent his time torturing animals and little girls. I think he is quite well suited for the office.”

“I have nothing against it,” Lord Redwyne said. “I was there at the Battle of Blackwater. Many say it was Tywin Lannister who saved the city from Stannis Baratheon, but without Lord Tyrion’s trick with the wildfire and his efficient and courageous defense of the city walls, King’s Landing would have fallen before our armies could arrive. His accomplishments in the North and the Vale, both on diplomatic and military grounds speak by themselves. I think it is better to have him as an ally than an enemy. He is much more useful alive than dead.”

“I must advise you against this choice, your Grace,” Lord Yronwood said. “You overthrew his sister. She died when you took King’s Landing, along with many Lannister troops.”

“From what I heard, Lord Tyrion didn’t have a very good relationship with his sister. I think she tried to have him killed more than once. And when she was queen, she even put a price on his head,” she opposed.

“What about Ser Jaime? He is still in the black cells and must be judged for his crimes. I doubt his brother would stand aside and do nothing while you execute him. His father had your brother’s children butchered.”

“My decision is taken. Tyrion Lannister swore fealty to me just like you did. It is not Tywin Lannister that I name to be my Hand. Children are not responsible for their father’s crimes. Right now, Lord Tyrion is heading to the Westerlands where he must deal with some local matters there. As soon as it is done, he will come here and take his office. And considering he can ride one of my dragons, I suggest you show him some respect when he arrives.”

Most people were stunned. Yennefer the Red Priestess was smiling. “So, the third head of the dragon was found.”

“It is true?” Lord Tyrell asked this question, looking to Daenerys, then to Varys. “The rumors were right?”

“It seems so,” the Master of Whisperers replied with an amused expression.

“Now,” Daenerys said, cutting short to the interlude, “I’d like to know the state of the city’s provisions for winter.”

From the information Varys, Marcon and Lord Tyrell provided, it was clear, as Daenerys expected but hoped against, that the city wouldn’t get through winter. Some granaries had been looted if not
destroyed or burned in her absence. The fights slowed down, and in some districts stopped the reconstruction effort. People were moving back into the city, for the surrounding areas offered little alternative for shelter. Villages such as Rosby complained about the great number of refugees that swarmed in their alleys. The fields gave their last harvest a long time ago and peasants were very reluctant to share what they could save for winter with the homeless of King’s Landing. Cases of farmers found assassinated and their homes plundered were signalled. On top of that, Lord Tyrell tried to not complain about the fact that the large amount of foodstock they sent to the city was beginning to exert a real toll on the Reach. The likelihood to provide enough roofs and food for everyone to survive the long winter ahead of them grew smaller.

“Of course, we can still hope for this winter to not be as long as the Citadel expects,” the Grand Maester said.

“They say a long summer means an even longer winter,” the Master of Whisperers said. “And according to the Citadel’s forecast, we can expect this one to last several years.”

“My maesters in the Arbor said the same,” Lord Redwyne added.

“It is true,” Marcon acknowledged, “but my most recent observations are… troubling, to say the least. On one side, there are elements pointing towards a very harsh winter, harsher than previously measured, but my observations also point towards a shorter winter. I don’t know what happened, but in the last few days, the state of the upper sky changed drastically. I’ve never seen something like that in my life. The records I hold say that the last time this phenomenon happened, a very short and harsh winter came upon Westeros, and it was quickly followed by a very warm summer.”

“When did it happen for the last time?” Yennefer asked.

“Over four hundred years ago. I couldn’t give the exact date.”

The Red Priestess smiled. As for Daenerys, she wondered for a moment… The Doom of Valyria took place about four hundred years ago.

“I think it would be best to assume that this winter will be long, your Grace, instead of resting the fates of the people upon the hope that this winter will be short,” Varys said.

“I agree with Lord Varys,” the Grand Maester said. “My measurements could be wrong. I was surprised myself of the results they gave, and the predictions of the Citadel have always been relative if not entirely wrong when it came to weather. We are lucky when half their predictions are accurate.” He sighed. “Better to be careful than to be sorry.”

Daenerys nodded. She agreed too. The people of King’s Landing, just like all the people of Westeros, were her people, and as such she had the duty to protect them, to keep them alive and well. “The Crownlands cannot sustain the city through winter, nor can the Riverlands. They were devastated by the recent wars. The North, Dorne and the Stormlands simply don’t have the necessary resources to feed so many people.”

“What about the Westerlands? Surely they can spare…” Lord Tyrell began.

“The Westerlands were never farming lands, Lord Tyrell,” the Grand Maester interrupted. “There are maesters in these lands that I know personally. What farms they had were hit badly by Robb Stark during the War of the Five Kings, and the output of the last harvest was poor. There weren’t enough men to take the crops after the losses of the war and the levies Lord Tyrion made when he marched north. Whatever the Westerlands could provide will not be enough. The Reach remains the kingdom with the higher capacity to contribute.”
“But… we already gave plenty. If that goes on, it will be our people who will starve.”

“Lord Tyrell.” The Lord of Highgarden looked at her, expecting the worst. “I will not force the Reach to give more. I only ask that you provide what your house already promised.”

Relief was plain on the fat man’s face. “I thank you, your Grace.”

“The Vale will provide what we lack,” she declared. “They were untouched by war until recently and they had time to fill their granaries before it broke on their lands. They are closer to us and with the harbor of Gulltown, the rations will arrive more quickly by sea.” She turned toward Lord Redwyne. “Are the docking installations of King’s Landing in a good enough state?” she asked.

“They need some repairs, but it will be feasible.”

“Good. Lord Tyrell, Lord Yronwood, since most of my Unsullied and the Dothrakis will be back in the city soon enough, we won’t need your men for long to ensure the peace. I think it’s about time they go back home to their families. Since Dorne is farther and the actual weather more difficult to suffer to its people, I ask that all the Dornish, safe for those under the direct command of Lord Yronwood, go back home. The men of the Reach will leave as soon as my army is back.”

With the Dornish gone, the odds of having another war between Dorne and the Reach inside King’s Landing would disappear, and the need to feed them as well. Dothrakis and Unsullied were used to harsh living and only required the minimum. Replacing the Westerosi by them to ensure the safety of the city would increase the amounts of food they could give to the people.

They discussed about several other matters. Lord Tyrell wondered aloud who would rule the Vale now that Harrold Arryn was dead. For the time being, Nestor Royce would be acting ruler until Daenerys chose a new Lord Protector of the Vale. She also delayed the decision of naming a new Lord Paramount of the Stormlands. When she ended the meeting, she asked Lord Varys to stay with her.

He spoke before she could as soon as they were alone. “I must congratulate you for sending the Dornish away, your Grace. It was quite a sound idea.”

“I don’t want to see my people suffer because the Dornish and the Reach men cannot suffer each other.”

He nodded. “Lady Margaery Tyrell said something similar when she decided to force Trystane Martell out of the city. Though I believe she said the people, not my people.” Good. She knows where her place is. “She wishes to speak with you, by the way.”

“Later. For now, there’s something I want to discuss. You know Tyrion Lannister?”

“I was on the small council when he was acting Hand for his father and before, and after as well.”

“You’ve only had good words for him ever since we met, Lord Varys. You said yourself that you worked closely with him in the past. You testified for him at his trial and you defended him every time you had an opportunity. Tell me, why didn’t you try to make him king? Seeing how you jump from one king to the other, I’m surprised you never considered this possibility.”

The eunuch’s eyes were wide of surprise for a short moment. “I thought about this for a very short time, your Grace, I’ll admit it. Before you came to Westeros, and before I got to know who you were after your brother’s death, Tyrion Lannister was one of the few people alive who could make this country a better place. He had the mind for it, the will, and an appropriate last name if not the right one. And later, when his name was cleared and Lord Tywin dead, he had the power and the titles
too. And I still believe he’s one of the most capable people to make Westeros a better place to live.”

“Then why didn’t you support him?”

“Because although he might have everything to make Westeros better, he doesn’t have what is required to be king. Tyrion Lannister will never sit on the Iron Throne. He could never sit on the Iron Throne and he knows it. No more than I could. People follow leaders like you, your Grace. They will never follow dwarves or eunuchs. They find us repulsive. But at least dwarves and eunuchs can help the leaders from the shadows to rule for the people.”

“To rule for people who find you repulsive?”

“Yes, for even though they find us repulsive and we find them repulsive, we are all repulsive in the eyes of the highborn. That allows us to identify with the people, for we are all looked down upon. And for myself, I’ve been part of this people once, and I would rather not see another one of them end up like me.”

She couldn’t tell if the man was lying or not. His trade was in secrets, so she supposed it was normal if he could hide his true feelings and intentions very easily.

“What do you know of Tyrion Lannister?”

“He is a good man. Too prone to drink, and also to gamble and to visit brothels, at least before he met a woman he loved. Now he’s only too prone to drink. He has his father’s instincts for politics, but also compassion. He loves power but despises those who use it to prey on the powerless. He also has a sense of honor that House Lannister lacks most often than not, though he’s also ready to do what is necessary. I liked him as Hand of the King. He played the game well.”

“Do you have any idea why he would be able to ride one of my dragons?”

The Master of Whisperers sighed. “Dragonlore is not something I know a lot about, your Grace. When I first received word of your dragons, I didn’t want to believe it. For me, dragons had been gone for over a century and would never come back. I’m afraid I cannot provide you with an answer and certify that it will be true.”

“But you have answers. You always do, even when you’re not sure.”

“I have possible answers… each one more fantastic and unlikely than the others.”

He showed the palms of his hands to display his powerlessness. He was hiding something.

“But you, what do you think of Tyrion Lannister?” he asked.

“He helped me,” she answered carefully. “He proved he was loyal. He saved my life at Winterfell.”

“Did he?” the eunuch, surprised.

“Yes, he did.” That was the first time he rode Viserion. How could he do this? How could he ride Viserion as naturally as she could ride Drogon? I feel that I can trust him, but I shouldn’t trust a Lannister so easily.

“Well, your Grace, I think you couldn’t have chosen a better Hand. And I’m not saying that to flatter you.”

“I hope not. I always wanted you to tell me the truth, nothing more, and I hope for your sake that you
“I will, your Grace. Didn’t I prove it by providing the answers you recently seek?”

Yes, he did. She had her confirmation. Not that it mattered much now that Jon Snow joined the Night’s Watch again.

“Fetch Lady Margaery. I will talk to her.”

She turned her back to him, indicating the discussion was over. She heard his soft footsteps behind her. Margaery Tyrell wouldn’t be there before a few minutes. This time belonged to her, and only to her.

Her thoughts turned to Rhaegal, who was dead, and to her nephew, though it didn’t really feel like he was a nephew. She and Jon Snow had been born the same year, at the end of the war that shattered their family and killed their parents. She felt that she didn’t have enough time to know him before they went on their separate ways, he to join the Night’s Watch and stand guard in the North for every danger that might still come from the unknown lands, she to rule the Seven Kingdoms.

She had everything she wanted, everything she fought for. With the submission of the Vale, all of Westeros, from the Wall to the southern shores of Dorne, belonged to her. She had fought for this for years, endured all kind of ordeals and challenges to arrive at this moment, and now that she was there, it didn’t seem as fulfilling as she thought it would be. It wasn’t glorious, like when she burned down Astapor, or a celebration of joy like when she took Yunkai and Meereen. Here, in King’s Landing, when all was complete, when she was the queen she always vied to be, there was almost nothing she felt. Well, not really.

She felt overwhelmed, with the weigh of the world on her shoulders, much like in Meereen when she realized how difficult it would be for her to maintain peace and freedom in Slaver’s Bay. Her capital was in ruins, a gift left by Cersei Lannister. Half the North was devastated by the army of the dead, and before that, the War of the Five Kings devastated half the Seven Kingdoms. Winter had come, and it would be a race against time to be prepared for it, to make sure her people could survive. Snow was already falling on the Crownlands and it would fall on the Reach and the Stormlands very soon. Maybe it would even reach Dorne.

She knew why she didn’t feel anything. She had too many concerns to feel joy over her victory. Too many people had died in this war, her own people, people who relied on her, and it was now her responsibility to care about them. She wasn’t the inexperienced conqueror who entered Meereen under the acclamations of the slaves she freed. She was a queen and she knew what lied ahead of her. It was much more difficult to rule a kingdom than to conquer it. She learned it the hard way in Slaver’s Bay, and Tyrion Lannister reminded her of that before he left for the Westerlands. She wished he was there. His counsel had been a great help ever since they met, but she understood he had to deal with the matter of the Westerlands. She killed Mirri Maz Duur after she murdered Drogo, and she couldn’t deny her Hand the same thing. Furthermore, people who killed children deserved to die. This was about justice as much as it was about revenge.

A handmaiden with curly brown hair entered. “Lady Margaery Tyrell,” she announced.

Daenerys told her to come in. The single daughter of Mace Tyrell walked in and the handmaiden left.

“Your Grace,” the young woman said.

She was a few years older than Daenerys and quite pretty, but you could see on her traits that she
had been through a lot. Daenerys was aware of the hard times she had with Cersei Lannister and she sympathized with Margaery Tyrell, but she couldn’t feel as close to her as she felt to Sansa Stark when they spoke in the Vale. Lord Tyrion’s wife had never been queen before and she wasn’t a potential threat to Daenerys’ power. Margaery Tyrell, on the other hand, was and would always be. She claimed that she had no longer any interest in the crown, but even if she told the truth, Daenerys couldn’t be sure she would have no interest in the future or that no one would ever try to use the woman against her. She had to be careful with the future Lady of Highgarden.

“I heard you wanted to talk to me, Lady Margaery,” she said.

“Yes, I did. First, I wanted to tell you that the only reason why we sent Trystane Martell away…”

“… was because you had no choice. I know, you already told me. I got it. But I don’t think that’s the reason you came to me.”

Daenerys had a pretty good idea why Margaery Tyrell had come to her. “How is my son?” She was right.

“He is alive and well, though I cannot give you any specific news for the moment.”

Lady Margaery took her time before she spoke again. “Your Grace, I beg you. He is my son. I want… I need to know how he is.”

Daneereys sat down at the seat reserved for the queen. “I made things clear when we met at Storm’s End. Your son is being well taken care of, and he will be taken care of for his whole life. You will never see him again, but he will have a good life.”

“I know, but that’s not enough. He’s all I have left. You had a son before, you must know how it feels.”

“No, I don’t.” She stood up. “Because my son is dead. He was dead the moment he left my womb. Your son is still alive and well, and he will have a good life. If I were you, I would cherish the fact that I know he is well instead of complaining about he fact I cannot see him. Because I would rather have a living child I cannot see than a dead child. And don’t say he’s all you have. You still have a family. I don’t.”

She could have a family again, but Jon Snow decided to stay at the Wall. She was forced to leave the family she may have the moment she began to know him.

“Will I ever be able to see him?” Margaery asked.

“I was clear. You cannot know where he is, or his name, and you cannot see him again. I’m sorry.”

“I understand,” Margaery said after a moment with an obvious effort.

“Good. You were queen for a time, and you betrayed Trystane Martell who, according to Lord Varys, was a good friend of yours. I expect you to know sometimes there are unpleasant decisions to take.”

“I do, but I betrayed Trystane in order to save him. All his men had turned on him. It was our only chance to end the fighting. Lord Yronwood couldn’t convince so many lords to abandon the hostilities without this. If we hadn’t done it, you would have found King’s Landing in a much poorer state when you came.”

“I still find it odd that Dornish would stop fighting only after their prince is forced to leave.”
Daenerys nodded. “Would you marry Trystane Martell if you had the chance?”

“Do you mean whether I would marry him if I were you or if I would marry him if you proposed him to me as a husband?”

“Whatever you like.” She was curious to hear the answer to both questions.

“Trystane is a good man, but considering the actual circumstances, I wouldn’t marry him, queen or not. He is already contested by his fellow countrymen and marrying him would cause problems with my bannermen, no matter the position I have. I regret what I did to him. I wish there had been another way.”

“Sometimes, there are no other ways. I will not hold you any longer, Lady Margaery. You may leave.”

Daenerys remained to think for a moment. If roles were exchanged, she would indeed be furious as well if Margaery Tyrell confiscated her child. However, roles were not exchanged and she had to think about the peace and stability of the Seven Kingdoms and the well-being of her people before everything else. She couldn’t allow someone to use the son of Tommen Baratheon against her or allow the boy to know who he was so he would start a rebellion one day. She could have killed him. She would have been well in her rights, with the way the Baratheons and the Lannisters treated Rhaenys and Aegon. It would have been justice for both Tywin Lannister and Robert Baratheon. But she didn’t kill the boy. It wouldn’t have been justice for him. Margaery’s son had done nothing to deserve death. Daenerys would make sure he lived, and that he had a good life, but she wouldn’t take the risk to see him endanger her rule. That she wouldn’t permit.

She thought with sadness about Sansa’s daughter, gone for good, and about her own son, dead before he could see the light of day. And Margaery would never see her son either. All the three of them lost their child, just like so many men and women in this country and across the Narrow Sea. Still, her son and Sansa’s daughter were dead. Margaery’s son was not.

She left the small council room and went to her apartments, the queen’s apartments. There she wrote a letter, then brought it herself to Marcon. He lifted his eyes from whatever he was writing when she entered.

“Yes, your Grace. How may I help you?”

“Send this to Sunspear.”

Chapter End Notes

Daenerys is actually beginning to rule the Seven Kingdoms instead of conquering them, and she's already taking decisions crucial to the future of her reign, that could determine the fall or the survival of her regime. Although Daenerys is capable to make
compromise, she can also be inflexible in specific matters, especially when it comes to dealing with rebellions or anything compromising her own vision of a just society, like we can see here. We also see how Daenerys used her time in Meereen to learn how to better deal with different factions inside the same country, even the same government.

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
Chapter Notes

Quite a short chapter. The structure is unusual, going from the present to the past, but I hope you'll like.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sansa XXXVI

Joanna is dead.

The words pounded in her head. They came again and again, no matter how many times she would try to drive them out. It was like that ever since Tyrion said them.

Joanna is dead.

This time, she wasn’t praying. There was no godswood, no weirwood, no statue, no gods to turn to. Only fire.

Joanna is dead.

From where she stood, on the borders of the small camp that was set in front of the castle, Sansa could see everything, just like every of the two thousand men who were quickly assembled to lay siege upon Castamere. Only this time Castamere didn’t need to be besieged, nor stormed.

Joanna is dead.

There had been a short war council when they arrived. Sansa, Tyrion and Arya had flown on the dragon’s back all the way from the Eyrie. They stopped at the Golden Tooth on their way, where she could see Alysanne Lefford who was very kind with her, much like their new queen was in the Vale. Then they resumed their path that led them here, to Castamere.

Joanna is dead.

Tyrion had stood with his officers as they looked upon maps in the command tent. The sun was setting on the horizon. There had been two maps, one of the surroundings of the castle, the other one of the Westerlands. The officers, Sansa didn’t know their names, discussed of the best way to take the castle, some arguing to starve the besieged to death, others declaring they should storm the castle right away, another worrying about the number of men they might lose and looking for the strategy with the fewer losses. Tyrion didn’t say a word. He kept looking at the map of the Westerlands.

Joanna is dead.

Arya stood by her side as they watched from afar. “Do you feel better?” her sister asked her. Sansa didn’t answer. How could she ever feel better? She brought her hand to her belly. She felt she was about to give back whatever small food she ate for dinner.

Joanna is dead.
“I was once married to a man against my will. He wasn’t a good man, but he had his good sides and he loved me. I came to love him too. We had a baby, a son. I called him Rhaego, after my dead brother, the brother I never knew. Rhaego never lived long enough to breathe the air of our world. He died the moment he came into it.” She barely listened to the words of Daenerys Targaryen, just like she barely drank from the cup of wine before her, in a small chamber of the Gates of the Moon. “I thought everything was lost after that. I was alone, in a hostile land, with people counting on me. But I took strength in my loneliness. I became stronger through this. And I found out that living was still worth it, even if every day was a fight. Because things get better. When we touch the bottom, when the world seems about to collapse around us, this is when we must be strong, and this is the moment we choose to live.”

Joanna is dead.

She looked at her little sister. She had changed so much since they left Winterfell. How she wished they had never left. None of this would have happened had they stayed home. They would still have a family. Father, Mother, Robb, Rickon, they would all be alive. If she had begged her father to stay in Winterfell instead of King’s Landing, she may not be standing here right now, assisting to the end.

Joanna is dead.

At night, she slept with her lord husband. She rested her head on his chest, and then she cried. He gently brought his arms around her neck, and he comforted her. This was the only time when he did it. The rest of the days was spent avoiding each other. Sometimes, she thought he wanted to tell her something, but he didn’t, and when she tried to talk about it, it never ended well.

Joanna is dead.

Sansa asked Arya what she was seeing. Her sister looked forward and Sansa stared at the same place. “I say that I see justice.” This wasn’t what Sansa was seeing. It might be night, but how was it possible that their eyes didn’t see the same thing.

Joanna is dead.

She remembered when she saw her for the first time, when she just came out of her. The labor had been an ordeal for Sansa, but then she saw her, her daughter. She had her father’s eyes. She used to fall asleep when Sansa sang her a song. She was so quiet, and so beautiful.

Joanna is dead.

“I’m sorry,” her sister told her. “I know I told you already, but I’m here no matter what you need. Is there anything I can do?” Arya was almost pleading to her. Sansa didn’t answer. What she wanted, Arya couldn’t give it. There was only one thing in this world Sansa wanted, and she wanted her daughter.

Joanna is dead.

“It’s not your fault.” He said that as a matter of fact, without the usual warmth and care in his voice that she had grown accustomed to when he addressed her. He had changed. Ever since the Battle of the Vale, he hadn’t been the same. Or perhaps she was the one who changed. Perhaps she was no longer Sansa Stark. Perhaps Sansa Stark was truly gone. Only, she wasn’t sure if she was Sansa Lannister either, not anymore. Who was she? If only she could ask her husband, but she didn’t think he would answer her.

“Lord of Castamere one night, a pile of ashes on the morning,” said a man nearby, probably unaware
she heard him. “I was there the first time. Back then we used water. Now it’s fire.”

Joanna is dead.

When his men stopped arguing during the war council, Tyrion spoke. “We don’t need to take Castamere.” The officers had all looked at him, utterly surprised, but he didn’t give them any consideration. “We don’t need to besiege it. We don’t need to storm it. We don’t need to attack it.” He took a piece, threw aside the spice that represented the small force of House Spicer, and planted the piece in its place. The piece was carved in the shape of a dragon.

Joanna is dead.

The huge dragon flew over the castle of Castamere, spitting his fire of destruction upon the barely rebuilt fortress. Rolph Spicer was inside, along with all his household, and they wouldn’t get out. The moment he saw a dragon flying in the skies, he sent one of his men to offer his surrender, to the condition he would keep his life. Tyrion had laughed and ordered his men to not let the messenger leave the encampment. He told Spicer’s man that he did him a favor and that he would be much safer here than with his master come the night.

Joanna is dead.

Only a few days ago, Tyrion had been flying over another castle, much higher. It hadn’t been the first time she saw him fly on the back of the beast. He had done it when he fought Vance Corbray’s army, but it had been soldiers he rained fire upon. And once the men of the Vale saw the huge army facing them helped by a dragon, they flew away. Relatively few of them were actually burned alive. The way Tyrion had burned Serion Lannister and Vance Corbray after the battle had been much more shocking. Sansa didn’t remember well this moment. It was then she had learned the truth. She knew there had been flames, but everything was a blur. The destruction of the Eyrie was much clearer in her mind. The two dragons flew like brothers and spit their fire upon the empty castle, reducing it to rubbles just like Ramsay Bolton did with Winterfell. However, everyone was there to see it this time. The Lords of the Vale had been desperate when they saw the pride of their kingdom destroyed and being powerless to do anything against it. Some tried to escape the wall of Unsullied surrounding them in a futile attempt to save the seat of House Arryn, only to be knocked out.

Joanna is dead.

The makeshift platforms that were erected to rebuild the huge castle were all burning. The walls, whose reconstruction had barely begun, were licked by the flames and already blackening. From where she stood, Sansa saw a man running from the castle’s gate. He made a few steps. As his figure detached itself from the fortress, they could all see he was aflame as much as the castle he just left. He only made a few further steps before he stumbled to the ground. He never got up.

Joanna is dead.

They took her away from her. When they captured her, they took her daughter away from her. She begged, cried, screamed, but nothing would change their mind. They took her away from her, and she would never see her again.

Joanna is dead.

Sansa looked at the place where the burned man fell. She saw few men who were actually burned alive on the battlefield in the Vale, or perhaps she saw more and she didn’t remember. All the events that took place on this day were blurry at best. She had been somehow fascinated the first time she saw a man die, thinking no one would write a song about him. Now, however, seeing a dead man
had an entirely different meaning for her. This man died because Tyrion wanted it. To admit it was terrifying. To acknowledge the fact that Tyrion wanted everyone in the castle to die was terrible. This wasn’t the husband she knew. This wasn’t the man she had Joanna with.

Joanna is dead.

Joanna is dead. He told her that. After his officers were gone and he had decided to burn Castamere to the ground, Sansa had been alone with him. And just like every time they were alone lately, they had nothing to tell each other. Only this time Sansa dared to speak. She tried... she tried in a very weak way, but she tried all the same... to tell him that maybe... there could be another way. She wasn’t sure if she wanted Rolph Spicer dead. She knew he played a role in Joanna’s loss, but the only thing she was sure to want was her daughter. When she had tried to convince Tyrion not to burn the hundreds of people inside Castamere, she only met the icy stare. The stare he had when they met Walder Frey.

Joanna is dead.

That was when he told her, and he said nothing else. That was enough. It meant he wouldn’t come back on his decision. He left the tent and Sansa didn’t see him again before the night. Water once drowned the people in this castle, tonight they were cooked alive inside its walls, and those who tried to escape like this man burned alive all the same. Tyrion didn’t lie to his men or to her, for when darkness fell upon the Westerlands, he climbed on his dragon’s back and flew towards Castamere to destroy it. She couldn’t forget his words to his officers before he left. I will finish what my father started.

The Eyrie, and now Castamere. But Castamere wasn’t empty like the Eyrie. The husband she knew wouldn’t have done this. He would have warned the people inside, given them a chance to surrender. He didn’t. He only spared the messenger, and he sentenced all the others to die, just like he sentenced Serion Lannister and Vance Corbray. Only most of the people inside this castle had nothing to do with her kidnapping or Joanna’s death.

Tears began to fall on her cheeks. They weren’t caused by the smoke that reached them. She lost her daughter. She looked at Arya. Her little sister was looking toward Castamere, fascinated by what was going on. She was so different from the sister she had known. Had she lost her too? Was she about to lose Tyrion as well?

Joanna is dead.

The burning of Castamere lasted all night. Tyrion rained fire on the fortress until dawn. There wasn’t much left when he gave up. As he came down, Sansa noticed something odd in the dragon’s eyes. His eyes, two pools of molten gold, looked at her, and as they met with her own gaze, she thought he was asking for her help.

Joanna is dead.

She looked away. She didn’t want to look into the beast’s eyes. Every time she looked at him, she feared the worst for Tyrion. She was afraid of what he might become. She was afraid of the truth he told her. Only, by avoiding the eyes of the dragon, she met the eyes of the man she loved, and they were not to make her feel better. There she found another one of her fears, a much older fear, and she felt this fear was beginning to become a reality. A song played in the background, a familiar song, but it was different.
With a mane of gold or scales and wings

The beast always has claws

And yours are long and sharp my lord

With fire unlike mine

And so he thought

And so he thought that lord of Castamere

As the fire rained o’er his halls with everyone to see

Yes now fire rains o’er his halls with everyone to see

And while they all listened to the song, the only thing Sansa could see were the cold green eyes of her husband and the icy stare again that came with them. The stare she feared and that she saw at the Twins. It was the face of Tywin Lannister. He looked like the man who murdered her mother and brother.

Chapter End Notes

The structure of this chapter was inspired by the structure of a part of Sansa III, where Sansa keeps reminding herself or hearing something again and again. The chapter is mostly about her thoughts and memories as Castamere is burned to the ground by Tyrion. It’s probably where Tyrion embodies the worst sides of both his fathers.

Please review

Next chapter: Doran
Doran had two chapters early in this story. I have the impression it's been a lifetime since I wrote from his perspective. He is probably not the most interesting character of Game of Thrones, but he is certainly one of those which death was done in the most stupid and illogical way in the show. Doran Martell is one of the few people in Westeros to actually rule his lands for the good of his own people. Of all the paramount lords who ruled the Seven Kingdoms when Season 1 started, Doran was probably the only one to take decisions with the well-being of his subjects as the first priority. Even Ned Stark, in my opinion, cannot claim the same for he seemed to be serving honor codes more than the interests of Northerners, nor Tyrion when he was acting Hand for his priority remained to protect his family's interests, despite his attempts to make things better for the people of the capital.

Sorry, too much ranting. Back to the story.

And I apologize for uploading this chapter so late once again.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

To Doran Nymeros Martell, Lord of Sunspear, Prince of Dorne,

Recent events forced me to reconsider a marriage between me and Trystane Martell. Although I would be honored to have such a husband, the said events prevent me from accepting for the good of the Realm. Your queen will never forget your loyalty and the help you provided. House Martell can always count on my full support and help against their enemies. Our two houses have been friends for a long time and it will remain that way.

Daenerys Targaryen, the First of Her Name, Queen of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynars, Lady of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm

Doran laid down the raven scroll, his swollen hand shaking. Milk of the poppy soothed the pain, but there was still a tingle in his palm and fingers. Although Doran was disappointed with the situation, it was far better from what it could have been. Trystane had come back from King’s Landing, chased from the city after fights erupted following the death of his three cousins, Obara, Nymeria, and Tyene.

Doran had planned the marriage between Daenerys Targaryen and Quentyn, then with Trystane, to ensure the safety of Dorne after the Targaryen dynasty was reinstated. Dorne couldn’t live apart from the rest of Westeros. They had to maintain good relations with their neighbors. After the repetitive failed invasions of Dorne, the Reach and the Stormlands had come to avoid war in the deserts of the south. As long as Dorne wasn’t a threat to their lands, the Baratheons and the Tyrells wouldn’t bother Doran’s people. In consequence, he never threatened their lands in any way. Even when he made an alliance with Joffrey Baratheon, he limited his military involvement by positioning troops near the frontiers, but they remained on Dorne’s territory. Not a single Dornish soldier set foot on Renly or Stannis’ lands.
When Daenerys Targaryen came to Westeros, he knew this fragile but lasting balance would be broken. For the first time since the fall of the Mad King, Dornish soldiers went north of the Red Mountains. The balance was lost, and with the queen confirming the territories in the Stormlands that were granted by the Lannisters during the War of the Five Kings, Doran knew these concessions could become a source of conflict in the future. He had never truly wanted more territories in the North, but he couldn’t give them back now, especially not now that such a move would make him look weak at the worst possible time.

The guarantee of peace after the Baratheon dynasty would be overthrown was the marriage of Daenerys Targaryen with his son, ensuring the close alliance of House Martell with the new queen and dissuading any lord from seeking fight against Dorne. Now however, with Trystane back to Sunspear, the project of marriage tattered, and several minor houses in Dorne angry after House Martell, and possibly already preparing for war, all his plans of peace had gone into dust. The message of Daenerys Targaryen was somehow relieving, since she guaranteed help against their enemies. Doran understood the meaning of her words. This meant she would help them fight any house that would rebel against them as a consequence of the recent events in King’s Landing.

Doran knew it wouldn’t be easy. He would have to restore the authority of House Martell over Dorne. He knew his people and they were still thirsty for blood and revenge, just like he was. However, he doubted they would be as patient as he was to get their revenge. They would go to war right away if not very soon. It was good news in some way, for people who went to war at the first provocation were less dangerous than those who waited for the right moment to strike, but what was good news for his family were bad news for Dorne, for the people would suffer of this war. However, it was unavoidable at this point.

“Hotah.” The captain of his guard looked at him, his axe ready as always. “Bring me my son. We need to talk.”

Hotah did as he was told. While he was away, Doran looked at the Water Gardens. Not long ago, Trystane and Myrcella had been walking there, two children in love who were unaware of how the world wanted them dead. Myrcella was dead, and Doran’s son was only a shell of the young man he once was.

His son walked into the room where Doran sat without saying a word. The young man full of life that Doran knew was gone. There was only a ghost. He hadn’t been like this when he arrived in Sunspear. After he took time to restore himself, Doran had had a very long and painful conversation with him. Trystane defended the decisions he took in the capital. He went on a monologue that lasted for about fifteen minutes, explaining himself, trying to convince his father that he had done the right thing by condemning Tyene.

Trystane had been furious all along his speech. Doran had listened to him, the pain to see his son in such a state greater than the pain of the gout. After his son’s tirade was over, it was Doran’s turn to speak. He spoke more slowly, without raising the voice, letting his reason and his head talk instead of his heart. He reminded Trystane of the duties he had as future Lord of Sunspear, of his failures, of how he betrayed his people by placing his personal vendetta before Dorne.

First, Trystane had objected, but as Doran kept speaking, his son’s complaints grew weaker. He could only mutter objections, then he didn’t argue anymore and simply listened to his father. At the end of their conversation, Doran’s last son couldn’t look into his father’s eye.

Doran didn’t like to see his son this way, broken, but he had no choice. Trystane would be Lord of Sunspear someday. He would rule the entire people of Dorne, lead the destiny of their nation, and for that Doran needed to lower his son so he could rise again. Trystane had to understand the mistakes
he made so he could take back the right way.

His son was just in the same state as when they had stopped to discuss days ago. He knelt before his father when he entered and didn’t dare to look at him. Trystane never behaved this way. He was always respectful towards his parents, but never obedient to the point he would bow like a servant.

“Rise, Trystane. You’re my son, not my serf.” His son slowly stood up, still refusing to make eye contact with Doran. “Sit.”

Doran indicated the seat in front of him, and Trystane did as he was told, keeping his eyes on the floor. Hotah remained at the entrance, ready to intervene at any moment.

“Hotah, leave us,” he told him.

The strong man didn’t say anything, which wasn’t surprising. What was surprising was that he didn’t move.

“My prince…”

Areo Hotah never questioned Doran’s orders, less disobeyed him. Doran felt that for the first time, Hotah might be tempted to do so.

“Leave us, Hotah. He is Mellario’s son.”

Doran knew that Hotah, although he remained in Dorne when Mellario left, remained deeply attached to her. Doran tried to communicate to him through his eyes that Mellario wouldn’t have wanted him to suspect her son this way. A ray of understanding might have passed through Areo’s eyes, and he left the room. Doran was alone with his son.

For a long time, they remained silent, Doran gazing at his son while the latter refused to look at him. Not far away, he could hear the water of the gardens dripping. This environment helped with the health of his body as much as that of his mind, but they couldn’t divert his thoughts from Oberyn’s death after the Mountain killed him, and they couldn’t do better now.

Doran started the conversation with a simple question. “Did you have time to think?”

“Yes, Father.” Trystane’s voice was flat, dull. He still didn’t look up.

“And?”

“I don’t know. I… I know that… I don’t know. I don’t know, Father. I know what happened is because of me, but… What else could I do? They killed her. What did you expect me to do?”

“I was hoping you wouldn’t make Oberyn’s mistakes, or the mistakes I almost made.”

“I’m sorry. I… I don’t know anymore if what I did was right or wrong.”

Doran knew what his son was going through. He had gone through this long ago, when Elia and her children died. He had only wanted to kill everyone who had something to see with her death. He had been like Oberyn. He wanted to go to war against Robert Baratheon, Ned Stark and Tywin Lannister and kill them and all their men. Only, something stopped him from doing so. Doran had always been a man who thought before he acted. In his youth, before the gout stuck him to a chair, he would often walk in the corridors of Sunspear or the Water Gardens, using the opportunity to reflect on a situation before he took a final decision. That day however, the day he learned of Elia’s death, he had gone to walk in the streets of the city.
Doran seldom went down in the streets. Most of the time, he was carried by litter. He cared about his people but didn’t meddle with them like Oberyn did. That day, however, had been different. He went into the streets, alone. And there he saw the misery of his people. The widows, the orphans, the cripples, all those who suffered from the war. And he had realized how worse it would get if he kept making war against all the other kingdoms.

Oberyn had been with him. They disguised themselves as simple merchants. His brother had wanted him to see the suffering of their people so that he would be convinced to bring justice to Elia’s murderers. Instead, Doran asked himself what Elia would want him to do. Would she have wanted their people to suffer so that they could kill the people who murdered her? The answer was easy to find.

Later, Doran had come to the conclusion that if they fought the new dynasty, they would be alone. He feared the Tyrells wouldn’t fight long when they would realize Aerys was dead, and the end of the siege of Storm’s End proved that Doran was right in his predictions. They needed allies. So Doran delayed his vengeance. He made alliances in secret, prepared the return of the Targaryen dynasty, hid and waited for the right moment to strike. And he succeeded.

Doran knew that Trystane had been facing the same dilemma. He had to choose between avenging his beloved or serving his people. He chose the first, and now the people of Dorne would suffer from it. They would fight each other, and thousands would die in fratricidal war.

Trystane may have forgotten it, but Doran reminded him of that during their conversation that took place days ago. Now his son was torn apart as he realized the full consequences of his actions.

“You remember what I told you one day. What decides whether something is right or wrong?”


“Yes. The best decision, and the one we must always take, is the one that benefits the most to the people of Dorne. It is not justice, riches, victories, the nobles, or even the people who decide what is the right decision to take. It is what is best for the people that decides what we must do. Were your decisions in King’s Landing the best for Dorne?”

He didn’t reply.

“Look at me, Trystane.” Slowly, his son raised his eyes. “Were your decisions in King’s Landing the best for Dorne?”

“No,” he confessed.

“Then you know that you did wrong.”

A single tear fell from his left eye. “I loved her.”

“I know. I saw you every day, wandering in the gardens. Happy. Tell me Trystane. You knew Myrcella, better than I did. Do you think she would have wanted you to avenge her if that meant the death of thousands of people?”

“No,” Trystane whispered.

“Now, was revenge worth it all?”

“Was it, Father?”
For the first time, his son looked straight at him and their eyes met. He wasn’t defying Doran. He was looking for an answer. His son was a broken man. Doran wished he could give his son what he wanted, but he couldn’t.

“Only time will tell us. What I know is that it wasn’t worth my brother’s death.”

If Doran could get back his brother by reinstating the family who murdered Elia and his nephew and niece, he would. Only he couldn’t, and it was useless to wish Oberyn could be back with them. He was gone, just like the Sand Snakes, and now Doran had to care about those who still lived, beginning by the young man who sat in front of him.

“I received a message from Daenerys Targaryen,” he announced.

“Oh.” His son didn’t look surprised. Trystane was clever enough to know this would happen.

“There won’t be a marriage.”

“Oh,” he repeated, still unconcerned.

“However, she assured that she would support us against any enemy we would have. What do you make of it?”

“She will help us, Father. She is true to her word.”

This confirmed what Doran thought and hoped for. “The next months will be difficult for us, my son. We will have to fight rebellions in Dorne. We may have the support of House Targaryen, but we will have to bring the peace back by our own means. This will require force and diplomacy at the same time. It will be difficult to keep Dorne united without sacrificing too many of our countrymen, but we will have to do it. You will have to do it.”

Trystane nodded. “Yes, Father.”

“You will be Lord of Sunspear one day, my son.” *Maybe sooner than you think.* “You will have to behave like the Lord of Sunspear from now on.” He sighed, then resumed with a softer tone. “We do not have an easy task, Trystane. We have the destinies of over two hundred thousand people in our hands. This is a great responsibility. We cannot allow our personal feelings and desires to infringe on our duties. Everyone in Dorne is counting on us. They depend on us, rely on us, and we cannot disappoint them. I know this is hard. This is something inhuman to ask, but it is something we must do. If we don’t do it, no one will, and everyone will suffer more than we will ever suffer from repressing what makes us human. Do you understand?”

“I understand, Father.” Trystane replied with a voice that wasn’t as hollow as it used to be. It was still flat, but you could hear in the tone that he was ready to do his duty. In time, he would learn to carry his burden and to live with it, as Doran learned to live with his.

When his son was gone, Hotah came back. The bearded priest stood at the entrance of the room, like he always did, alert and ready to react to anything. Doran stayed there, watching the peaceful nature of the gardens in silence. It looked so empty now. Elia and her children were gone. Quentyn was gone. Oberyn was gone. Myrcella was gone. Obara, Nymeria and Tyene were gone. Ellaria Sand was imprisoned in a tower cell, probably for the rest of her life, in Sunspear. Oberyn’s remaining daughters were kept there as well, free of their movements but under heavy supervision. Only Doran, Hotah and Trystane remained, and soon they would go too.

“Did you ever regret serving me, Hotah?”
Despite his cold stature, Hotah allowed for the keen observer to see he was surprised by the question. “I never regretted anything, my prince,” he replied.

“Never?”

“Never.”

“Not even when Mellario left?”

For a moment, the bearded priest hesitated. “I was sad, my prince.”

“Me too.”

A long silence followed, a silence which both men respected.

“Hotah, bring me to Caleotte.”

The guard his wife left when she went back home pushed Doran to the maester’s apartments. There, Doran dictated a letter. He started it all over again three times and asked for Caleotte and even Hotah’s advice more than once. Strangely, he found the short answers of the bearded priest to be more helpful than the long suggestions of the maester. In the end, it gave a letter that Doran thought might be appropriate.

The next day, the letter left the Water Gardens for the closest harbor. There, it would take a ship to Essos. Doran prayed it would reach Norvos in time, before it was too late.

Two days later, news came to the Water Gardens that Myria Jordayne, Lady of the Tor, had entered into open rebellion against House Martell. Her father had been among the lords executed by the new queen.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter closes Trystane’s storyline. I hope that he didn't look too much like a cliche character through this fanfiction, like the man who's only trying to avenge the woman he loves. I tried to put emphasis on his attempts to rule Meereen, then King’s Landing in Daenerys' absence, picturing him as a ruler trying to emulate his father, while being confronted every day with the memory of the woman he lost, and added his friendship with Margaery to give more color to the character. In the end, still, it was his search for revenge that condemned him.

As for Doran, well, he was more of a backstory character, someone acting in the shadows like Varys, but whose decisions played a great role in the events that shook Westeros and in shaping the story. His death was so stupid in the show, and I'm glad that I produced something that I deem more realistic for him, and that allowed him to actually help Daenerys to come back to Westeros. Daenerys may be hated by some, loved by others, and produce mixed feelings among the rest, she still helped to defeat the White Walkers, so we can credit Doran for the far but determining role he played in the defeat of the great enemy. A peaceful, ill, quiet lord who, in my opinion, deserves more praise and a better place in history books than conquerors like Aegon, Tywin or Daeron.

Please review
Next chapter: Sansa
Sansa XXXVII

Chapter Notes

Two chapters this week. I was planning to upload this one week ago, but these two chapters go so much together that I thought it would be better to not leave you on your appetite for a complete week. Furthermore, these two chapters are quite short.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

SANSA XXXVII

They walked inside, surrounded by four men with the armor of House Lannister. Pushed in the back, Gawen Westerling, Lord of the Crag, and his wife Sybell Spicer fell on their knees. Tyrion stepped forward, dominating them in his position, his shadow covering them both.

“So, you needed one day with my armies at your gates, and another one with a dragon over your heads to understand that resistance was useless?”

Normally, Tyrion would have said that with a hint of humor. His voice was now devoid of any such thing. It sounded like the voice of someone who was dead. Every day, Sansa had the impression he was coming back, and she came to doubt that Tyrion wasn’t the son of Tywin Lannister.

All their eyes were set on them, the two prisoners and the man who held the power of life and death over them. Sansa stood away with the officers and Genna. Tyrion’s aunt had accompanied if not led the troops Casterly Rock sent to besiege the Crag. She had only been there for one day when Tyrion and Sansa came from Castamere by dragon. They arrived in the middle of the day, and a few hours later Gawen Westerling surrendered unconditionally. It was night now, and they were defeated.

“Do you know what is on this table,” Tyrion resumed, “apart from a map of the Westerlands? These are copies and traces of correspondence between the Crag and three men: Rolph Spicer, Serion Lannister, and Petyr Baelish. It is quite a chance that your maester keeps a copy of everything you send and receive.”

He walked towards Lady Sybell, who looked on the ground. “And it is quite good news too that your maester refused to burn his archives like you asked him to, right before Lord Westerling opened the gates.”

Lord Gawen’s expression changed at this moment. He looked at his wife with a bewildered expression.

“And it is quite a coincidence that all the messages you exchanged with Serion Lannister, your brother and Littlefinger were addressed to you and signed by you, Sybell Spicer.”

“Don’t believe a word of what he’s saying, Gawen.” The Lady of the Crag spoke for the first time.

“It’s useless, my lady. Ser Daven sent a raven to Casterly Rock. He questioned your men in the North. One of them was stationed at Winterfell when Lady Sansa and our daughter were taken away. He returned to the army later, after the Wall fell a second time, hoping that in the confusion no one would notice him, but he was wrong. He confirmed the role your house played in the
 kidnappings. And he also confirmed that he received his orders from you.”

“Anything to say?” he added after a heavy moment of silence.

She looked up at him, hatred painted in his eyes, but she said nothing.

“Sybell, how could you do this?” her husband said.

“I did it for our children,” she replied, still looking at Tyrion. “They deserve better.”

“You had the great privilege to see your son marry one of my cousins.”

“A bastard!” she spat.

“A Lannister! A Lannister who was ten times above him, ten times what your entire family will ever be. I gave you a chance after you betrayed the Westerlands and sided with Robb Stark. My lord father wouldn’t have shown you the same mercy. I think I should have done what he would have done back then. Kill you and everyone one of your family.”

“Well,” Tyrion continued after another moment of silence, “that’s what I’m going to do now. Gawen Westerling, and you, Sybell Spicer, his wife, I sentence you and all House Westerling to death. The members of your household who are not members of your family will live and remain in service at the Crag for the family who will take your place.”

“Wait, my lord!” Lord Gawen begged. “I didn’t know about this, I swear. I had no part in this conspiracy.”

“Well, you should have known. For then you would have stopped it and informed me. Seeing you cannot stop your wife from plotting against her liege lord, that makes you as guilty as she is.”

“But my children…”

“You already lost a son, I’m sure you’ll be happy to see him again with all your family. I will not allow something that came out of this cunt to live.” He pointed Lady Sybell as he spoke. She was paler than bed’s sheets. “Take them away. They die at dawn.”

“No, my lord, please, please…”

Everyone was silent in the command tent as they dragged Lord Westerling and his wife, mute and despair, out. Once the cries of Lord Gawen were far away enough so that they wouldn’t hear him, a complete silence settled. Tyrion slowly turned on himself to face them, and again she saw the eyes of Tywin Lannister.

“You may leave, all of you. There’s nothing more to discuss tonight.”

The officers left quickly, but Sansa lingered behind. She was shaking and didn’t dare to look anywhere but to the ground. Tyrion had just sentenced a whole family to die. The youngest son was only twelve.

“Sansa.” She almost jumped when she heard the voice. She hadn’t heard it in a while. She turned her gaze toward him in a quicker way than she would have dared only a moment ago. “You should go and take some rest.”

He was back. She nodded and quickly walked out before the icy stare of Tywin Lannister would come back and she wouldn’t remember the last time she looked at Tyrion tonight as the time when
he was the husband she loved again.

She stormed more than she walked into their personal pavilion. She clung to the memory of this rare moment in the last few days when Tyrion had been himself again. She was so afraid of losing him after she lost Joanna that she didn’t dare to talk to him. She feared it might send him further down. She was afraid that anything she would do might have dire consequences. All she could do was watch and pray for him. She didn’t have the courage to speak to him anymore.

“There you are.” Genna had walked in without asking for permission, of course. “So, what are you going to do?”

Sansa frowned. “What do you mean?”

“Are you planning to remain in that chair doing nothing, or will you talk Tyrion out of this idea?”

She was confused. Genna sighed and spoke again.

“You remember the day you arrived at the Rock? On our way back from the ancient Great Hall, I told you Tyrion would need you one day. I hope you didn’t forget.”

Sansa didn’t know what she was talking about first, but then the memory came back to the surface, something she heard a long time ago and that she couldn’t forget easily. *When this day comes, Tyrion will need you. It will be your duty to stop him from doing something he may regret for the rest of his life.*

“Ah, I see you remember.” Genna must have noticed it from the expression that went through her face. “So, what are you planning to do?”

“Nothing,” she whispered after some time. It was barely audible, but Genna seemed to have heard it nonetheless.

“Nothing?” her aunt-in-law asked, unconvinced.

“If you don’t want the Westerlings to die, talk to him yourself.”

“He will not listen to me, Sansa.”

“Then he won’t listen to me either.”

Genna sighed. There was a chair right next to Sansa and she sat on it. The wood made a strange sound when she took place. An enormous hand landed on Sansa’s shoulder, firm yet kind.

“You’re the only one he will listen to right now, Sansa.”

“No, he won’t. Things have changed.”

Genna said nothing for a few seconds. “I know it is hard to lose a child. I’ve been there, but you cannot let it destroy you.”

“She’s gone,” Sansa said with a strangled voice.

“I know,” Tyrion’s aunt replied softly, almost in a whisper.

“We sent people to look for her through all the Vale, and they found nothing. She’s gone, somewhere at the bottom of the Narrow Sea, or lying on a coast somewhere. Her body all…”
She couldn’t finish. Tears threatened to fall again.

Again, the two women said nothing. They sat alone in the pavilion that felt so empty to Sansa, without any of the people she loved. Arya was training somewhere in the camp. She didn’t think her little sister could be of any help to her anyway. Arya said she would always be there for her, but she wasn’t. Sansa was alone.

“How were things at Castamere?” Genna asked her.

Sansa refused to answer. She didn’t feel like she could lie to Genna, and she didn’t want her to know that what horrified her the most in the second destruction of Castamere was the way Tyrion had looked more than ever like Tywin Lannister.

“I heard another song was composed,” she resumed. *Yes now fire rains o’er his halls with everyone to see.* “I was hoping things would be different, but Tyrion proved without a single doubt that he was my brother’s son.”

“Is he?”

She didn’t look at Genna, but she stopped talking for a moment. Only for a moment. “People say Tywin smiled as Tarbeck Hall fell, and I wouldn’t be surprised if he smiled when he flooded the tunnels of Castamere with all its people inside, though Tygett never told me about it. Tell me, did Tyrion smile?”

“No, he didn’t.” There was no smile upon Tyrion’s face when he was done destroying the castle. There was only… she couldn’t really describe what it was. It was easier to describe what it was not. It was devoid of any mercy, any compassion, any pity.

Total absence of love. That’s what it was. That’s what was inside Tyrion’s eyes when he was done burning Castamere to the ground.

“Joanna wasn’t there when Tywin destroyed Castamere and Tarbeck Hall. She and Tywin were not married yet.” Sansa thought that the mother-in-law she never knew was lucky. She didn’t have to see the man she loved at his worst. “You know she regretted it later.”

“Why?” Sansa asked, surprised.

“Because she felt that she missed her chance to save him. She told me not long before she died. It is sad that Tywin was only ruled by his wife at home. Maybe it would have been for the better if he was ruled by her in other circumstances.”

Genna stood up and looked down on Sansa. “This is your choice, my dear, but I suggest you do something before dawn or else history will just repeat itself.”

Sansa was left alone once more. She was used to solitude. Even when she was with Tyrion now, she felt alone. All her family seemed thousands of miles away from her, as if a wall was erected between them, and she was afraid they might slip farther from her than they actually were.

Reluctantly, as if she was being forced to do it, Sansa left her seat and walked out into the night. Her footsteps brought her back to the command tent. When she arrived, Tyrion was reading something, his back turned on her.

*Tyrian has a lot of Tywin in him, but also his mother’s compassion. Up to now this compassion has kept Tywin’s ruthlessness away, but I fear one day it might not be enough. When this day comes, Tyrion will need you. It will be your duty to stop him from doing something he may regret for the*
rest of his life.

The words Genna told her a long time ago haunted her. Tyrion wasn’t like his father yet. She had seen it tonight, just before she left. When he spoke to her, the caring husband she knew was there. Was it a remnant of the Tyrion she knew? Was he truly turning like his father? The *Rains of Castamere* were playing not far away. By the sound of it, they were a group of drunken men, probably sitting around a campfire with mugs of wine. They probably hadn’t heard of the *Fires of Castamere* yet. Although they had not heard the song, everyone knew what happened at Castamere. Maybe they thought the same would happen to the Crag.

She must have made a sound when she entered, for Tyrion quickly turned to look behind him. His expression softened when he saw her.

“You should be resting.” He went back to his reading.

“You need rest too,” she replied.

“That’s useless. I cannot sleep.”

Tyrion had a horrible sleep before they were wed. It got better as their marriage went on. However, now that Sansa thought about it, Tyrion hadn’t slept much more than her since they learned about Joanna’s death. Her nights were lacking in sleep that she failed to realize that Tyrion was no better.

At least, Tyrion must have noticed that she lacked sleep too, hence his recommendation.

“I cannot sleep either,” she said, while sitting next to him.

“The sleepless demon monkey and the sleepless disgraced daughter.” He sighed. “We’re perfect for each other.”

A smile, a fugitive smile, came to Sansa’s lips and remained there for less than a second at the memory of a joke he made a long time ago. The same day, Sansa learned that her family was murdered at the Red Wedding, gracious gift from Tywin Lannister.

“You shouldn’t do this.” The words had come out of her mouth before she realized she was saying them.

“Reading?” He didn’t lift his eyes from the scroll.

“No. Killing the Westerlings.”

He looked up, but not in her direction. Tyrion stood up and nonchalantly threw the scroll on the table. “I have no choice. They killed her.”

Sansa gazed at her feet. She despised Sybell Spicer for the role she played in her abduction at Winterfell and the death of her daughter, but she felt that she had to say something.

“Tyrion… you cannot kill children.”

He sighed. “If I let them live, with the memory of their mother executed, they will hate me forever and conspire against us at the first opportunity.”

Her husband still refused to look at her. Sansa felt her heart stopping when she heard his words. She looked at Tyrion. The candles projected his long shadow on the tissue of the tent’s wall.

She shivered. When she was in King’s Landing, not long after the Battle of Blackwater, she was
forced to assist a court session. Joffrey wasn’t present, too busy spending time with his new betrothed. Tywin Lannister, despite the fact he never wore a crown, was more a king than Joffrey ever was, and he looked more like a king than his grandson had ever looked to be. When the session had been over, the Hand of the King had risen from the throne and Sansa had seen his shadow on the floor below the dais. It was the same shadow Sansa was seeing tonight.

She looked at Tyrion instead of his shadow. There was no way she could confuse him with Lord Tywin, but as soon as her eyes wandered on the shadow that loomed not far from her, a terrible chill ran on her back as she had the impression that Tywin Lannister stood right next to her.

“How are you different from your father then?”

Slowly, he turned to face her. His face was unreadable. It was as if he didn’t understand what she just said. Her whole body was shaking. Tyrion made a step towards her. She stood up immediately and walked out as quickly as she could without running. When she was out and the wind hit her face, she realized there were thin lines on her cheeks that were very cold. They were tears. She was crying.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter : Tyrion
How are you different from your father then?

He looked at his wife walking away from him. Was it fear on her face? Or sorrow? Or both?

He dropped his arm. He raised it to comfort Sansa. It had felt so awkward when he did it. Before, it had been natural for him to touch his wife, to hold her hand, to cup her cheek, after it had been awkward at the beginning of their marriage. Why did it feel so unnatural again?

He knew why, of course. It was since they were reunited, since he learned he was the bastard son of Aerys Targaryen, since they learned of their daughter’s death. He had failed to save her, failed to protect his family. That’s why he wanted to punish those who did it, to stop them from ever threatening those he loved again. Wasn’t it?

He sat back in his chair and pressed his left elbow on the table, leaning his face against his closed fist. His eyes fell on the ring of his fourth finger, the ring he had for three years now. Tyrion didn’t know for how long he remained lost in his thoughts, just looking at the ring.

“I see you haven’t lost your good habits,” a voice came from the entrance. Tyrion wished it had been Sansa’s, but he knew when he heard that it was the voice of his aunt.

“Maybe, but I don’t recall you not being able to sleep at night,” he replied.

“With Emmon as a husband, I hope you don’t assume my nights were perfect.”

Tyrion thought about the miserable Frey who married his aunt. “No, I wouldn’t.”

It was the first time he was alone with his aunt since he arrived at the Crag. She sat in front of him from the other side of the table. Tyrion spoke before she could place a word.

“You knew, didn’t you?”

She feigned ignorance. “What did I know?”

“Don’t take me for a fool, Genna. You think I ignore why I can ride a dragon?” he snapped.

His aunt was completely taken aback. She must have thought he was accusing her of something else when he said she knew something. Perhaps she knew that Sansa would come to see him. Anyway, she obviously wasn’t expecting this.

“What did you hear?” she asked. Tyrion could see she was tensed.
“My mother took Moon Tea, didn’t she?”

Again, she seemed surprised. She looked away. “Yes, she did.” She seemed relieved, but Tyrion didn’t allow this relief to last long.

“You weren’t there Genna, that night. When I was called by the king, he did nothing. He said nothing, he didn’t stand up, or lifted a finger, or moved the slightest. He didn’t even dare to look at me. And he knew. Don’t try to justify him.”

His aunt was stunned. Tyrion just said the words his lady mother told her when she was about to give birth to him. She had been all alone with her when they talked. His aunt closed her eyes and her lips tightened.

“How much do you know?”

“I know more than enough,” he replied.

“Then why ask me, if you already know?”

He didn’t reply right away. When he did, he couldn’t cover the anger in his voice. “You hid this from me.”

“What else did you want me to do? Being a Lannister was all that protected you. And it was already difficult for you to know you were a dwarf. There was no need for you to know that you were more than this.”

“Yes, a bastard.” All dwarves are bastards in their father’s eyes.

“You were Joanna’s son, and you still are. That makes you a Lannister.”

“What a consolation,” he ironized.

“That’s not a consolation. That’s a fact. Joanna carried you, Tyrion, she brought you into the world. She was a Lannister long before she married your father.”

“My father? Can you tell me one moment when Tywin Lannister was a father to me?”

Genna took her time to answer. “Maybe never. Maybe he was never a father to anyone.” He frowned. “Maybe you, Jaime and Cersei were his heirs, but never his children. All I know is that he would refuse to hear that you were his son. He wouldn’t speak to someone for months after he told him that, even if the someone was of his own blood.”

“Did he know?”

She sighed. “I suppose we will never know.”

“Who else knows?”

“No one. I would never spread stories like this.”

They fall back into a heavy silence. Tyrion thought about he discussion between his lady mother and Genna that Brandon Stark showed him at Winterfell. He had run away to the sept when he discovered the truth, something he never thought he would do. His sister-in-law had found him afterwards and it was their shared determination to save Sansa that allowed him to go forward.

Genna broke the atmosphere. “Tyrion, all this doesn’t matter to me, and it shouldn’t matter to you
either. I know this is difficult, but you have to be over this. I wouldn’t be surprised if there were at least a dozen bastards who were not the lord’s child in our family tree. Men are men and women are women, and they will always be. You need to focus on what’s happening right now.”

She stood up and proceeded to leave, but she stopped before she made five meters. “Let us be clear, Tyrion, Joanna was your mother and she loved you. She loved you before you were born. The last thing she did before she died was to beg Tywin to let you live. Tywin did raise like his son, if not like a son. You have more of him in you than Jaime and Cersei ever had.” She stopped before she added something else. “But that doesn’t mean you have to be like him.”

Then Genna left for good. Tyrion didn’t sleep at all this night. He spent it thinking, or simply just staring at something. It could be his wedding ring, the map on the table, a chair, or even the coming light through the flap as the night came to an end. When the time was right, he left the tent as well.

The place he chose for the execution was in an open field between the Lannister encampment and the Crag. A group of six knights followed him to the location. When they arrived, Gawen Westerling, Sybell Spicer and their three children, Jeyne, Eleyna and Rollam, were already there, hands and ankles tied, in kneeling position. Tyrion stopped at good distance from them. Genna was present too. Sybell Spicer was looking at him with pure hatred, and he gave it back to her in kind. Tyrion waited, and finally he came.

Viserion had gone to hunt yesterday, and now he was back, right when he was needed. The dragon with golden eyes swiftly landed next to Tyrion and eyed the prisoners in front of him. Lord Gawen and his children were obviously terrified by the beast. Tyrion wondered what it would be if it was Drogon who stood before them.

Lady Westerling was trying to hide her distress, but she was afraid of Viserion just as much as her husband. Tyrion stepped forward until he was standing right in front of her.

“Tell me, Lady Westerling, who would you prefer to die first? Your husband or your children? Unless you want to die first.”

She didn’t reply and kept looking at him the same way than before, hating him with her eyes.

“I suppose it is hard to decide. Whoever dies first, you’ll have to look at him burning alive until this is your turn. That’s not an easy choice.”

Still the same gaze of hatred.

“Why did you do this?” Tyrion’s voice took a less mocking tone. “You lost a son. Wasn’t that enough for you? You may not have received what you thought my father promised you, but was it worth risking your entire family in the hope that a brothelkeeper would give you more? You really thought Littlefinger cared about you? That he would reward you for your contribution to his plan?”

“Go on and be done with it, Imp,” she replied spitefully. “Kill us now.”

“So eager,” Tyrion mocked. “I would believe a mother would try to save her children at all cost, not demand that they be killed right away.”

No reply, and still the same hatred in her eyes. Tyrion look at Lord Westerling. “I pity you, Lord Gawen. Being married to this woman. It must have been horrible for you. I knew a man who was married to a woman very similar to her. Ambitious, cunning, power hungry, spiteful, odious, insufferable. She ended up having him killed, then her three children died, and in the end, she died as well. Her whole family died because of her lust for power.” He looked again at the woman. “Would
you be ready to sacrifice all your family if it allowed you to get a bigger castle or a throne?"

She didn’t answer. She seemed about to spite on him.

“Who is silent consents,” Tyrion declared. He turned to Lord Westerling again. “I really pity you, my lord.”

“My lord, please,” Lord Westerling begged. “Spare my children. They did nothing. If you want to kill me, then do it, but please spare them.”

Tyrion looked at the two young girls and the boy, who was still officially betrothed to his cousin Joy. They were crying, the three of them. Tyrion didn’t show any reaction to this.

“You lost a son in the last war, Lord Westerling, didn’t you?”

“Yes, my lord. My son Raynald.”

“It must have been difficult for you.”

“Yes, it was.”

“Then you know what I’m going through. In fact, I’m going through worse, for you lost one child out of four. Joanna was my only child.”

“I’m sorry, my lord, but I swear that I had nothing to do with that. I knew nothing of all this.”

“Yes, obviously you know nothing, Westerling.”

Tyrion stepped back and looked at the five of them. The Westerling were an impoverished house, and Sybell Spicer and her brother, who were of modest origin, had wanted to climb into the highest spheres of the society. Rolph Spicer had paid for his crimes with his life, but that wasn’t enough.

“Sybell Spicer, Gawen Westerling, Jeyne Westerling, Eleyna Westerling and Rollam Westerling, you will all die.” Viserion straightened behind. The Westerlings all panicked. They felt their last hour was coming. The Spicer was still looking at him, probably wanting to rip his heart out of his chest. Only she wouldn’t be able to do so. She didn’t have much time left.

“But not today,” Tyrion added. They all looked in consternation and utter surprise to each other, including the woman. Tyrion looked at the father and his children. “Lord Westerling, you and your children will be brought back to the Crag right away. Our queen doesn’t consider children to be responsible of their father’s or mother’s crimes, and me neither. I expect to have no further problem with House Westerling in the future. You will have a garrison of soldiers loyal to House Lannister stationed inside your walls from now on. You will have to see to their needs, of course. The garrison will stay there as long as I think it is necessary. Whoever in your household is found to plot against House Lannister or the new queen will be executed. Bring them to the Crag while I deal with this woman,” Tyrion added for his men.

They seized a Lord Westerling, two young women and a boy all confused about the way events turned. Before they were far away enough, the eldest daughter yelled. “What are you going to do to our mother?”

Tyrion turned his attention back to Lady Westerling, who after showing confusion for a moment, went back to her hatred expression as soon as Tyrion looked at her. “As for you, Sybell Spicer, you took part to the plot against House Lannister. You are entirely responsible for your actions and their consequences, which include the death of my daughter. However, out of concern for your husband
and your children, I will spare your life for now. I exile you from Westeros. You will be brought to Lannisport and thrown onto the first ship to leave for the Bay of Dragons, with nothing but the clothes on your back. I expect you to not survive more than a few days.”

With a sign from his head, soldiers escorted her, still tied. Tyrion wasn’t about to let this woman get out with it. He would make sure to tell the captain of the ship that would bring her to Essos that the Lord of Casterly Rock would be very thankful if the Lady of the Crag accidentally fell in the sea during the journey to the east.

Tyrion turned to his dragon. “No burning today, Viserion. Sorry to have bothered you for nothing.”

Viserion didn’t seem to be bothered. In fact, Tyrion even thought he saw relief in the dragon’s eyes. Well, he would rather have a dragon who didn’t enjoy burning people alive. Tyrion thought he was done with it. He didn’t want to turn like his father.

He walked away and noticed from the corner of his eye a barely visible smile on his aunt’s lips. The Mad King wasn’t the only father he would be different from.

Chapter End Notes

Some of you were very worried about the path Tyrion was taking, and some even came to hate him for what he did at Castamere. Tyrion has these moments he will decide to do something rash and totally irrational, to follow his emotions, and right after he's going to regret it (see Tywin's death) or try to take back what he did (see the threat to Joffrey when he insisted to go with the bedding at Tyrion's wedding). That is part of his character, and sadly it can push him to do horrible things in specific circumstances, especially when he is in a position of power like now. However, Tyrion remains a good person deep down. He just needs someone to stand up and tell him he's wrong, and that he's not forced to be like his father, whoever he is.

Please review

Next chapter: Gerold
A short detour by the North before we go back south.

GEROLD III

The small group of men quickened their pace as they saw their home appear. Ironrath stood tall in the distance, identical to the last time Gerold saw it. Snow covered a large part of the castle, but he supposed that for the Northerners it was normal. Gerold himself had grown used to snow after such a long time in the North.

He was the only man of the Reach heading for Ironrath. The remnants of his army were at Eastwatch-by-the-Sea with Garlan. Most of them were waiting for the next ship heading for Oldtown to go home. Some were told they would stay behind with Gerold. For the time being, they were all at the Wall, protecting the North from any threat that may arise in the region. The soldiers of Ironrath were all given leave to go home. The need to rebuild Ironrath, still mostly in ruins, and for the harvesting of ironwood justified this decision. Men in service of House Forrester were more useful working ironwood than standing guard on the Wall and patrolling the Gift. As a result, Gerold would come back to Ironrath alone, without any of his own men.

He spent a large part of the journey alone. Sometimes he would speak with the other men, but not much. Despite their shared time fighting the dead, there was still resentment over his departure from Ironrath. The truth was that Gerold blamed himself too. He didn’t know Mira was pregnant, but the fact remained he left a woman heavy with their child behind. He also condemned many of his men to die from the cold by leaving in the thick of winter like this, like Garlan explained to him long ago. Only, back then, he wanted to go home. The battles had been a shock for him. All he wanted to do was to get away from this, and when Mira refused to follow him, he felt betrayed.

The castle walls were getting closer and bigger. What would he tell her? They had been apart for a very long time, and not only physically. There was so much he wanted to tell her, and yet he didn’t know where to begin.

On his way to Ironrath, they came upon Brandon Stark who was heading to the Wall. Gerold talked with him shortly. That was through him that Gerold learned that Ryon Forrester ran away to Essos and that Mira was officially the Lady of Ironrath.

Gerold didn’t feel much at the news. All he wanted was to see Mira again. It was a shock, something he didn’t expect, but nothing more. Later, he thought that his father and grandfather would probably rejoice at the news. He hated them for that. His wife’s brother just left, and all they would do was to find it appropriate for House Hightower. Altos would probably be angry to discover that his brother would be Lord of Ironrath, and Gerold hated him for that too, but at least he got some satisfaction at the idea that his elder brother would be seething with rage.

Truth be told, Gerold didn’t really care about Ironrath. He came back for his wife, not for a castle. Not long before they resumed their way, Brandon Stark talked with him one last time.
“We all have duties. Sometimes it’s to a master, sometimes to the Realm, often to something greater than us… and what is greater than us is our family.”

That, Gerold had known since his birth. House Hightower was more important than every one of them. Altos probably thought he was House Hightower by himself, which might explain why he cared so little for his siblings, especially the little brother with nothing.

They arrived before the gates. The portcullis arose. They barely needed to slow down before they rode into the main courtyard. It looked as desolate as in Gerold’s memories, maybe with more snow. Men climbed down their horses, welcomed by women and children. As Gerold dismounted, he saw her.

She stood away from the crowd welcoming back their men at home. She must have noticed him for she was looking straight in his direction. Gerold didn’t ride at the head of the group. The people of Ironrath were not his people after all. His men were at Eastwatch-by-the-Sea with his brother. It hadn’t stopped his wife from seeing him in the group right away.

He made his way through the small crowd and walked toward her with a measured pace. Her sister Talia was by her side, with four guards, two on their left and two on their right. Every one of them looked at him suspiciously. All but his wife. Her own expression was neutral. Gerold wondered what was to be read in that, or if anything was to be read. He wanted to say something, but it got stuck in his throat. They just stayed there, saying nothing.

“Come.”

That was the first word Mira told him within months, and the first thing she did after that was to turn around and walk toward the wooden castle. Gerold stood there, uncertain about what to do. All the others were still there, eyeing him with the same suspicion. Still hesitating, he made a few steps forward. When he saw they wouldn’t try to stop him, he walked more decidedly and went past them, only to be followed all the way inside.

In the entrance, Mira was waiting for him. She said nothing and continued her path, not toward the Great Hall, but she headed to the stairs. Gerold kept following her. He wasn’t sure where they were going, but he came to recognize the place. When she put her hand on the handle of a door and opened it, he knew that was the lord’s rooms. He had gone in this part of the castle the last time, although he never lived there. Mira was now the Lady of Ironrath. He shouldn’t be surprised that she settled there.

The door was left open. He thought it might be a sign that she was inviting him inside. Before he walked in, he looked behind. No one followed him. They were alone. He only thought it for a very short time. When he walked in, Mira was taking something in a cradle and settling it into her arms.

“Is that…?” He didn’t finish.

“That’s our son,” she answered. “I called him Rodrik, for my brother.”

He slowly approached and looked at him. His eyes were closed. Somehow, Gerold ended holding him in his arms. When his son opened his eyes, he met those of his wife. His son was calm. They just looked at each other. Nothing was said and the three of them just stayed there in silence.

Later, he walked with Mira in the grove behind the castle. The trees were devoid of leaves. When he arrived, the skies were covered but no snow was falling. Now small flakes whirled in the air. The state of the grove was much better than the forests around. The Whitehills left scars that would take many years to heal. He heard from Malcolm Branfield that his family had seeds to repopulate the
forests with trees, but they wouldn’t be able to plant them before the snows were gone. He had grown used to winter, but he still had the impression Mira was more in her element than he was. He felt like a stranger.

“Malcolm told me to inform you that he will come to Ironrath soon. For now, he’s at the Wall, but as soon as they will be sure no White Walker is left he will come back,” he told her as they walked on the thin but hard layer of snow.

“I would like to see him again,” she said.

“You will. I promise.” Mira had already lost more than enough. He wouldn’t believe she could lose more.

“He sent a raven. He wrote you were injured at the Wall. How’s your leg?”

“It’s alright. Don’t worry about me.” He was still limping a little, but he didn’t need a stick anymore and would be completely healed by next week.

“I do. I was afraid you might die,” she added.

She stared straight ahead after she said that. He saw that she was sad. They stopped before a clearing.

“That’s where you played with your brothers and Talia?” he asked her.

“Yes. That tree.” She pointed it. “Elena Glenmore would always hide behind it, and Rodrik would always find her. She wanted to be found.”

“Did you have any news from her?” Elena Glenmore was the betrothed of Rodrik Forrester when he was still alive.

“Back home, in the Reach. I don’t think we will ever see her again.”

They remained silent. He dared to take her hand. She didn’t flinch away. “I’m sorry Mira. For Asher. For Ryon. For everything.” He tried to explain himself. “I… I was stupid. I should never have left you. I was… I was broken after the Battle of Highpoint. My mind wasn’t clear. I spent every moment since Moat Cailin cursing myself. I won’t leave you again… unless you want me to.”

It cost him to say it, but he had to. He had tried to force her to come with him when he left. He wasn’t going to do it again. That wasn’t what he wanted.

Without warning, she threw herself on him. He wrapped his arms around her, and he felt tears falling on his neck. She was crying, silently, without making any noise. He buried his face in her hair as she buried hers in his neck. He didn’t know for how long they remained there, just the two of them, in each other’s arms, but when they left the clearing, it was to both go back to Ironrath.

Gerold Hightower didn’t leave Ironrath that day, nor the day after. He only left after his sister-in-law, Talia Forrester, left for Deepwood Motte, and when he did it was with his wife, for a wedding.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter closes the Forrester arc. It's not been the most interesting part of this
fanfiction, but this way I bring the story of Telltale Game to an end, something that is more unlikely every day to happen for real.

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
Chapter Notes

In this chapter, we get some news about a character we haven't heard of for quite a while: Jaime.

TYRION XXXVIII

A cascade of red threads blocked his vision. His nose, buried in them, picked the familiar scent. Tyrion closed his eyes again and allowed to take comfort in them for a little while longer. The heat emanating from her body pressed against his was a welcomed warmth. The place where they were sleeping might not have been as cold as where they had been for the last year, but now that winter had settled even in the south, they needed all the warmth they could get everywhere they went.

Tyrion inhaled one last time the scent of his wife’s hair. He didn’t realize how much he missed it. Reluctantly, he pulled away, careful to not wake her up, and got out of bed. Dawn was coming. He dressed himself. Tyrion couldn’t be late for today. The stakes were too high.

He looked back to his wife. The events at the Crag were only a few days away. That was the day he made a decision that he hoped he would never regret. He and Sansa barely spoke that night. At one point, she asked him why. Why? She asked nothing more, and nothing else. The answer was quite simple.

“I’m not my father.”

Tyrion wasn’t sure which father he meant. He knew who his real father was, but whenever he thought of his father, it was the image of Tywin Lannister that came to his mind, not that of the Mad King. Tywin Lannister had left permanent marks on all the children he raised. Tyrion could still not reasonably think that he was not the son of Tywin Lannister. Whenever he thought that, it felt awkward, unnatural. The man had never been kind to him, barely acknowledged him as a son, and only did so when it was required or when he could get some advantage out of it, but the Old Lion shaped the halfman he became. A good man does everything in his power to better his family’s position regardless of his own selfish desires.

To always serve the interests of House Lannister. That was what Tyrion had been taught to do. Was he serving the interests of House Lannister when he burned down Castamere a second time? And when he wanted to slaughter the whole House Westerling? Would the Fires of Castamere, the new song that was sung while he rained fire on Rolph Spicer, become the new weapon bards would sing to dissuade any rebellion? Or was it simply by pure will of revenge that he wanted to kill every living Spicer and Westerling? Not only for Joanna and Sansa, but also for Podrick and for Bronn. Tyrion lost the boy who had always been loyal to him, and Daisy lost her husband and the father of her child.

They had killed his only daughter, and it had destroyed Sansa. The loss of her child had been harder on her than it had been on him. Tyrion just wanted to burn everyone related to the kidnapping and the death of Joanna when Serion Lannister told them. Was he really like his father? Would his father have acted out of anger like this, or would he just have done what he thought was best for House
Lannister, like when he invaded the Riverlands? Did he behave like the son of Tywin Lannister?

*You’re not your father.*

How was he different from his father? How was he supposed to be different? Sansa was there, sleeping, seemingly enjoying some peaceful time. She ran away from him that night at the Crag. *How are you different from your father then?* He didn’t know. It was easy to differentiate yourself from the Mad King but doing the same with Tywin Lannister was another game.

Tywin Lannister wouldn’t have spared Sybell Spicer. He would never have let someone who contributed to the death of a Lannister get away with this. He would have made an example with her. Would he have spared her family? Tyrion didn’t think so. Sybell’s family would never forget or forgive. No one would resent Tyrion for killing them. The Westerlings were poor, without influence or relations. By killing them, the Lord of Casterly Rock ensured he got rid of a potential enemy, while gaining or reinforcing an ally by bestowing the Crag to someone. By sparing them, he didn’t dissuade future traitors and allowed a very likely foe to live, with his lands and castle still intact.

No, that wasn’t what Tywin Lannister would have done. Tyrion didn’t do what his father would have done, and that was because of Sansa.

His wife moved and stirred at this moment. From sleeping on her belly, she ended on her back and opened her eyes. Tyrion thought not for the first time, and certainly not the last, how beautiful she was. The child of fourteen that Tywin Lannister forced him to wed was gone, Sansa was now eighteen. By all standards, she was a grown woman, the most beautiful lady of the Seven Kingdoms in Tyrion’s eyes, one of the most beautiful in everyone else’s view, a wife, and a mother. A mother whose child was taken away from her, all that because the child was from Tyrion.

“It’s already time?” she asked.

“Yes,” he replied. The night was short. It would have been longer had Tyrion not slept with Sansa. She dropped her eyes to the sheets still covering her body. She wore a nightdress below, something that wasn’t too much with this weather. Tyrion joined her back in the bed, though he only sat in it, and took her hand in his own. She looked up to him in his eyes. She wasn’t afraid like she was that night. She gripped his hand harder than he gripped hers.

“I’m sorry, Tyrion,” she said.

“It’s not your fault.”

“What do you think will happen to him?”

“Well, since I brought the Vale to our queen, she might relent from death and instead send him to the Wall. I could ask this as a favor.”

“I hope she will accept.”

A muffled laugh escaped his mouth. Sansa had always been good at courtesies. She wasn’t hiding behind them any longer when they were together, but she was careful about how she said things. She wouldn’t say she knew or thought that Daenerys would send Jaime to the Wall.

“Yes, hope, we can hope,” he mocked.

She didn’t remove her hand. “I’ll be there for you.”

“If you don’t want to see my brother, you don’t have to.”
“It’s not for him that I will be there. It’s for you.”

“Thanks.” She didn’t know how much it meant for him. “I have to see the queen.” And someone else.

She nodded. “Then go,” she whispered.

Before he walked out of the room, he leaned and gave a long kiss to his wife. She accepted it and never pushed back. Tyrion didn’t want that kiss to end. She was so sweet, so good, and he wanted her to know that he loved her, and that he would always love her, no matter what would happen. He couldn’t lose her, not again.

Tyrion entered the small council chamber some time later. He and Sansa were settled into the Hand’s apartments, but the way to the room where the small council gathered was longer than it used to be under his father. Daenerys Targaryen decided to bring back the small council to his ancient room. The queen wasn’t about to let the Hand claim that he ruled the Seven Kingdoms. Daenerys Targaryen was there to rule Westeros, not only to be its queen.

Varys was already there when he came in.

“Oh, my good friend. I hope your journey was uneventful.”

“It depends which journey you’re talking about. The one from the Eyrie to here, or the one from the Crag?”

“Is your lady wife feeling well?”

“As good as she can be, considering the circumstances.”

“I was very sorry to hear about your daughter.”

“Were you?” Tyrion asked.

Varys had been an ally in King’s Landing, and a friend, as much as he could be, but Tyrion wasn’t about to trust him into all matters. His disappearance following Kevan’s death was also suspicious. Had Varys something to do with his uncle’s death, or did he just vanish when he realized Cersei would seize power? He had a discussion with the eunuch yesterday after he arrived, and Varys told him he had been working for a Targaryen restoration for a very long time, ever since Robert Baratheon took the crown. Varys claimed he never wanted Kevan to die, for he was a far better ruler than Cersei, but once he was dead Varys thought he would be more useful to Daenerys Targaryen in Meereen than here. Overall, Varys never confessed or denied any involvement in Kevan’s death.

“Of course, I was, my friend. It hurt me every time you are injured, and I can’t imagine a greater pain than the loss of a child.”

“How can you know? Did you ever have children?”

“No, my friend, but the children are the people we fight for, so they may know a better world than the one we knew.”

“Well, my daughter will never know this world, no matter how better or worse he is,” Tyrion replied bitterly.

“You have all my condolences.”
“Did you know it was Littlefinger?”

“Who kidnapped your wife and your daughter? I’m afraid I only knew too late. I had been away from Westeros for a very long time and my network of spies and informants will need some time to recover.”

Tyrion nodded.

“You do not trust me, don’t you?” Varys asked.

“I’ve never known if I could trust you.”

“And you were right to be suspicious. I contributed to the downfall of the Lannister and Baratheon dynasty. However, I would never have been the cause of your downfall, my friend.”

“Why not? I’m a Lannister, have you forgotten?”

“No, I never forget anything, not even rumors. And I could hardly ignore that you now have a dragon. It is also difficult for me to forget there once were rumors concerning the Mad King and the ladies in waiting of Queen Rhaella.”

For a long moment, Varys innocently looked at him in a way that was not so much innocent. Tyrion said nothing, and it was finally Varys who spoke, and he didn’t ask a question. “So you know. I’m not sure if this is for the better.”

“Why would the fact that I know anything that you believe I know be for the better or not?” Tyrion asked him.

“A wise man once said information is power.” And power is a trick, a shadow on the wall. “But do you know how we get power from information?”

“I’m sure you already have an answer.”

“From the way we use that information, or the way we do not use it. How do you plan to use it or to not use it?”

“How would you suggest I use it or not?”

“Answering a question with another question. How clever,” Varys said while smiling.

“Will you answer with another question as well?”

“Oh no, though my answer might call for a question. I would only say that I would never suggest anything that might involve another war, not now that we finally have a queen who cares about the people, despite all her flaws.”

Tyrion walked past Varys, took the decanter on the table and poured himself a generous glass of wine. After one great sip that made him fell better, he looked straight into Varys’s eyes, with no intention of playing games this time.

“I just lost my daughter in this war, and too many people have died. I don’t have any intention of getting into another war if I can avoid it. And for the record, I’m not interested in the Iron Throne. I never was. I’m not my father.”

Varys looked skeptical for a very short moment, then bowed and smiled. “You can’t imagine my relief, hearing those words, my lord. I was fearing the worst after the reports I received from
"Castamere."

"Well, you have nothing to fear from me, as long as I have nothing to fear from you."

"Oh, don’t worry about it. The only reason you could worry about me is if you turn like your father, and I don’t think you will. I hope you will not."

The door opened, and Daenerys Targaryen walked in. Tyrion wondered if Varys had planned all this and the queen heard everything they said. Did he tell her the truth? Tyrion should have known Varys would know something, or at least suspect something. The Master of Whisperers was supposed to know everything, and Varys excelled in that domain.

"I didn’t expect you to be here, Lord Varys," she said. The queen looked intently at him.

"Forgive me, your Grace, but when I heard that Lord Tyrion had an appointment with you so early in the morning, I thought it would be a good opportunity to speak to you about certain developments."

So Varys wasn’t supposed to be here. If it was a setup, Daenerys Targaryen wasn’t aware of the plan, or she feinted to ignore it, but somehow Tyrion doubted it was the latter.

"What developments?"

"About what you asked me to find concerning your nephew. I have new information." The queen looked to Tyrion, then back to Varys. He opened the hands. "I thought the Hand of the Queen might help the queen to take a decision."

She looked at Tyrion for a moment, as if trying to decide something. "Very well. What did you find?" she asked, looking again at her Master of Whisperers.

"Please, wait."

While Varys walked to a sidestep door, the queen addressed Tyrion. "Unless I tell you otherwise later, everything you will hear onwards will remain in this room."

"You have my word."

She was serious, and there was no reason to not do as she told. Varys came back with a woman between two ages. She had a tanned skin and black hair with strays of grey. Some wrinkles were beginning to appear on her face, but by all account she was still a beautiful woman by many standards. Tyrion guessed immediately she was from Dorne. Some of her physical characteristics were specific to some population of this desertic land. The way she looked on the floor proved she wasn’t noble, and Varys confirmed it.

"Your Grace, my lord, this is Wylla. She’s been a servant of House Dayne of Starfall since her birth, and so were her parents and her grandparents before them." The woman bowed while saying Your Grace. "Wylla has some information concerning the matter you’re interested in, your Grace."

Wylla was keeping her hands crossed and still looking on the floor, her hair falling on both sides on her oval face.

"You may speak, Wylla," Daenerys said, her voice encouraging and soft. Tyrion noticed it when she spoke with the common folk. She always had a behaviour telling them that they had nothing to fear. The opposite was true for noble people.
The servant looked up. She wasn’t afraid. “Your Grace, I have served House Dayne since my birth, as Lord Varys just told you. Lady Ashara and Ser Arthur always spoke fondly of Prince Rhaegar.”

Daenerys nodded. “I know my brother and Ser Arthur Dayne were very good friends. Ser Barristan Selmy used to tell me he doubted Rhaegar would have died on the Trident had Ser Arthur been there.”

“It is not for lack of want, your Grace. I can tell you, for I was there when it happened, that Ser Arthur almost begged Prince Rhaegar to let him follow him to battle.”

“But my brother refused?”

“Yes, your Grace. He had another mission for Ser Arthur.”

“Guarding the Tower of Joy.”

It wasn’t a question, and Wylla didn’t confirm nor deny it. She looked to Tyrion, then to Varys, and back to the queen. “I can tell you what I know, your Grace, but I wish I could tell it to you and only to you.”

“Why? So you could tell our queen that you are the mother of Jon Snow?” Tyrion asked out of nowhere.

Wylla was surprised, and so was the queen. Varys wasn’t as much surprised, but an amused expression went through his eyes.

“A certain girl of the name of Arya Stark met a certain Edric Dayne some time ago, and he told her that you were the mother of Jon Snow, and also that you nursed them both, Edric Dayne and Jon Snow. At least, that’s what Lady Arya claimed that he claimed he heard at Starfall.”

Daenerys Targaryen looked to Tyrion, then to the servant. The latter recovered. It was obvious she was not intimidated before highborn people. She was merely respectful of them, but she could stand before them without any problem. “Your Grace, this is not what you believe.”

“Are you the mother of Jon Snow?” the queen asked.

She looked to Varys and Tyrion again, then sighed. “Officially, yes. At Starfall, I am known as the mother of Jon Snow, the bastard son of Lord Eddard Stark. And this is what he told Robert Baratheon and many other lords, at least in the south.”

“And unofficially?” Tyrion asked.

“I was there when Jon Snow was born. I was at the Tower of Joy.”

Wylla explained to them everything. Not long before Robert’s Rebellion began, Lady Ashara Dayne received a raven from her brother, Ser Arthur Dayne. They needed a maid somewhere in the Red Mountains of Dorne. Wyla had been chosen personally by Lady Ashara. She was instructed to tell no one about this, not even the Lord of Starfall, Lady Ashara’s elder brother. Wylla left discreetly and arrived to a place called the Tower of Joy. There she discovered Rhaegar Targaryen and Lyanna Stark, for who she worked for weeks. Through the conversations she heard, she learned that Prince Rhaegar had annulled his marriage to Elia Martell and wed Lady Lyanna in a secret ceremony in Dorne. They lived together for some time, then Rhaegar Targaryen left for the war. Lady Lyanna, now pregnant, was left in the care of Wylla and a midwife.

Varys interrupted Wylla’s tale to say he searched for this midwife and discovered she died of an
illness ten years ago. Wylla resumed to explain that she, Ser Arthur Dayne, Ser Gerold Hightower and the midwife were ordered by Prince Rhaegar to bring Lady Lyanna and her child to safety if anything was to happen to him. When they received news of the Battle of the Trident, however, the pregnancy was already too advanced and Lady Lyanna couldn’t travel. They remained at the Tower, hoping against all odds that the Targaryen army might prevail and that the war would be won. Dorne was still loyal to the king and the fight was still far away. News of the Battle of the Bells arrived, then of the Sack of King’s Landing. Lady Lyanna’s pregnancy stretched and her state got worse, so running away was out of the question. They finally heard of the submission of House Tyrell, and the day after Lyanna Stark went into labour.

Her labour lasted for what seemed like days, and she lost a lot of blood. She and the midwife did their best, and just when Lady Lyanna was giving birth, her brother arrived with five other men. Wylla didn’t see the duel, but Ser Gerold and Ser Arthur both died. When Lord Stark ran into the room, his sister was already dying. He promised her before she left this world that he would protect the baby.

Wylla had told Eddard Stark everything on that day. He had accepted to escort her back to Starfall, where he had to bring back Ser Arthur’s sword anyway. The initial plan was for the baby, who was named Aegon Targaryen by his mother, to be raised at Starfall by Lady Ashara. However, the day after they arrived at Starfall, Ashara Dayne jumped from a cliff. Eddard Stark decided to bring the baby with him to Winterfell. Wylla accepted to make everyone believe the baby was hers and that he was the bastard son of Ned Stark. In Starfall, everyone believed it, for Wylla was absent for a long time and Ned Stark claimed the baby as his before the Lord of Starfall. Wylla was allowed to follow him to Winterfell where she nursed him, then came back to Starfall where she maintained the lie.

“I swore to never talk about this, but the prince was your brother and I think you deserve the truth.”

Daenerys had listened to the tale from the beginning to the end. Her expression remained even through it. When she spoke, her voice was measured. “I would like you to not talk about this, and to keep the oath you made a long time ago.”

“Yes, your Grace.”

“You may leave.”

When Wylla left, Tyrion was first to speak. “That confirms what Howland Reed already told us.”

“Is that all you found?” the queen asked Varys.

“No.” Tyrion’s friend showed a piece of parchment. “From the Citadel. My little birds there got their hands on an excerpt of High Septon Maynard’s records, and more specifically the passage where he speaks of the wedding between Prince Rhaegar and Lady Lyanna.”

The queen read it, then gave it to Tyrion. When Tyrion was done reading, there was only one thing he could say. “Anyone has doubts now?”

“It seems… that Jon Snow is the lawful heir to the Iron Throne,” Varys said carefully. The queen nodded. She was looking away from them.

“I don’t think it matters much,” Tyrion said very quickly. “Jon Snow doesn’t want to be king, and he said he was planning to join the Night’s Watch again…”

“I know. He sent a raven not long ago. He said his vows again,” she replied.

“So, that means the only other Targaryen in this world, to our knowledge, gave up any claim he
might have on the Seven Kingdoms,” Varys said as he looked to Tyrion while he said that. Daenerys was still looking away, which was a good thing for she didn’t see the exchange of looks between the eunuch and the dwarf.

“It seems so.”

“Perhaps it would be better to destroy that document.” Varys was talking about the page of Maynard’s records that Daenerys still held in his hand. “Although Jon Snow is a member of the Night’s Watch, some people might eventually use it to rebel against you.”

Daenerys stared at Varys, then at Tyrion. He made a movement of head that meant that it was possible. She looked at the page, and finally gave it back to Varys. “Send it back to the Citadel. One day, the truth might come out.”

Varys bowed and left. Tyrion was now alone with Daenerys.

“Do you think I made the right choice?” she asked him.

“Well, Varys isn’t wrong, Jon Snow’s claim could indeed be used against you.”

“You think he could challenge me if he learned the truth about the marriage of Rhaegar and Lyanna?”

“I doubt it. Unless you turn like your father.”

“I don’t intend that to happen,” she said firmly.

“Then you have nothing to fear from Jon Snow. Other people could contest your claim by using this, but the mere fact Jon Snow is again a member of the Night’s Watch will limit the impact these records could have if they tried to start a rebellion. Furthermore, they will be hidden somewhere in the Citadel, and there aren’t a lot of people like Jon Arryn and Ned Stark who are ready to go through an entire book to find clues about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of kings. I’d say you’re quite safe.”

“Nothing leaves this room,” she reminded him.

“Yes, I understand.”

“You know why I asked you to come.”

“I suppose this has something to do with the trial of Jaime this afternoon.”

She nodded and indicated a chair where he sat. She took place not far from him. They were more similar in height like this. He thought that a long time ago, he had been sitting there with another sister, when he was just named Hand of the King. The resemblance stopped there.

“I want you to know that Jaime Lannister’s trial is not related in any way to you. You have nothing to blame you for, and nothing to fear where you and the rest of your family are concerned.”

“Well, how comforting it is.”

“I will sit as judge at the trial, with Mace Tyrell and you.”

He frowned at this. “You’re asking me to judge my brother?”

“I’m allowing you to take part to the process that will determine if he is guilty or not guilty, and the
sentence he will face if he is found guilty. Consider it some way to show that I trust you, and to show you gratitude for your services these last months, in the North and the Vale.”

“Well, thank you.” Maybe Jaime had a chance if he had a say in his sentence.

“However, I want to be clear. I will not tolerate that you declare your brother not guilty if it is obvious that he is.”

“So, you’re forcing me to declare my brother guilty?” he asked, making sure he looked hostile this time, which he was.

“I’m forcing you to be an impartial judge.”

“Just like you?”

She obviously didn’t appreciate the rebuke, but she found a way to look sincere once again. Strangely, Tyrion thought she was genuine. It wasn’t Cersei who sat next to him. “Jaime Lannister will have a fair trial. I promise. Although I think it very unlikely, I will clear him if he is not guilty. If he is guilty, you will have a say in the sentence. I will consider your opinion, and everything your brother will say.”

“Can I ask for a favor?” Tyrion asked after a moment.

“Go on.”

“Can I see him?”

His sister took her time to answer. Finally, she nodded. “I will go to see the Lady Sansa while you visit him.”

“Thank you.”

He didn’t see any objection to Daenerys visiting Sansa. His wife didn’t seem to dislike her half-sister-in-law, and Daenerys really seemed to sympathize with Sansa’s situation of losing a child.

“Do you love your brother?” she asked him as they left.

“Yes, I do. He’s probably the only one in my family who ever truly loved me, and who was ever close to me.”

“I understand.”

She walked away in the direction of the Tower of the Hand, while Tyrion headed for the dungeons.

Chapter End Notes

I have great news for you. This week, I finished to write the final chapters of "A Shadow and a Wolf". There are eight chapters left after this one. Since everything is ready, I will go back to a cadency you haven’t seen for quite a while : two chapters per week. I hope you will enjoy the final chapters of ASAAW.

Please review
Next chapter: Jaime
Jaime IX

Chapter Notes

For the first time in forever, we get to see things from Jaime's perspective. Remember he's been in a cell for... about 50 chapters.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

JAIME IX

He had been in this cell for too long. He didn’t think he would be able to walk if he tried. He didn’t think he would see if he tried, not in the light of the day. He was back in his cage in Robb Stark’s army, but worse since he couldn’t be exposed to the elements of nature. Rain could wash him a little, and the sun could warm his face even if it could also burn it. Here, there was nothing, not even something to spend time like looking at the nature or the men marching to war, not even the hope to escape.

Was Brienne still out there? How long since he abandoned her. Jaime had lost count of the days he spent in this cell. Anyway, without the light of day, how to estimate the time he spent there? However, as time went on, Jaime found out he thought less of Cersei and more of Brienne, until his twin sister was nothing but a fog of unreal memories, some involving sex and others daggers and blood. How could he remember sleeping with a woman, then killing her? It made no sense. His life made no sense as he looked at it. Who was he? Who had he tried to be?

You are nothing, Jaime Lannister.

Kingslayer, oathbreaker, man without honor, ser. All these names and titles didn’t ring well to his ears. He couldn’t define who he was, who he had been. People would think that after so much time to reflect on everything, alone in his cell, he would have come to some sort of conclusion, would have understood what kind of life he led, but he didn’t. A man had come to tell him his trial would be tomorrow, but he couldn’t make out what tomorrow was, not when left alone into darkness.

He heard footsteps. His hearing had increased considerably since he came here. The most simple and imperceptible noise was caught by his ears. A small panel prevented him from seeing through the window in the door. Someone opened it. Jaime was blinded immediately by what small light came from there. It had to be time for a meal, whichever it was.

A key turning into a lock was heard and hinges creaked as the door was opened. The first look Jaime had on the corridor leading to his cell was a show of torches that completely blinded him. He raised his arms to protect his eyes from the sudden light. Before he could do anything, had he intended to do anything, two men caught him by the arms and carried him out. Jaime let those men drag him. His legs could barely move after all this time sitting in the cell. He hadn’t been bound by chains, but saw no use to walk, so he had spent most of his time sitting on the soiled floor. His arms were in a better state, for he had used them to eat, while he crawled with his legs to get to the food.

They brought him higher and higher, judging from the increasing light, the many windows they crossed on their path, and the stairs they climbed. They arrived in a room where maids got him rid of his rags, bathed him and dressed him. Jaime complied with everything they asked, but never spoke a word. By the end, when they showed him into a mirror, he was presentable again. They even cut his
hair, making them as short as they used to be before he was imprisoned.

The man who looked at him in the mirror was like the same old Jaime Lannister, physically speaking that is. The resemblance stopped there. Jaime couldn’t recognize himself. He didn’t know who was looking back to him in the glass. Which Jaime Lannister was it? The one who killed his king? The one who saved Brienne? The one who murdered his sister? The one who abandoned Brienne? The one who served the Mad Queen or the Mad King?

“Glad to see you back, big brother.”

The voice caught him by surprise. It had been an eternity since he heard it. When was the last time they spoke? Probably before he left for Casterly Rock, to live with his wife. Jaime slowly turned his head to meet the eyes of his little brother.

“Tyrion?” Was that really him? He thought he would never see him again.

“Glad to see you, Jaime.”

“I… I thought you might be…”

“Dead?” his brother completed.

“I… They never told me anything,” Jaime said emptily.

Tyrion frowned. “You don’t know what happened?”

“Not since…” Not since he killed Cersei, he was going to say, but he said something else. “Not since Daenerys Targaryen took King’s Landing. Where is Brienne?”

“Brienne of Tarth?”

“Yes. Where is she?”

“Jaime, she died.”

He felt all blood being drained from his face. “How? When?”

“A long time ago. She died during the Battle of King’s Landing.”

Should Jaime have cried? He didn’t think he did, but he felt much worse than crying. He almost felt nothing. Brienne was gone too. She truly sacrificed herself so he could do what she came to do in the capital. He suspected she didn’t have much chance to survive the battle, he prepared himself for the news of her death, but there had been a small part of him, a very small part, that hoped against all odds that the Maid of Tarth would escape all this alive. Now he knew she was gone, and he felt nothing.

“I should have known they told you nothing of what happened. Let me fill the blanks for you.”

Tyrion quickly told him what happened during the months Jaime spent in his cell, cut from the rest of the world. Jaime noticed during the conversation that Tyrion had the Hand’s badge on him. Jaime had a very hard time believing that Daenerys Targaryen chose Tyrion to be her Hand. This surprised him more than the fact his brother could ride one of her dragons. The hardest part for both brothers to hear was the fate of Jaime’s niece, Joanna Lannister. When Tyrion was done relating everything, the two brothers sat in silence. Jaime managed to break it.

“How is your wife?”
“It’s very hard for her. I… I almost lost her too.”

Jaime could see all the suffering Tyrion had been through, and he also saw this wasn’t over. He recalled, not for the first time, how Tyrion was devastated by the loss of his first wife. He started to drink and whore after this event, after their lord father had the poor girl raped by his men and then forced Tyrion to rape her.

“Things are a little better now. We’re beginning to accept that she’s gone, but I don’t believe Sansa will ever be able to forget what happened.”

No, of course, she wouldn’t. Even Cersei could never forget her children. Jaime knew his sister enough, even if he didn’t know her as much as he thought. Cersei had tried to forget her children after they were all gone but Jaime knew she failed. If Cersei failed, how could Sansa Stark ever forget how her only child, a baby, was killed in the most barbaric way? Tyrion might try to sound convincing when he said things would get better, Jaime knew this was far from over for his little brother.

“Do you have anything to fear from Daenerys Targaryen?” Jaime asked him.

“No, I don’t think so. She trusts me after the wars in the North and the Vale. She even allowed me to be one of the three judges at your trial.”

“Really?” Jaime was skeptical, but one look to his brother revealed this was very true. Maybe there was hope after all.

“The queen and Mace Tyrell will be the other judges. The trial begins in three hours.”

“Well, that leaves a lot of time to prepare myself.”

“I know. I’m sorry about that, but I couldn’t have the queen delay your trial. Apparently, she already led an important inquiry. But you’ll get a fair trial.”

“Like the one Cersei was planning for you after Father’s death?”

“No. You will be able to call your own witnesses, and to question all the people who will be called to testify against you. You will have complete freedom to speak and to explain yourself.” Jaime wasn’t convinced, and Tyrion must have seen it. “I know this is hard to believe, Jaime, but Daenerys really wants to know the truth.”

“Really?”

“She knows her father was a monster, and she doesn’t want to be like him. You have to tell her. You have to tell her everything.”

“So I’m accused of her father’s murder, and all I have to do is to tell her how the Mad King wanted to destroy the city so I will be forgiven?”

Jaime didn’t believe he would get out of this so easily, and Tyrion confirmed it, a regretful expression on his face. “You still killed her father. I doubt she will declare you not guilty, even with the circumstances in which you killed him. But I think she could send you to the Wall or exile you in the east.”

“What a relief,” Jaime exclaimed with sarcasm.

“You must know that you are not only accused of regicide.”
“Oh. What other crimes did I commit?”

“Kinslaying, for the murder of our cousin Alton, and attempt of murder on Brandon Stark. She wanted to accuse you of Cersei’s murder too, but she dropped the charges.”

“Well, at least I will be declared kinslayer, but not for killing a twin sister. I guess it’s not as bad for a cousin.”

There were many things Jaime regretted in his life. Alton’s murder wasn’t at the top of the list, but he regretted it all the same. He no longer thought of killing Cersei as a crime, for he had done what was right to do. He stopped another catastrophe. Then why did Cersei’s death affected him more than Alton’s, if the first was justified and the second a crime by all accounts? Shouldn’t it be the opposite? Did anything make sense in this life?

Tyrion went about a long ranting about how they could explain each accusation was true but done in particular circumstances. There was no witness to the murder of Alton. Jaime was the only one who knew what truly happened in this cage. He could plead that the death occurred during a fight between them and was an accident, that he didn’t have clear ideas back then after many months spent chained into a cage. As for Brandon Stark, he could put the emphasis on the fact the boy didn’t die and put forward reasons like the protection of his three children, who would have died had Bran told anyone what he saw on that day. They could also clear him of suspicion concerning any involvement with the footpad by proving that it was Joffrey who hired this man.

Jaime barely listened to what Tyrion was saying. His brother might say that he would convince the queen to not execute him, Jaime didn’t feel like he wanted to not be executed. He didn’t think he wanted to die, but he didn’t think he wanted to fight to live either. What would he do if he was exiled in Essos? Where would he go from there? What would he do at the Wall, now that both wildlings and dead men were gone? Jaime had fought for Cersei when the true fight was in the North, when he should have been there to help Tyrion and the others fight the dead. His knighthood was a complete failure from the beginning to the end.

“I will probably have to declare you guilty, Jaime, at least on the murder of the Mad King, but this way I will be able to negotiate your sentence with the queen. I’m not going to let you walk to the execution block.”

“Is that the tower cell?” Jaime asked out of nowhere.

“Yes, it is. I had you moved here before the trial. The trial is open to everyone. The queen’s men couldn’t deny you a bath before you were to be seen by everyone.”

Of course, Jaime had to be presentable for the moment of his death. “Is that the same where you were?” He was talking about the time when Tyrion was accused of their father’s murder, a stupid accusation Cersei made up. Jaime’s accusations made more sense, and they were true.

Tyrion seemed unsure. “I don’t know. Maybe.”

“You once said in that cell that you were done with House Lannister, that your loyalty was now to your wife.”

“Yes, I recall. I also said my loyalty was to you.”

“Yes.” Jaime remembered. It was a loyalty he didn’t deserve.

“I’m not going to let you down, big brother. I’ll get you out of here,” Tyrion assured him. “Just… tell the truth. I think it’s the best thing to do now. It’s time that everyone knows the truth. The whole
truth.”

The whole truth. *Tell him, or I will.* The voice rang like a bell through his mind. It had been so long since the words were said to him, but he heard them again and again ever since. *Tell him, or I will.*

“Tyrion… are you safe?”

“Safe?”

“With the new queen, I mean. She could sentence you to die, or revoke your titles, anything, if she thinks you are not loyal to her.”

“I’m not at risk, Jaime.”

“If protecting me puts you or Sansa in danger…”

“It doesn’t.” Tyrion cut him short before Jaime could finish his thought.

“Don’t put yourself in danger for me!” It was supposed to be a yell, but it came out so hoarse that Jaime doubted they could hear it outside the cell.

“I will not give up on you, Jaime.”

“Look at me. Look at me, Tyrion. There’s nothing left of me. I killed my sister, our sister. I’m a dead man. Even if by some miracle I’m spared, what will I do in the east or at the Wall? There’s nothing left for me in this world. Don’t trouble yourself with me, little brother. I’ll tell the truth at the trial and face whatever judgment I receive. I have nothing left to lose.”

Almost nothing. There was still one thing Jaime had to lose, something that was even more precious than Cersei or Brienne, or anything else he ever had in his life, and he didn’t want to lose it. *Tell him, or I will.*

Tyrion’s face was shut. “You’re not dying, Jaime. I’m getting you out of this.”

For a moment, Jaime saw a shadow of his father, when he decided something and wouldn’t hear anything about it, with the exception that Tyrion’s eyes, instead of saying he had no say in this, immediately shifted to another language, stating he would never abandon his family, and that Jaime could rely on him. Jaime would have preferred if Tyrion had behaved like Lord Tywin, only saving him by duty, and not out of love.

“The trial starts soon.” Tyrion stood up. “Everything is going to be fine.”

He walked back to the door cell, but right when he was about to hit the wood to call the guard to open, Jaime spoke up.

“I lied to you.” He had to tell him. *Tell him, or I will.* He couldn’t have Tyrion hear it by anyone else. It had to be from him.

His little brother turned back to look at him. “What do you mean? Lie to me about what?”

Tyrion was clueless. Of course, he was. He never doubted Jaime’s word.

“I lied to you about your wife.” Confusion increased in Tyrion. “Not Sansa. Tysha.”

Tyrion’s traits changed. His lips were quivering, and he got pale. “What of her? She was a whore.”
Jaime could tell from the way he said it that Tyrion didn’t believe it, or at least he didn’t entirely believe it. His little brother had always been the clever one in the family. Jaime should have known Tyrion would have doubts, suspect something. He was surprised in fact that Tyrion never figured out the truth before, and never asked any question about the girl. But then, when it came to women, Lannisters didn’t seem very rational. Jaime had thought for years he knew Cersei, only to discover this woman was everything but what he believed she was.

“She was no whore.” The pot of wildfire was thrown. He did it. *Tell him, or I will.* Well, he told him. But he didn’t stop there. Words spit from his mouth. “I never bought her for you. That was a lie Father commanded me to tell. Tysha was… she was what she seemed to be. A wheelwright’s daughter, chance met on the road.”

Tyrion remained speechless for a very long time, just staring at him. Jaime looked away. He was unable to look into his brother’s eyes. “Tysha. She wed me,” Tyrion croaked.

“For your gold, Father said. She was lowborn, you were a Lannister of Casterly Rock. All she wanted was the gold, which made her no different from a whore, so…” Jaime knew it wasn’t true. He knew the truth now, but back then he couldn’t be sure, and he had taken Father’s word for granted. “So it would not be a lie, not truly, and… he said that you required a sharp lesson. That you would learn from it, and thank me later…”

“Thank you?” Tyrion’s voice was broken, but Jaime refused to look at him. He couldn’t. “He gave her to his guards. A barracks full of guards. He made me… watch. And…”

“I never knew he would do that. You must believe me.”

“Oh, must I?” Now Tyrion was furious. Jaime would be in his place. “Why should I believe you about anything, ever? She was my wife!”

“Tyrion…”

Before Jaime could say anything, he received a powerful slap from the back of Tyrion’s hand. His brother had approached him while they spoke. The slap stung. Jaime had forgotten what physical pain was. He was used to receive blows, but it had been an eternity since he received one, after he was thrown into a cell.

“I… I suppose I earned that,” he managed to say.

“Oh, you deserve more than that, Jaime. If Father was still alive, you cannot imagine what I would do to him.”

“Did you kill him?” Jaime didn’t know where the question came from, but it came out. Tyrion laughed, not of his usual laugh to make fun of something, but an evil laugh.

“No, of course not, but I wish that I had. I wish that I had killed Joffrey myself too, and that I had killed Cersei as well in your stead. You all deserve to go to hell!”

“Probably,” Jaime conceded in a low voice. Tyrion stood in front of him for a long time. Jaime expected anything. Perhaps he would use the small dagger at his belt to slit his throat. Maybe it would be better that way. Jaime probably deserved more to die for the lie than for killing a mad king.

Tyrion didn’t bring his hand to the knife. Instead, he just walked away furiously and pounded on the door.

“I always loved you more than Cersei,” Jaime said in a last attempt.
“My sister is waiting for me.” He was finishing saying these words Jaime didn’t understand when the heavy door opened with an Unsullied guard on the other side. “By the way, Jaime, did you know your father allowed someone to rape his wife because he thought it would allow his grandchildren to sit on the Iron Throne? My wife is not the only one who he had raped by other people.”

With that, Tyrion walked out, and the door closed on their brotherly relationship. Jaime Lannister had lost the last thing he had to lose.

You are nothing, Jaime Lannister.

Chapter End Notes

With this chapter ends Jaime's role in this story. We shall never see his like again... as a POV.

I'm kidding. Next chapter is the trial, so we'll see Jaime there. Only it was the last time he was there to show us events from his perspective.

I planned very early for the truth about Tysha to come out at the end of the story. Tyrion's exit, "My sister is waiting for me", is in some way Tyrion's denial of his Lannister origins, although Jaime might not understand it, and the end of his attachment to the idea of Tywin Lannister being his father in any positive sense of the term.

Please review

Next chapter: Daenerys
The melted swords were sharp. She would need time to get used to this throne. She missed the ebony bench of Meereen. It might not have been the most comfortable seat for a queen, but the Iron Throne was way worse. She had to be careful to not cut herself and to move as little as she could, while maintaining a dignified position.

People poured inside the Throne Room. Rows of seats were placed on both sides of a corridor going from the large doors to the dais where Daenerys was sitting. Noble born people were taking place in the seats, while the lowborn packed on the sides and the far end of the hall. Everyone wanted to witness the fate of Jaime Lannister. The guards had allowed an access to the Red Keep to the common people, but too many came and they were forced to force many out of the castle. They would know of the knight’s fate when the heralds would announce it all over the city, once the trial was over.

On the dais, two chairs were positioned near Daenerys, one on her left and the other on her right, just one step below her. Mace Tyrell was supposed to occupy the seat on her left. He was right now engaged in a discussion with his daughter, Lady Margaery. She and other people, such as Lord Varys, the Grand Maester Marcon, the Red Priestess Yennefer, and Lord Anders Yronwood were provided seats on the inferior steps of the dais as well. There were also a few guards at the dais’ feet, and more all over the room, mostly men from the Reach.

Tyrion Lannister wasn’t there yet, nor was his wife, the Lady Sansa. Daenerys had gone to see her before the trial. She seemed in a better state than when Daenerys met her in the Vale, but the death of her daughter still affected her deeply. Her sister, the Lady Arya, who was probably the less lady woman Daenerys had ever met, was present. Sansa had talked about her little girl to Daenerys. In fact, it was Daenerys who pushed Sansa to talk about her, to tell her everything about her daughter. As a result, despite initial reluctance, Sansa Lannister managed to tell her every detail about her daughter, from the color of her eyes to her sleeping habits. She seemed better at the end of their conversation.

She used the opportunity to raise the matter of Winterfell with her. Sansa wasn’t enthusiastic at all to inherit her family’s home, but she was ready to be Lady of Winterfell since her brother Brandon was unwilling. One way or the other, since her brother couldn’t have children, her own children would rule the North one day.

Lord Tyrion was still to be seen. Mace Tyrell now sat in his chair, but Daenerys’ right remained empty. She wondered if the small man would finally refuse to stand as judge for his brother’s trial. If that was the case, Daenerys wished he told her about it before the trial was about to begin. She had come to trust Tyrion after all this time, even going as far as to name him her Hand after the Battle of Winterfell, but she wouldn’t tolerate that he undermined her authority.
Finally, he came. The Lady Sansa was with him, along with Arya. The desire Daenerys felt to berate him for being late was replaced by uncertainty when she saw the way he carried himself and his expression. He walked with his wife and his sister-in-law until they were at the dais. There, they went separate ways. Sansa Stark headed for her own chair lower, and her sister stood next to her, looking more like a soldier than a lady of the court, while the Hand took his place next to the queen. Tyrion Lannister no longer seemed to be grieving like this morning, but angry. As for Sansa, something seemed to have shaken her up.

“When do we start?”

He asked her the question as if he was eager for the trial to begin. He could have been angry at her because she was about to judge and condemn his brother. Daenerys could understand. The brother she knew had been killed in front of her and she had not felt a thing, but there had been a time when she would fear for his life, back when they travelled through the Dothraki Sea. She saved his life by begging one of Drogo’s warriors to spare him, even though he assaulted his khaleesi. But it wasn’t at her that he looked angry.

Three strong pounds resonated through the hall. The three judges were present. It was the signal the trial could begin, and the herald announced it. The doors closed, and the people rushed to their places, everyone walking on everyone’s feet, running into each other. With the help of the guards, order came out from chaos. People were only whispering, creating a background noise. A man in the colors of House Tyrell who was standing by the door opened it for a few inches, then silently closed it and made a sign with his head in Daenerys’ direction.

Three new pounds were made by the herald with his stick. The whole hall fell silent. When the doors opened, the noise of their movement reverberated on the walls and ceilings. Escorted by four gold cloaks, chained on the wrists and the feet, Jaime Lannister walked in.

Daenerys hadn’t seen him since the day she took the city, when she found him in this very room, at the feet of the Iron Throne, his dying sister in his arms, stabbed with his own dagger. He remained in the cells beneath the Red Keep ever since. Now he walked to her, and soon he was stopped in a free space near the dais. No guard stood directly between him and Daenerys. He might try to attack her, but after weeks spent in a cell and his four members bound by chains, she doubted he would be in any state to try anything on her. He could still try. Her men were ready to stop him, and she was ready as well.

Here he was, the man who murdered her father, in the throne she was sitting upon. Robert Baratheon might have pardoned him, but she wouldn’t. She would serve justice to those who deserved it.

Jaime Lannister met her eyes, and her eyes met his. As she stood up, the room was silent. The time had come. The herald announced her.

“Daenerys Stormborn, of House Targaryen, the First of Her Name, Queen of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynars, Lady of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm, the Unburnt, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Breaker of Chains and Mother of Dragons.”

“We are today assembled for the judgement of a man in the light of the law of the Seven Kingdoms,” Daenerys began. “There is no justice without laws, and no one is above them. I will preside this trial, and with me Tyrion of House Lannister, Hand of the Queen, Lord of Casterly Rock and Warden of the West, and Mace of House Tyrell, Master of Coin, Lord of Highgarden and Warden of the South. May justice prevail.”

She sat down. A septon designated by a council of septons from Oldtown made a prayer, asking the Father Above to guide them to justice. Another prayer was made by Yennefer, begging the Lord of
Light to guide them to the truth, reminding everyone that no hidden truth would be kept in the shadows forever. As the prayers were made, Daenerys noticed how Jaime Lannister spent his time looking up to her, then back to his feet. After a few times he repeated this chain of movements, she realized he always looked down after he looked on Daenerys’ right. She looked at her Hand from the corner of her eyes, to realize he was looking at his brother with the look of a viper, and gripping the arms of his chair so hard that his fists were white. Not a single time did he look to Daenerys or his wife. His gaze was for his brother and only his brother.

When the prayers were over, the Grand Maester gathered several papers he had on a very small table in front of him and brought them to Daenerys. Marcon had spent the prayers in silence, his hands joined before him, so he rushed to have all the documents ready. Among them were all the proofs Daenerys had, declarations signed by people attesting Ser Jaime’s crimes. Some were from lords of both the Riverlands and the North, who had been present when Ser Alton Lannister died. One was also signed by Brandon Stark. He gave it to Daenerys when she last saw him in the North. She was ready.

“Ser Jaime Lannister,” she began, “you stand accused of the regicide of Aerys the Second of House Targaryen, the king you swore to serve and protect as a member of the Kingsguard. The usurper, Robert Baratheon, pardoned you for this crime, but I am not willing to forgive so easily. There are laws in this world, and I do not turn a blind eye on them. Hence you stand on trial today since you didn’t answer to these crimes twenty years ago. You also face accusations of murder on your cousin, Ser Alton Lannister, and for an attempt of murder on Brandon Stark. How do you plead?”

The Kingslayer raised his eyes to look at her. He stared right into hers. “Guilty.”

The whole crowd muttered. Daenerys didn’t show it, but she was surprised by this. She expected Ser Jaime to deny the accusations. “You recognize that you committed these crimes?”

“Yes, I do. Everyone knows I did it. I also killed my sister. You know it, you were there when I plunged a dagger in her throat. So why bother with a trial when you already know everything I did and it’s already decided I will be declared guilty? Why not give me to your dragon right away?”

New reactions came from all over the hall when he confessed to killing his sister. The herald had to bring back the silence. “You have not yet been declared guilty, Ser Jaime. I do not sentence my people to death without first listening to what they have to say. I’m not my father.” The declaration shut the mouth of everyone in the room. “Now, you stated you were guilty of all these crimes. Do you have anything to say that could justify your actions?”

Strangely, she found the scene similar to the time in Meereen when she had to judge Mossador for the murder of the Son of the Harpy.

“I have to say… that killing Alton and pushing the boy from the top of that tower were probably two of the worse things I did in my life. But killing your father, the Mad King, and murdering my sister, these are probably the two best things I’ve ever done.”

New shocks. The herald had to bring back order again. She shot a look at Tyrion, who was still looking at his brother with the same cold expression.

“Perhaps you would care to explain why murdering the king you swore to serve and murdering your own sister were the best decisions of your life,” she asked harshly.

“You knew what my sister was planning, didn’t you? The eunuch and his little birds found out about it after the battle, I’m sure. Unless he didn’t tell you. Varys is very good at hiding secrets. My sister wanted to burn the whole city instead of letting you have it. She had hidden caches of wildfire
everywhere. When I came into the Red Keep, Qyburn was on his way to start it all. So I killed him, and then I went to Cersei and killed her too.”

This was in line with what Lord Varys discovered, and in accordance with the declarations of Jaime Lannister when she found him in the Throne Room the first time. “How did you know of your sister’s plans? Did she tell you about them?”

“No, of course not. She didn’t trust me anymore. But I knew her. She had already destroyed the Great Sept. I knew she wouldn’t hesitate to burn the rest of the city. You must know it, Lord Tyrell. She killed your son, and almost killed your daughter too.”

“I know it only too well, Kingslayer,” he replied on a hard tone.

“Well, in this case, why didn’t you stop her the first time, when she murdered my son?” the lord asked.

“Because I was outside the walls when it happened, and I never suspected she would do it back then. But after the Great Sept, after that day… I knew what she was capable of. So when I saw Qyburn, I knew what she had in mind. She had the same thing in mind than your father.”

“What did my father have in mind?”

Jaime Lannister laughed. “Your father was mad. He was obsessed with wildfire. He burned Rickard Stark with it, while his son strangled himself by trying to save him, and he laughed while it happened. *Burn them all,* he always said, *burn them all.* He was the first to have the idea, you know. After the Trident and the Bells, he had Rossart place wildfire caches all over the city. He was his favourite pyromancer, the one who cooked Rickard Stark alive. After Qarlton Chested confronted the Mad King about this, he resigned as Hand. It was probably the only time Quarlton was brave. He had always been a craven and a sycophant, looking for favors from your father. His moment of bravery cost him his life. He was burned alive, and Aerys gave the badge of Hand to Rossart.”

“I was there all the time they plotted this. Your father loved to have me around. Finally, the day arrived when the rebels marched on the capital. My father arrived first, claiming he was there to protect the city. I warned the king to not open the gates. My father would never pick the losing side. You can ask Varys, he was there. He told your father the same. But your father chose to listen to Pycelle, the Grand Maester Pycelle. He said he could trust the Lannisters. So the gates were opened, and my father sacked the city. I went back to the Mad King and begged him to let me negotiate a surrender. Instead, he ordered me to bring him my father’s head, and then he sent Rossart to burn the city. I went to kill Rossart, and then I came back into the Throne Room and stabbed the king with my sword still red from Rossart’s blood. The Mad King kept laughing on the floor. I guess he didn’t think he would die. I made sure he would and plunged my sword in his back. That’s why I killed him. This is the best thing I’ve ever done as a kingsguard. I protected the people. I suppose that’s what a true knight should do.”

The hall was silent as if no living soul had been present. Daenerys herself was taken aback with the story. She knew her father was rightly called the Mad King, but she didn’t know what his intentions had been concerning the city. Tyrion told her there had been a very specific context to his brother’s actions. She hadn’t known what to expect.

“You said you knew of my father’s plans. Did you try talk him out of this?”

“My duty as a kingsguard was to protect and obey the king, not to question him. Anyway, all those who did ended burned alive.”
“Why didn’t you tell anyone back then?”

“Because no one was interested to hear it. It was much easier for them to simply hate the man who murdered his king than to face the questions whether a knight should obey his king in all circumstances. And it allowed them to not take the blame for a king’s death. You think Eddard Stark or Robert Baratheon were interested to hear the reasons why I killed the king? No one wanted to hear it.”

“I think the people who died in the Great Sept of Baelor would have liked to know. Maybe your sister’s plans could have been stopped if people had known there were large stocks of wildfire under the city, and thousands of people would still be alive.” The Kingslayer scoffed. “What about Ser Alton Lannister? Did he plan to burn King’s Landing too?”

“He planned to burn Riverrun. No, my cousin’s only crime was to be a Lannister and an opportunity for me to escape. I killed him so someone would open my damn cage and I could escape Robb Stark’s camp. Too bad I failed.”

“You murdered a cousin of yours?” Lord Tyrell asked, outraged.

“What? Don’t tell me there’s never been murders of cousins among the Tyrells.”

“And Brandon Stark?” Daenerys interrupted it before it went too far. “Why did you try to kill him?”

At that, Jaime Lannister looked less proud all of a sudden, even remorseful. “I didn’t want to kill him, but I had no choice. He saw me with Cersei. He was going to tell everyone about it. I did it to protect the woman I loved and our children.”

“The woman you love? Your children? To you both?” It was Mace Tyrell again who spoke.

“Come on, Fat Flower, everybody knows about me and Cersei. Don’t tell me you wed your daughter to two bastards born of incest without any knowledge of it.”

“Enough!” Daenerys put a stop to it. “Mace Tyrell is one of the judges here at this trial. You will show him some respect, or else this will be held against you.”

“What does it matter? I’m already condemned. I’m guilty. Guilty, you hear! So get over with this and give me a quick clean death so I may no longer have to bear being judged by every one person in the Seven Kingdoms.”

The crowd was silent. All eyes were turned to Daenerys. They were waiting for her decision. However, this decision did not belong only to her. “Do you have anything else to say, Ser Jaime?”

“Only what I’ve already said. I regret that I killed Alton, and I regret what I did to the Stark boy even more, but I don’t regret what I did to Cersei and your father. Any true knight would have done the same.”

She nodded. “We heard you, Ser Jaime. Know that since you acknowledged your guilt, everything you said will only serve to determine the appropriate sentence for you. I will retire now with Lord Lannister and Lord Tyrell to deliberate. The trial is adjourned. The sentence will be given after the bells ring.”

“Clear the court,” the herald shouted.

Before Daenerys left the hall, she looked to Varys. “What he said, is it true?” she whispered.
He nodded. Followed by the other two judges, she walked to the small council chamber.

“He’s guilty,” Lord Tyrell said as soon as they were in.

“How brilliant you are, Lord Tyrell. You just stated the obvious,” Lord Tyrion mocked.

“To your knowledge, Lord Tyrion, is your brother telling the truth?” she asked.

“He told me the same story a long time ago,” he replied dryly. Considering the length he went to protect his brother, Daenerys found his behaviour quite unusual.

“How do we know he’s not lying?” Lord Mace asked.

“Lord Varys confirmed the facts,” Daenerys stated. “I know what my father did, only I didn’t have all the details. We have to give it to Ser Jaime, he saved thousands of people when he killed my father, and he did the same for Cersei. We would be discussing about ruins without him.”

“That doesn’t erase all the other things he did. Trying to kill a child, murdering his cousin, sleeping with his own sister and having children with her, and then killing her!”

“Ser Jaime is not accused of incest, nor is he of killing Cersei. We must only consider the current accusations, and he is guilty of all of them. Regicide, murder, kinslaying, and attempt of murder. All these crimes are chargeable with death.” She turned to her Hand, who was unusually silent. “What do you think, Lord Tyrion?”

He stared back at her, his gaze even. “It’s like you said. He’s guilty, all these crimes separately are punishable by death. Even if your father’s murder was justified, he still killed his king and you can sentence him to death for the two others, which are not justified.”

She frowned, but her Hand showed no reaction. She turned to Lord Tyrell and interrogated him with her eyes.

“He deserves death, your Grace.”

She nodded, looked back to Lord Tyrion, who still showed no reaction, then back to the Lord of Highgarden.

“Leave us alone, please. I would like to discuss with the Hand alone.”

Lord Tyrell seemed offended, but if he was he said nothing. He left the room and Daenerys addressed Tyrion right away. “What’s going on?”

“A trial, I guess.”

“You know what I mean. You were adamant for me to spare your brother only a few hours ago. Now you seem indifferent to his fate, even willing to have him executed.”

“Shouldn’t it please you?”

“What’s going on?”

He sustained her gaze for some time, then sighed and looked away. “Let’s just say that I discovered a side of my brother that I wasn’t aware of before.”

He kept looking away for some time, then stared again into her eyes. “Have you made up your mind?”
“I’m not sure,” she replied.

“Well, I have nothing else to tell you. I’ll be back when the bells toll. Your Grace.”

He bowed and left. She looked at him walking away, wondering what had happened within the last few hours.

She spent some time alone, trying to decide what to do. She hadn’t thought it would take so much time to decide the fate of Jaime Lannister, but new elements and facts required a longer period of reflection than she expected.

When she took back her place on the dais, the bells tolled, and everyone came back in the hall. The herald hit the floor with his stick three times and everything went silent. Jaime Lannister was staring right at her. He didn’t show any fear. The man was ready to face his destiny. Slowly, she stood up from her throne, the one where her father was killed a long time ago by the man standing below her. He didn’t regret it. Of all the crimes he was accused of, it was the only one he didn’t show any regret for.

“Ser Jaime of House Lannister, son of Tywin Lannister, you have been found guilty of regicide, murder, and attempt of murder. You killed the king you swore to serve. You killed a member of your own family. You tried to kill a child.” Not far from her, Marcon was taking notes, writing everything she said, his quill scratching the surface of his parchment. Tyrion was still looking intently to his brother, unflinching, without any trace of brotherly love.

“Nothing justifies what you did to your cousin and to Brandon Stark, and although there are reasons behind the murder of your king, it still remains a murder, made worse by the vows you took to protect him with your life. You didn’t have to kill him. After Rossart was dead, his plot was impossible to carry on. You could have brought my father out of the city to Dragonstone, where he wouldn’t have been a threat to King’s Landing, or escape if you thought he would have you executed and let the rebels take him prisoner. It would be treason and disobedience, which are crimes as well, but not as worse as regicide. The fact remains that you didn’t have to kill my father, and no matter the circumstances, killing him remains a regicide, which is punishable by death like all the other crimes you confessed today.”

She could see people were on the edge of their seats, waiting for the sentence to fall. Those who were not sitting were leaning to better see her and Ser Jaime. “I’m not my father. Unlike the Mad King, I do not take joy in killing the traitors and my enemies, and I know sometimes we face difficult choices. My father was a cruel man, and his decisions made the Realm bleed and suffer. Your crimes remain, Ser Jaime, and nothing you can do will erase what you did.” The Kingslayer was still looking at her, waiting patiently for his sentence. “However, your crimes don’t erase the good actions you’ve done. The fact remains that you saved this city twice.”

On that, Jaime Lannister was taken aback.

“For your actions that saved the lives of many people, including some who are present today, I offer you the choice to take the black and join the Night’s Watch, where you can have another chance to serve the Realm. If you refuse, then I will have no choice but to execute you for the crimes that you admitted.”

The knight was all confused. He wasn’t expecting this. On her right, she noticed Tyrion had a similar expression. She fought to not let a smile appear on her face and maintained her neutral expression, the expression she had to keep as a queen. Everyone was stunned in the room. Even Marcon looked up from his parchment to gaze at her over his shoulder. Varys and Yennefer seemed to be the only ones to not be surprised in any way, or who managed to not show any surprise.
When Ser Jaime spoke, it came out as a croak. “I choose to take the black.”

Eyes turned to him, then back to her. “So be it. You will leave for Eastwatch-by-the-Sea by the first ship. In the meantime, you will stay in prison. This trial is over.”

The herald, probably surprised too with this turn of events, pounded three times. The guards came to escort Ser Jaime back to his cell. The heavy doors were opened so they could get out, and people followed them on their feet and with their eyes. Daenerys walked back to the small council chambers. From there, she took less used corridors to go to her apartments. She just sat down and poured a glass of wine when someone knocked on her door.

“Come in.” It was Tyrion. She should have expected him.

“Why?” He looked as confused as his brother. She put down her cup.

“You know I had a brother once. Viserys.”

“Yes, the who ended with a crown of melted gold on the head.”

“Yes. I hated him, after he threatened to kill my baby. When I saw him die, I didn’t look away. I didn’t feel any pity for him, even though a few moments ago I was trying to get him out before he pulled out his steel sword and my husband would kill him. All that was gone in an instant when he pointed the sword towards me and said he would carve out my child and leave it to my husband. Within a few seconds, he was no longer my brother.”

Tyrion was frowning. “Most of the time, I don’t regret his death at all. But there are times when I regret some moments we spent together, moments when he was actually nice. I don’t know what happened between you and your brother, but I guess it is better to regret that he is alive and unable to do any harm, than to risk regretting he is dead.”

He opened the mouth but said nothing. He closed and opened it again a few times, before finally a few words came out. “Thank you.”

“Your brother will probably leave soon. There are ships leaving all the time for Eastwatch right now, carrying the food and other things our army at the Wall needs. If you want to talk with him, the sooner would be the better.”

“Yes. Yes, probably,” he stammered. He turned around and was about to walk out, but then stopped in his motion and slowly turned back to her. “There’s…” He hesitated a long time. “There’s something I have to tell you, and I’m not sure if you’ll like it.”

“Why?”

“Because… it concerns your father. And my mother.”

She raised her eyebrows.

Chapter End Notes

Much shorter than Tyrion's trial, I admit, but with the accused who confesses all the crimes, the procedure is quite shortened, and trials in medieval societies were much more expeditive than today. Everyone knew Jaime was going to be declared guilty,
there were only doubts on the sentence.

This chapter is also the last appearance of Jaime. This time, we shall indeed never see his like again, though he may be mentionned in the chapters that are left.

Please review

Next chapter: Bran
“Are you sure you want to do this?”

“It’s not about what I want to do. It’s about what I need to do,” he replied.

“You’re giving up everything to go up there?”

“I already gave up everything, Jon. I gave up everything I held dear the day I fell from that tower.”

“Bran, you don’t have to do this. The White Walkers are gone.”

“You know that’s not true, Jon. They’ll never be gone for good. There’s always a chance they could resurface.”

“When? Where?”

“I don’t know. Maybe in a few years, maybe only in another eight thousand years or longer, but they can always come back.”

“If they only come back in thousands of years, then why would you go north of the Wall? You’ll be dead by the time they come back. You still have a full life ahead of you, and you have a family. How can you give up all this for something that might never happen?”

“How could you? You did the same when you took the black again.”

“It was different,” Jon replied on a mournful tone. “There was no place for me in the south.”

“And there is no place for me either, Jon.”

“You’re wrong.”

“I wish you could understand, Jon. There are things that go beyond what you can understand. It’s complicated.

“Then explain to me.”

“I can’t. I wish I could.”

Jon made an impatient sound and stood to walk to the nearby window. “I didn’t fight the dead so you would end up going back on their lands.”

“It’s no longer dangerous. They are not a threat to me anymore.”

“Then why go back?”

“Because they might be a threat to someone else in the future.”

“How? They’re gone.”
“They could come back.”

“You keep telling this, but you don’t even have the slightest idea of how they could come back, or when, or where.”

“I do. It’s just complicated.”

“Everything is complicated!”

“Yes, they are,” Bran replied calmly to Jon’s outburst.

His brother sighed in despair. “I already took the black again. If you leave, what’s going to happen to Sansa and Arya? They will be alone.”

“Sansa already has someone to take care of her, Jon. She has a new family. She no longer feels like a Stark.”

“Don’t say that.”

“It’s the truth. I don’t like it, but that’s a fact. As for Arya, she doesn’t need anybody. She never did.”

“And the North? Who will rule it?”

“Sansa will do it. You know that, Jon. You’re just trying to find an excuse, as stupid and illogical it might be, to keep me here.”

“I just don’t understand.”

“I know, and I’m sorry for that, but you must believe me when I say this is for the right reasons.”

He wished he could tell the truth to Jon, but he couldn’t. He couldn’t tell anyone that the Children of the Forest still lived somewhere in the places known to men as the Lands of Always Winter, hidden from both men and White Walkers. They were not ready to come into contact with men again, not after they spent so much time alone, cut from all societies other than theirs. The Children he spent time with in the North were a small group who willingly left their communities and ventured in the south, seeking to destroy the White Walkers that threatened the realms of men and would turn on the Children as soon as they were done with the kingdoms of men. Now that the White Walkers were gone, Bran had to go north and find where the other Children still lived. He was the Three-Eyed Raven, the only man who could serve as a bridge between the two races. For when the men and the Children meet again, and they would, a wall of misunderstanding would exist between them, settling all the conditions for a war so devastating that it would span thousands of years and consume both peoples. Just like for the first war, when the First Men came to Westeros, the consequences would be disastrous, only this time they might be worse, for both species had improved their weapons and powers, and they developed their abilities in domains that were specific to the opponent before. Men now controlled magic, and the Children had more powerful weapons as well.

Only Bran could prevent this from happening. He could help the Children to understand men again, and when he would die, the men and women who would succeed him would lead the Children so that when men would find them, the two races could live together, in peace. The men were bound to find the Children. With the White Walkers gone and the great volcano of the North now free of the Walkers’ hold, this winter would be the last one. It would be harsh, harsher than anyone could have foreseen, but when it would be over, summer would settle and never end. Men would start to occupy the lands beyond the Wall like they never did before, they would grow in number, and sooner or later, one of their kingdoms would meet the Children.
The first war between the two people had led to the creation of the White Walkers and the unending succession of summers and winters that followed, with all the death and suffering it involved. The world had not been perfect, unlike some of the Children would like to think. Men had brought some good with them, and the Children couldn’t see it because they were too occupied to look at the wrongs they did. By their intolerance, their refusal to consider change, and their lust for war and glory, both sides made themselves suffer, and none won in the end. Everyone lost, and it was only with the appearance of a new foe they all contributed to create that they became allies and learned to live together.

Now Bran had to make sure history wouldn’t repeat itself, but he couldn’t say anything to Jon. It was true that the White Walkers could reappear. Some Children might even be thinking about it in this very moment, but more than anything, Bran had to protect men and the Children from themselves. Only he could do this.

“Jon,” Bran said carefully, “you cannot hold me here. You have an important role to play in Westeros, and I have one just as important to fulfill on the other side of the Wall. I already sent messages to everyone in the North and to King’s Landing that I renounced to my claim on Winterfell and asked all the Lords of the North to swear fealty to Sansa. It’s over. I was never meant to be Lord of Winterfell, Jon, no more than you. We were both called to something else, something greater. And look around, it worked. We defeated the dead, we saved the realms of men. But our work isn’t over. It will never be over. I must go north of the Wall. This is my duty.”

Bran leaned forward as much as his useless leg allowed him to. “You’ve seen what the White Walkers were capable of. If they ever come back, you know what a catastrophe it would be. I have to make sure it never happens, and the only way I could ensure this is north of the Wall.”

“How? There’s nothing left north of the Wall. You will die out there alone.”

“I’ll have help.”

“You really want Meera to come with you? She will follow you everywhere, but don’t you see that she suffers? You make her suffer with what you’re doing.”

“Meera is not coming with me,” Bran revealed. He had hoped Jon would learn it only at the last moment, when he was long gone.

“If Meera doesn’t go with you, then who will help you?”

Bran didn’t answer. Jon looked at him queerly, realizing there was something more that Bran refused to tell him. He kept his mouth shut all the same. It would be better if Jon didn’t know what help Bran was talking about, or uncertain about the identity of those he thought about.

“Bran, tell me.”

“I cannot. I’m sorry, Jon. You have to trust me.”

“How am I supposed to trust you if you don’t trust me?”

“It’s not a question of trust, Jon. It’s just that no one must know. I swear to you, Jon, I must go north. It’s vital, just as this was essential that you joined the Night’s Watch.”

Jon seemed to think about it for a moment. “I don’t like it, Bran.”

“Me neither. When I was in this cave, the Three-Eyed Raven told me he didn’t want to end up like this, with roots growing on him, but he had to do it. I must do the same now, just like him, just like
you, and like many other people. People will not remember me, but I will have saved them. They will not be aware that they needed to be saved, but they will be alive and well because I have given my life for them."

Jon shook his head several times, paced a little and came back to sit behind his desk. “Alright. I don’t like it, but I won’t stop you. Will we ever see you again?”

“One day, maybe we will.”

“Be careful out there.”

Bran nodded. “I will leave tomorrow in the morning.” It will be the time.

Jon called Meera and she came to carry Bran to his room. They left Jon’s office to go to one of the rooms that had been repaired. Castle Black was busy with men from many horizons working to rebuild the castle and reinforce the fortifications around the crevice. Few of them were members of the Night’s Watch. Most were Northerners and wildlings. Some of them came from the Riverlands, and even a few from the Westerlands. Jon had taken the black again and swore his vows. No Lord Commander had been chosen yet but by all accounts, Jon was unofficially the leader of the Night’s Watch. There should be an election soon.

The room Bran was given was on the ground level, hence the uselessness to climb stairs to reach it. Meera helped him to get into bed.

“You know that I spoke to your brother, don’t you?” she asked Bran, almost to blame him.

“I suspected it,” he recognized.

“I hate the Three-Eyed Raven. He should never have left this cave.”

She walked away. “I’m sorry, Meera.”

She got out as he said her name. He didn’t sleep that night. He almost never slept now, and when he did, he visited the past. This was no longer sleeping. This time, however, he had no visions. He thought of Meera. Although he was the Three-Eyed Raven now, he was also Brandon Stark, and Brandon Stark was the boy who had fallen in love with Meera Reed. However, he couldn’t allow the desires of Brandon Stark to take precedence over the duty of the Three-Eyed Raven.

Love is the death of duty. But love couldn’t have a hold strong enough on him, no matter the love in question. Love for family, love for the North, love for Meera, none of it mattered before the task ahead of him.

He spent the whole night thinking about it. Brandon Stark wanted to stay, but he also knew, and the Three-Eyed Raven knew as well, that he couldn’t stay. The Three-Eyed Raven understood Bran, and Bran understood the Three-Eyed Raven. They both knew the personal desires of one man had to be sacrificed for the future of two races. They both knew what had to be done.

In the morning, Bran didn’t feel tired. He was at peace with himself. A small part of him hated himself for what he was doing to the people who loved him, but it didn’t matter. Only the future mattered. He broke his fast for the last time in the realms of men, and then he was carried to the tunnel. Meera pushed him without talking. Before the inner gates, Jon was waiting for him. Bran knew he wouldn’t stop him. Jon ordered the gates to be opened.

As it was raised, Bran took a last look at Castle Black. A considerable part of it was already usable again. Jon made a very good job at rebuilding it. He kept looking at it as they progressed through the
tunnel, until all he saw was a white point far away.

He looked to Meera, who maintained her eyes straight ahead, refusing to make eye contact with him. He knew she was looking at him only a few moments ago, but she wouldn’t look at him while he looked at her. She wouldn’t meet his eyes. So he decided to look forward as well, and he felt her eyes on him again. It was a soothing and comforting feeling, the last time he would ever feel it.

They progressed through the tunnel in silence, Meera, Jon and Bran, none of them daring to speak. They didn’t know what to tell each other. Only when they reached the outer gate did Jon talk.

“You can still change your mind.”

“No, I can’t.”

That was all Bran said. That was all he could say, for in this moment, if he spoke more, he might actually change his mind and turn back. Reluctantly, Jon raised the torch he carried and made two semi-circles with it. Slowly, the outer gate was raised. He heard Meera take a long inhalation, and then she pushed his sledge and Bran found himself on the other side of the Wall. There he waited, all in black, a long scarf covering all his face, waiting for him on a horse.

“You’re right in time,” he said in a very grave voice.

Jon and Meera stopped at a good distance from him. They were afraid and didn’t know what to expect of this man, for they didn’t know he was a friend, and more than a friend. The man in black stepped down his horse and approached. Bran heard Jon putting his hand on Longclaw and Meera seizing a dagger. Then the man removed the scarf from his face and revealed it for everyone to see.

Bran wasn’t surprised, for he knew who he was already. Meera remained suspicious for she didn’t know him. Jon, on the other hand, was agape.

“Uncle Benjen.”

Coldhands, as he was also known now, smiled to both Jon and Bran, and then to Meera, who looked, confused, to Jon.

“We thought you were dead.”

“I thought so me too,” he replied, “but the Children of the Forest saved me.”

Bran turned to Jon. “I told you I would have help.”

Jon was too stunned to say anything. Bran hoped Jon would just believe him and not ask any other question. Benjen looked to Bran.

“It’s time.”

He walked forward and Meera brandished her dagger, but Jon stopped her with his arm. Coldhands lifted up Bran from his sledge with an impressive strength. He brought him to his horse where he carefully saddled his nephew.

“Don’t worry. I’ll make sure nothing happens to him,” Coldhands told Jon and Meera. He climbed on his horse as well.

“Wait! Where are you going? Benjen… Talk to me. How are you still alive? Where have you been?”

“That I cannot tell you, Jon. There are a lot of things I cannot tell you. But I can tell you this. We’ll
meet again, and then you’ll know everything.”

Benjen hurried his horse forward and raced at high speed. The last image Bran had of the realms of men were the two figures of Jon and Meera, the first mouth opened and looking helpless while looking to his brother disappearing, and the second with tears streaming from her eyes. They got smaller and smaller until Bran couldn’t see them anymore. He turned his back to his past and looked to the future. The wind hit his face strongly, but that wasn’t the reason he was crying. His life as Brandon Stark was over. His life as the Three-Eyed Raven was beginning for real.

Chapter End Notes

Another character leaving us.

I'm trying to wrap up all the arcs of the story. Bran didn't occupy the place in "A Shadow and a Wolf" like he did in the books or the show. He only had two chapters written from his perspective and he was more a background character, providing information and explaining the whys and the hows of the events occurring on the magical realm.

I'm trying to provide an explanation to the decisions of the Children of the Forest in this chapter. To me, it is unlikely that all of those who were still alive died in that cavern, and although it is not impossible, it seems unlikely that they only trained Bran to save humanity when they fought mankind for thousands of years. That these were the actions of a marginal group among the Children is more likely, while there are others still alive somewhere.

I guess that if there could be a sequel to "A Shadow and a Wolf", this chapter is the one leaving the door open for such a sequel. I'm not planning a sequel right now, not with "A Rose and a Lion" still being written and far from finished, and I have other projects ongoing, but who knows? Let's not close the door forever. We never know what life is keeping in store for us.

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
Chapter Notes

Sorry for being late with this new chapter.

A very political chapter that shows the beginning of Daenerys’ rule and her very first decisions as queen. As you will see, she's not going to leave Westeros as it is.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

TYRION XXXIX

They all stood next to their seat, waiting for the queen to arrive. The first meeting of the small council where all members would be present was about to begin. Tyrion understood what Daenerys was doing. She tried to show she was the queen, for the small council would only start when she would be here, and she would be here when she wanted to arrive.

In the meantime, the other members of the small council were busy doing one thing or another. The Master of Coin and the Master of Ships, respectively Mace Tyrell and Paxter Redwyne, were engaged in a long conversation. Anders Yronwood, the Master of Laws, talked with Varys, Master of Whisperers for a queen, a first time. Yennefer, the Red Priestess who represented the High Priestess in her absence, looked at the glass that allowed light into the room. Kinvara had not come back yet. The last time Tyrion saw her was at Moat Cailin. Ever since she left with the Red Priest Geralt to accompany him until his departure of Westeros, no one had seen her. Tyrion found this very odd. Yennefer had been discussing with Grand Maester Marcon for a time but had hostilely turned her back on him after he spoke of a Red Priestess with red hair another maester in the Stormlands told him about. Ever since, he was writing notes on a pile of paper. Intrigued, Tyrion approached him. The Grand Maester didn’t show any sign he was aware of Tyrion’s presence near him.

“Am I bothering you?” he asked the maester.

“Not at all, my lord.” The Grand Maester looked up and removed his Myrish glasses to look at Tyrion. He only needed them to read. Very few people used them, for they were very costly, but this maester seemed to have the means to pay for them. “What can I do for you?”

“You seemed very focused while you were writing.”

“Yes. I’m not always like that. Sometimes, I pace while I speak to myself, reciting what I want to write before I go back to work. But here… well, it wouldn’t be appropriate in front of all these important people.”

“Do you include me in these important people, Grand Maester?”

“You are the Hand of the Queen, my lord,” he replied, a small smile on his face.

“Clever answer.”

The Grand Maester laughed shortly. Tyrion wondered how he was chosen to be Grand Maester. The man barely had a few grey hair. He was no older than forty and very young by Grand Maester
standards.

“‘To go back to the matter that occupied us, what were you writing?’”

“‘Notes, my lord.’”

“‘Notes, indeed. I guessed so. Notes for what?’”

“‘Well, stuff.’ The Grand Maester seemed reluctant to answer. ‘It is for a book, my lord.’”

“‘What book?’”

“I intend to write a book about my tenure as Grand Maester.”

“Won’t your tenure end with your death?”

“Indeed. I’m afraid I will never see the work finished, but I think one of my friends in Oldtown will be kind enough to complete it when I’m gone. I might also use these notes for other works, such as the beginning of this new era. I’d like to relate how the Seven Kingdoms were changed as the new queen modified the political and economic structures of our country.”

“Are you sure you will have the time to do this, with your responsibilities as Grand Maester?”

“Not as much time as I’d like. I wish the days were longer, but I will do my best, and no matter how much I manage to write, that will be something I wrote, which is better than nothing. I want to leave something behind me.”

“We all do, Grand Maester,” Varys said from behind Tyrion. He had stopped talking with Lord Yronwood. “I just hope you realize it is more important to change the world for the better than to write about it.”

“I hope to do both,” Marcon replied with conviction.

Varys nodded in respect and turned to Tyrion. “My good lord Hand, a word in private, if I may.”

“You may as much as you want, my good friend,” Tyrion replied and followed.

“I heard the Lady Sansa is feeling better.”

“You heard well.”

“What about you?”

He could have looked surprised that Varys was so concerned, but instead he replied, “things could be better. I take it one day at a time.”

“And your sister?”

He whispered the last question, which left no doubt on which sister Varys was talking about. “She didn’t kill me yet.”

“I shall hope so. It would be very sad if she lost another brother.”

“What do you want, Varys?”

“Me? Only to be sure that my friends are safe.”
“For now, everything is alright.”

“I hope it will remain that way. I would be careful as to who you tell your secrets in the future.”

Varys walked away from Tyrion, who again found himself alone. He didn’t know why he told Daenerys the truth about their parents. Varys was right. She could have him executed on the spot. It had been stupid but when she told him why she didn’t kill Jaime, he felt like telling her, as if he owed it to her. Jaime had left the city two days later. Tyrion had gone to see him one last time before he left. They didn’t speak a lot, but they left on better terms than how they parted ways before the trial. Tyrion said he would go to visit him at the Wall. He still wasn’t sure if he would do it, but he wasn’t sure that he wouldn’t do it either. Jaime had apologized again and told him he would do everything he could to make amends at the Wall. He joked, saying it might have been the best place for him from the beginning.

Now Jaime was gone. Tyrion didn’t tell him the truth. The only people he told were Sansa and Daenerys. Apart from them, only Genna, Bran and Varys knew the truth. When his half-sister learned the truth, she was first stunned, then shocked. Tyrion had explained everything very carefully. Daenerys knew the powers Bran had, having experienced them firsthand, and since Tyrion could ride a dragon, she believed him quite quickly. She had required a moment for herself then, and half an hour later, she summoned Tyrion. He had gone back to Sansa in the meantime. He informed his wife of what he just revealed to the queen. Sansa feared the worse but when Daenerys called him again, she went with him. They discussed for hours. Daenerys took it pretty well, considering the circumstances. It wasn’t the first time she discovered she had a family member who was still alive. They talked about many things, from personal stuff to the political ramifications of this situation. Tyrion swore he had no interest in the Iron Throne, and he thought Daenerys believed him. Anyway, he was a bastard, and thus had a weaker claim on the throne than her, not to mention a smaller dragon and a height problem. The three had agreed not to reveal any of it.

They heard a door open and close. The queen came in, alone. She looked to no one, except for Tyrion who she looked at for an instant, and took place on her chair. The small council, who had waited for her, followed her example. Tyrion ended at her right, presiding the small council meeting with her.

“We have several matters to attend today, so let us begin right away. First, the Iron Islands. As you all know by now, I promised Yara Greyjoy that I would acknowledge her Queen of the Iron Islands. I will keep my promise.”

“Your Grace, I know you made a promise,” Lord Redwyne began, “but the Greyjoys are dangerous. I can’t remember how many times they rebelled against the Iron Throne, and each time the Reach bled.”

“Euron Greyjoy made the Reach bleed. His niece helped to protect the Reach and fought alongside you at Oldtown. She helped to free the Shield Islands. Have you received any information that Ironborn would have attacked your lands since Euron was defeated?”

The last question was destined to Mace Tyrell. “No, your Grace, but that doesn’t mean they will not attack again. The Ironborn always invade our lands, sooner or later.”

“In this case, it would be better not to give them a reason to raid your lands,” Tyrion said. “Yara Greyjoy is on our side. I’d say I would rather have a queen of the Iron Islands who’s friendly to us than a Lord or a Lady of the Iron Islands who would be ready to rebel at the first opportunity. Giving the crown of the Iron Islands to Yara Greyjoy may be our best chance to ensure the Ironborn remain quiet.”
“They will attack us someday,” Lord Redwyne opposed.

“They will attack someday, whether they are independent or subjects to our queen. The Ironborn always invade Westerosi lands. No matter what happens, the last centuries proved that the Ironborn cannot remain idle on their islands for long. A new war with them is inevitable in the long-term. But for the next twenty years, I believe giving independence to the Iron Islands is the best way to avoid a new war. If we deny Yara Greyjoy what she asked, you can be sure we will have a new war within three years.”

Tyron knew that giving their independence to the Iron Islands could create a precedent that would cause other kingdoms to look after the same thing. However, for the time being, the North was too exhausted from previous wars to think about sovereignty, and the Dornish lands were ruled by a prince who had no desire to bring his people into another war and already occupied by a rebellion of his own bannermen. Tyrion knew the Ironborn would try to return to their old ways. It was bound to happen. But they could delay the coming of that day and ensure peace with the Iron Islands for the time Yara Greyjoy would rule them. When the Ironborn would rebel again, they had dragons to deal with them and to bring the islands back into the Realm. But not yet.

“I will not come back on my word,” Daenerys said. “Yara Greyjoy will be queen of the Iron Islands as long as she recognizes me as queen of all the other Westerosi lands. I will honor the pact we made in Meereen, and so she will. She engaged herself to respect the integrity of the Seven Kingdoms and to end piracy activities.”

“She will not,” Lord Tyrell declared.

“When she does not, I will deal with her, but not before. The matter is closed. I’ve made my decision.”

The decision about the Iron Islands was accepted, though only reluctantly by most of the councillors. No one was fond of the Iron Islands. Lord Redwyne and Lord Tyrell would barely have been more displeased had the queen decided to give its independence to Dorne.

“Can we be sure the Red Priests will be able to spread the word of R’hllor in the Iron Islands?” Yennefer asked.

“My deal with Yara Greyjoy includes the freedom of religion. All faiths will be allowed in both the Iron Islands and all over Westeros,” the queen answered.

“That was to be expected. “Doran Martell already told us he can deal with the rebellion himself. I promised him to lend him my support if he ever needed it, but for now it seems he can end the rebellion without my intervention. I will not intervene in Dorne unless it is necessary,” the queen decided.

The decision had come from a discussion Tyrion had with Daenerys yesterday. At the news of the rebellion, she had wanted to go to Dorne and help Doran Martell immediately. She saw it as her duty, since she promised Prince Doran her help whenever he needed it. But the people of Dorne didn’t appreciate strangers on their lands, and they had been the only ones to resist the dragons in
history. It was better to let a Dornish who was your ally end the rebellion if he could, than to feed the said rebellion by marching on Dorne or flying over the kingdom.

“I agree with your decision, your Grace,” Lord Yronwood said. He must have received instructions from the Martells about it.

“Prince Doran Martell may not be present for the ceremony if he is to deal with a rebellion on his lands,” the Grand Maester said. He kept writing as he spoke.

“The coronation only takes place in two months. I’m sure that if the rebellion is not neutralized by this time, Prince Doran will still be able to send someone to represent him,” the queen said.

“Anyway, I heard Prince Doran’s health doesn’t allow him to travel very much. He is unlikely to come, no matter what happens,” Tyrion added.

“He should be there for the crowning of his queen,” Lord Tyrell argued.

“Prince Doran is the only Lord Paramount of the Seven Kingdoms who gave me his support before I arrived in Westeros. I trust him. He doesn’t need to travel hundreds of miles to prove his loyalty,” Daenerys declared. “Things are different for those who joined me later.”

“While we are on the ceremony, maybe we should decide who will rule the North, your Grace,” Marcon suggested. “Brandon Stark left Winterfell and declared he would never come back. We just received confirmation from the Wall that he went in the Lands of Always Winter. We need a Warden of the North to declare his fealty to you during the ceremony, and someone to rule the North in your name as well.”

“Her fealty,” she corrected. “Lady Sansa Lannister of House Stark will be Wardeness of the North.”

There was some uncertainty around the table. Strangely, it was the Grand Maester who intervened first. “I don’t believe it is wise to let someone rule two kingdoms, your Grace.”

“Since Jon Snow took the black and that Brandon Stark is gone forever, the Lady Sansa is Lady of Winterfell.”

“How will she rule the North from Casterly Rock?”

“Don’t worry, Grand Maester,” Tyrion reassured him with a smile on the corner of his lips. “I was able to rule a city on the brink of civil war. My wife and I are capable of ruling two kingdoms.”

“Maybe we should think about what we will do about the Stormlands,” Lord Tyrell said all of a sudden. “All the Baratheons are gone. It is time to name a new Lord of Storm’s End. It would be preferable to name someone who has some knowledge of the Stormlands, and one of your current allies, your Grace.”

Mace Tyrell wasn’t very good to hide his intentions to Tyrion. He knew what game the Lord of Highgarden was playing. Seeing Tyrion had two kingdoms, he was trying to obtain the same. Daenerys had already acknowledged the lands in the Stormlands that his lord father gave to Mace Tyrell after the Battle of Blackwater, and also those Tyrion promised to Doran Martell as part of his alliance early in the War of the Five Kings. However, if Mace ever wanted to hold both the Reach and the Stormlands, his hopes would be quenched very quickly.

“There will be a new Lord of Storm’s End, but no more Lord of the Stormlands.”

The news let most of the people of the small council stunned. It didn’t stun Tyrion, for he had
already been stunned when Daenerys told him of her projects days before. Now he had come to accept this was an interesting idea. Bold as well, but interesting nonetheless.

“What do you mean, your Grace?” Lord Yronwood asked.

“So no, all the lands that were under the authority of the Lord Paramount of the Stormlands when I arrived in Westeros will be part of the Crownlands.”

All were shocked. Even Varys seemed concerned.

“This would double the size of the Crownlands,” the Grand Maester said. No one could deny it.

“The Stormlands… part of the Crownlands?” Lord Yronwood was skeptical.

“Your Grace, we have lands in the Stormlands,” Lord Tyrell said.

“You will keep them, and so will Dorne. As I said, only the lands under the authority of the Lord Paramount of the Stormlands when I arrived in Westeros will be integrated to the Crownlands.”

“This is… unexpected,” Lord Tyrell babbled. “The Crownlands have never been expanded since Aegon arrived.”

“Now they will. The Baratheons ruled the Stormlands, and they rebelled against their king and seized the Iron Throne. See it as an example of what can happen to those who defy their king, or their queen.”

“What about the Vale? Will it be included in the Crownlands as well?” Lord Redwyne asked, as if he was not sure he wanted to hear the answer.

“No. The Vale will become a province, a territory that will be ruled by a man of my choice. He will have no right over the Vale, no hereditary rights, and he will rule on my behalf and only on my behalf. For now, Nestor Royce will act as governor until I name another one.”

The lords around the table were all worried. Marcon was writing more quickly than ever. The queen resumed. “Doran Martell will be Prince of Dorne, Mace Tyrell will be High Marshal of the Reach and Warden of the South, Tyrion Lannister will be Lord of the Westerlands and Warden of the East, Edmure Tully will be Lord of the Riverlands and Lord Paramount of the Trident, and Sansa Lannister of House Stark will be Lady of Winterfell and Wardeness of the North.”

“Who shall be Warden of the East?” the Grand Maester asked.

“Me.” Marcon stopped to write again, and he looked to Daenerys. Tyrion saw a flash of excitement in his eyes, then he went back to write.

“You, Your Grace?” Lord Redwyne asked.

“Yes. Since the Crownlands include most of the lands in the east and that the Vale will be under my rule through a governor, it will be me.”

The rest of the small council meeting concerned questions like the return of the troops in the North to their homes and the measures to put into place to ensure the population of the Seven Kingdoms and the troops still at the Wall had enough food and shelter to last through winter. The Reach and the Vale were to provide most of the provisions to make sure the whole Seven Kingdoms didn’t starve through winter. Repairs on the docks of King’s Landing had to accelerate, and the gold cloaks were to be mobilized to help build more shelters in the city. Wells and aqueducts were to be rebuilt.
Financial help was to be provided by Casterly Rock and Illyrio Mopatis, a merchant of Pentos who supported Daenerys when she was in Essos. Daenerys also got a guarantee from Tyrion that Dothrakis could settle on the deserted lands of the North, where the White Walkers decimated the population. Tyrion said he would have to speak to his wife first, but he knew he and Sansa had no choice to accept. Dothrakis would cause fewer trouble in the North than if they were settled in the Crownlands or the Riverlands. And although you could reason Daenerys and try to change her mind, she expected everyone to obey her orders and follow her decisions once they were taken.

After the small council session, Tyrion found himself with his sister in her private apartments.

“So, do you think I’m crazy and mad like all the others?” she asked him directly.

“I’d say you were bold. Not mad or crazy, but bold, and shouldn’t a queen be bold?”

A small smile crept on her face. “They’ll have to get used to it. I’m not going to sit in my throne and let the world stay as he is. I intend to make it better.”

“Still, we must give the world the time to get better. When we try to make it better too quickly, it can backfire and turn worse. Change is a long process. Look at the Bay of Dragons.”

She looked down for a very short moment. The information they got from Essos were not very encouraging. The former masters were still trying to get back to power, and there were also quarrels with the Red Priests and among them. No matter what they did, some people would always believe in slavery on the other continent.

“I intend to make all my reforms all the same,” she stated, visibly determined. No one would make her change her mind on this.

“I know, and this is admirable from you, but you must give time to the high lords to accept these. Only by taking possession of two kingdoms for yourself and the title of Warden of the East you created quite a shock. If you had taken away their lands in the Stormlands, I am afraid they wouldn’t remain loyal to you for a long time.”

If not worse. When people couldn’t rebel, like when the queen had dragons and any rebellion was doomed to fail, they turned to assassination or other ways to bring down their rulers.

“I will not change my mind about a royal army, you know that,” she said.

“I know. Only, if they had heard in the same meeting that you annexed two kingdoms and created a permanent army for yourself, they could have rebelled against you on the spot, or plotted to all turn on you together as soon as the meeting was over.”

“They know what will happen to them if they dare to rebel.”

“Yes, but men are not always logical. Sometimes they rebel without thinking of the consequences. We must make sure your reforms can withstand the test of time. Aegon V made a lot of laws to reduce the power of the powerful over the weak and to make lives of the latter better, but when my… Tywin Lannister arrived as your father’s Hand, he repealed all of them.”

“That won’t happen. Anyway, for the royal army, the lords of Westeros don’t need to worry. The core of it will be my Unsullied.”

“Yes, but if you accept in your army the people from all over the Seven Kingdoms and free them from their oaths to all other lords and kings, that will be a cause of anger for the other lords. For now, it would be better to wait for the Unsullied to come back. Then you will announce that they are your
permanent royal army, and after a year or two, you use the justification that Unsullied are not immortal and that some died to begin to recruit people from all over the Seven Kingdoms.”

She nodded, though it was obvious she was impatient. This queen had learned the hard way she couldn’t change everything in one night, but she was still upset she couldn’t change things more quickly.

“I will need you in the coming years,” she said. “I still don’t have to worry about you?”

“As I said, I have no interest in the Iron Throne. Casterly Rock is more than enough for me, and I can’t keep it if the truth comes out. So let’s keep it a secret. It will be better for you, for me, and for everyone in the Seven Kingdoms. I don’t think they want another Dance of Dragons.”

“Me neither.” She looked at the balcony, through the vast windows that allowed air and light to come in. “Ser Barristan told me there had been words of a relationship between my father and a lady of the Lannisters, but he assured me these were only gossips.”

“I guess they were more than that,” Tyrion commented. He wondered if Barristan Selmy ever wondered if he was the bastard son of the king he saved at Duskendale. Maybe he had even thought that Cersei and Jaime might be his children. After all, the rumors existed well before Tyrion was born, and his lady mother was a lady in waiting for Queen Rhaella many years before she was married.

“I don’t intend to be like my father. I don’t want to have anything to do with him. I don’t want my rule to be based on his own.”

“In this case, you might prefer to create a new dynasty with no links with him. Aegon came to Westeros with dragons, and he had no ancestors to base his claim on. He became king by right of conquest. You can do the same. It would also have the benefit to weaken any claim any other Targaryen would have.”

He showed his hands to her and smiled comically. She smiled in return. Tyrion turned serious again quite quickly though.

“Although, since we’re talking of dynasty, I know you broke your betrothal with Prince Trystane, but we should begin to think about finding another consort. Unless you want to put into place a new system to choose kings and queens. The Iron Islands, for all their flaws, have their own after all. Not all kings and queens are followed by their children or even by their heirs.”

The eyes of Daenerys turned dark, and her face showed sadness. “I cannot have children.” Tyrion frowned at that. “When I travelled in the Red Waste and I lost my child, the witch who helped me told me I could never have children again. My womb quickened. I will bear no other children. Not until the sun rises in the west and sets in the east.”

“Are you sure of that?” Tyrion asked, uncertain.

“My moonbloods have stopped, and I have lied with men and never got pregnant again.”

He saw how she was pained by this. He exhaled for a long time. He and Sansa were facing the same situation. Although sometimes he wondered if Serion Lannister had told the truth. What if the poison didn’t work? Sansa had her moonblood only a few days ago, so maybe she could still have children. Maybe he should have Marcon take a look at her.

“Are you really sure?” he asked again.
“Yes, I am. My dynasty will end with me.”

Tyrion looked away, lost in his thoughts. He had thought about a someone very specific to marry Daenerys, but now all went to dust. If Daenerys couldn’t have a child… then maybe the king consort he was thinking about could.

“What about Jon Snow?”

She turned to look at him, intrigued. “Jon Snow?”

“Well, he is your last relative alive, officially in the least. From what I know, he’s not unable to have children. If he was to marry, then his children could be your heirs.”

“Jon will not accept.”

“I can try to convince him. I’m quite good at persuading.”

“He’s in the Night’s Watch. He will refuse.”

“Let’s have him leave the Night’s Watch.”

“He won’t. Anyway, he can’t. He took his vows again.”

“I’m not sure we can take vows to the Night’s Watch twice. Furthermore, the White Walkers are no longer a threat and there are plenty of men at the Wall. They can do without one.”

“Even if you managed to persuade him to leave the Night’s Watch, who would he marry?”

Tyrion smiled. The idea had come to his mind as soon as his sister was no longer a possible bride for Jon Snow.

Chapter End Notes

The map of Westeros changed within a single meeting of the small council. One kingdom was integrated into another, another one was converted into a province, and the Iron Islands are independant.

Beyond this, Daenerys is establishing her authority. In Meereen, Daenerys ruled as an absolute queen, unlike the kings and queens of Westeros. During the first centuries of medieval ages in Europe, the true power lied more with the lords, dukes, earls, counts and other minor lords than with the kings. Kings and queens relied on their bannermen to hold their power. A shift occured by the end of Middle Age as the power moved to the monarchs, culminating in France with the absolute monarchy of Louis XIV. The Targaryens managed to be closer to absolute monarchs while they had dragons, but after the dragons died they relied on their alliances with powerful families to maintain their power over all Westeros, and Robert, Joffrey and Tommen had to do the same. Daenerys has dragons, so she's shifting to a politic model where she holds more power, like in Meereen, and she begins to put it into place by placing two kingdoms under her direct authority, and she plans to create a permanent royal army with the Unsullied as the core. The creation of permanent royal armies in medieval times were the signs that monarchs could apply their power to all their lands and not rely on temporary armies made of peasants only in times of war.
And for those who regretted that Jon Snow might spend the rest of his life to the Wall, there might be some hope for you now.

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa
The sun was beginning to make its appearance on the horizon. Sansa looked to the other side of the bed, empty. Tyrion had left yesterday for the Wall, and she already missed him. She could barely get a few hours of sleep tonight.

She had been so relieved to see the man she loved again, to see Tyrion not follow his father’s path. They had managed to speak to each other again, to get through their loss together. However, Tyrion was gone again now. It wasn’t the first time they were separated, but the first time it happened she discovered a plot of Littlefinger against him, and the second time she was kidnapped, and Joanna was taken away from them, forever. She tried to tell herself not to worry, but she was still afraid to lose Tyrion. Not in the same way, of course. When she heard that he spared the Westerlings, she had been relieved like she had never been in her whole life. She still feared he might turn into Tywin Lannister again, but she was also afraid anything might befall him while he was at the Wall. She heard there were still wights, and although they said the White Walkers were gone, she wasn’t ready to believe it so easily. After losing Joanna, she couldn’t support losing Tyrion as well, not when he already came back to her when she feared he might disappear.

The night before his departure had been wonderful. It was the first time they laid together as husband and wife since they were reunited. Sansa had almost forgotten what it was to actually be with him. Now she missed him.

She got out of bed and called for her handmaid. Once she was dressed and prepared for the day, she walked out to find Arya standing in front of her door.

“Did you sleep tonight?” Sansa asked her little sister.

“Aye, but not long.”

“You don’t have to stand guard in front of my door, you know.”

“I don’t sleep as much as you do. Or perhaps I sleep more than you but spend less time in bed.”

Something on Sansa’s face must have betrayed her. As they walked through the corridors of the Red Keep, they met several people, including handmaidens, guards, knights and other noble lords. When they crossed the path of a man and his wife talking in ushered voices to each other, Sansa followed them with her eyes even when they moved behind her.

“You miss your husband?” Arya asked her.

“Yes, I do.”

“You still won’t tell me where he went?”
“I can’t.”

Arya sighed, discouraged. “You tell him everything, he tells you everything, but you don’t tell me everything, even if I’m your sister.”

“I’m sorry, Arya. We just agreed to tell no one. It’s too important. If Jaime Lannister was still here, Tyrion would have told him nothing either.”

She hoped that Tyrion would tell him nothing. He told Sansa everything about the revelations his brother did, right after his visit, in the very few hours preceding the trial. Sansa had been horrified the first time she heard the story. Now it was even worse. Tyrion was broken by the truth. Sansa thought he would certainly have sentenced his own brother to death if he had the chance, and she would have agreed. Tywin Lannister had truly poisoned everyone in this family. But now, she was relieved that Daenerys spared Jaime Lannister. She hadn’t thought about right away, too horrified that she was by the revelation of the truth about Tysha, but she feared Tyrion might have gone back to his father’s ways had his bother been executed.

“He went in the North, didn’t he?” her sister asked.

“How do you know that?” She couldn’t catch herself before it was too late. She dropped her guard with Arya. Her sister was smiling cunningly.

“I saw him heading north when he left with Viserion. He must be going quite far to travel by dragon’s back.”

“I won’t tell you more, Arya,” Sansa warned her.

“Have it your way. But you don’t deny it. He’s going far away.”

“Anyone traveling on a dragon must go somewhere far away.”

“You confirm it.”

Sansa rolled her eyes, and Arya imitated her. They ended up laughing as they entered the gardens. Arya kept following her. She was acting like some sort of personal guard, and with the two swords she carried, she had indeed the required weapons and appearance for a guard. Sansa thought about Brienne, who died fighting near the walls of this very castle. She joined her father, and now Evenfall was empty.

“You really like it here?” Arya wondered.

“Not that much. I prefer the godswood but the gardens are where Margaery prefers to be.”

They only needed to make a few more steps and to turn a corner to see Sansa’s friend sitting on a bench. She stood, an honest smile on her face.

“Sansa. I’m happy to see you. How are you?”

“I’m fine.”

“Are you sure? You look a little pale.” It was obvious that she didn’t sleep a lot.

“She misses her husband,” Arya explained.

Margaery smiled with empathy. “I understand. What about you, Arya?”
Her little sister shrugged. “I’m fine.”

Margaery turned back her attention to Sansa. She was in much better terms with Sansa than with Arya. “Let’s walk a little.”

They progressed side by side through the garden, Arya staying behind. Sansa knew she was eyeing Margaery very closely. Arya didn’t trust her. Sansa tried in vain to convince her sister that Margaery was a friend, she wouldn’t stop watching her.

“I loved this garden better during summer,” Margaery said. Indeed, snow covered the alleys and were dying. Sansa and Margaery both wore heavy cloaks to keep themselves warm.

“I’m afraid the flowers will not bloom before many years,” Sansa added. It was a sorry spectacle indeed, all these dead flowers that had been so gorgeous before. Sansa could barely enjoy their beauty while she was in King’s Landing, with all her problems with Joffrey and the Lannisters back then.

“I’ve never seen the queen here. Do you think she dislikes gardens?”

“I don’t know. I guess she’s too busy to visit them, and anyway they’re not in a very good state during this season.”

“I thought you may know more of her tastes, considering you see her every day.” There was a hint of blame in Margaery’s voice. Sansa knew why. When she arrived in the capital after the Crag, Margaery had been there for her. In view of the death of Joanna, Margaery had revealed to Sansa the truth about her own child. Very few people knew about it. Sansa didn’t talk about it to anyone else, not even Arya who followed them right now, and not even Tyrion.

“She comes to visit me every day, indeed,” Sansa acknowledged. “She’s lost her son too, so she can understand what I’m going through. There are few women here who can say they lost their baby.”

Sansa looked at Margaery to make her understand that she was included in that sentence. “Yes, I know,” Margaery replied. Sansa perceived that Margaery didn’t entirely share the same feelings towards the queen.

“She’s not a monster like her father or Joffrey or Cersei. I can’t imagine her murdering children.”

Margaery looked away and sighed. “I know that I would probably do the same if I was in her place. She is the queen now, after all. But I can’t help but hate her. She took away something very dear to me.”

“I know. I’m sorry.”

They continued to walk together, taking news of their families.

“My grandmother says she will come for the coronation in two months. She’s not eager at all to come back here, but she wants to see me,” she confided.

“I’ll be happy to see her again,” Sansa told her friend.

“She and my father will probably try to get an authorization to send me back to Highgarden. I wish them good luck. My father is probably already looking for a new husband for me, but without the new queen’s approval, I’m condemned to celibacy.” Sansa said nothing and let Margaery talk. “I’m not sure anyway many men will want to marry me, I had three husbands and the three of them are dead.”
“It’s not your fault.”

“Maybe not, but I’ll make sure the fourth doesn’t try to be king. It might reduce the chances for him to die. Look at your own husband. He never tried to be king, and he’s still alive, while all the people who tried to be king or queen in Westeros are gone.”

“All except Daenerys Targaryen.”

“And Yara Greyjoy,” Margaery recognized. “But I don’t intend to tempt fate. My days of dreaming to be queen are over. I don’t want to see other people I love die because of my family’s ambitions. I don’t want to see anyone die because someone wants to sit on a throne.”

Sansa couldn’t agree more. She saw enough suffering for her entire life. The image of her little girl drowning came to her mind.

After her walk in the gardens with Margaery, Sansa went to read the ravens sent by Casterly Rock and replied to them. In Tyrion’s absence, she had to take care of the problems referred to him. Margaery was spending some time with the ladies of Highgarden that her father brought for her. They were not the ladies-in-waiting she had before. Almost all were dead, killed on Cersei’s order, and Sansa knew it was no longer the same for Margaery to spend time with friends, not after the loss of her brother, her separation from her child, and all the ordeals she went through. Sansa was well placed to know what it was to see your world collapse.

Following the lunch, Margaery and Sansa crossed path again in the Great Hall when Daenerys held court. Many people had issues to bring forward, from lords to the common people. Among the commoners, requests mostly concerned needs for shelter and food, or claims of injustice and mistreatment committed by the gold cloaks or the other soldiers. Lords complained about taxes and the burden of welcoming refugees on their lands, and in their streets for those who managed towns. There was also a representative of the Iron Bank of Braavos today. He claimed that he only wanted to make sure the new queen would honor the debts the crown had towards the Iron Bank. Daenerys declared that she wasn’t the one who spent the millions of golden dragons the previous regimes borrowed from the bank. In fact, she was very blunt, stating the Iron Bank should only blame itself for lending money to Robert Baratheon and his successors, considering it was obvious they wouldn’t be able to pay back. She declared that she would speak privately with the representative later, to settle any financial problems the bank may have with her.

When the court was cleared and people left the Throne Room, Sansa was approached by one of the queen’s men.

“Lady Lannister, the queen wishes to speak with you. She’s asking you to wait for her in your apartments. It is a very urgent matter.”

Sansa went immediately to her apartment, Arya still with her. When they came back to her rooms, Arya remained outside, probably to welcome the queen when she would arrive Sansa closed the door behind her. Someone was sitting in front of the hearth.

“Sansa, I was waiting for you.”

She knew this voice. A sweet, melodious voice, who sang at her second wedding. The woman stood up and faced Sansa, her red robe and brown hair swirling around as she turned, her green eyes setting on Sansa, her hands crossed before her.

“Kinvara.” Sansa did her best to hide her surprise, something she had elevated to an art. “I didn’t expect to find you here. I didn’t know you were back.”
“I just came back.”

“You were gone a long time. No one knew where you were.”

“Sometimes it is better to stay in the dark to serve the light.”

“I thought you were gone to accompany another priest until he left Westeros.”

“I was, but he had something to do before he left. You see, he didn’t leave alone. You see, some people are not made to be alone.”

“Well, I’m happy to see you well.”

Sansa wasn’t sure, however, if she was happy to see the High Priestess. She always felt strange in her presence. The woman saved her from Littlefinger and the Arryns, she even killed Littlefinger, and she was also the one to bring back Tyrion from the dead, but she couldn’t help but feel uncomfortable in her presence. The fact she entered her rooms without her permission wasn’t making it better.

“What about you, Sansa? Are you well?”

“Yes, I’m fine.”

Kinvara shook her head. “You’re not.”

Her eyes only showed compassion, but Sansa couldn’t shake the feeling there was more to it. “I’m as well as I can be.”

“That is true.” She wasn’t judging Sansa, and again, she was sure there was something more behind this.

“How did you get in there?”

“I opened the door.”

Sansa tried to change of subject. “I never thanked you for saving my lord husband.”

Kinvara raised a hand. “You don’t need to thank me for anything, Sansa. I’m only doing what the Lord wants me to do. Do you remember when I told you how I lost a daughter, a long time ago?”

Her expression had taken a much sorrowful turn. “Yes, I recall, in the Vale.” She had abandoned her daughter before she became a priestess.

“We turn our back on who we’ve been when we join the orders, but what the person before us did isn’t erased. It stays. Take yourself. Are you the same woman today than who you were when you left Winterfell?”

“No.”

“Does that make your past actions less real?”

“No.” Sansa remembered her father’s death.

“We cannot change the past, but we can change the future.”

She looked to somewhere on her left and on Sansa’s right. She followed the priestess’ gaze to fall
“Men like Petyr Baelish always lie when it is in their interest, Sansa. And I know these men and when it is in their interest to lie.”

Footsteps, a closed door, maybe the barely perceptible sound of tissue sliding on the floor. That was all Sansa heard, without really realizing she heard them. For all she could do was to look. On the couch… She stood there for she didn’t know how long. Somehow, Sansa's legs moved her until she was right before it. Then she knelt to be at the right level. The green eyes met the blue ones. The blond hair, that would have been shining in the sun, did not change. She looked to Sansa, quietly, examining her.

“Mama?”

Sansa realized she was crying. She grew up, but it was her, and she was there, alive.

“Joanna.”

That was all she could say in a wavering voice, and all she needed to say. Her daughter was alive, and she was smiling at her, raising her little arm to her.

“Mama.”

Chapter End Notes

For everyone who asked if Joanna was still alive, you have your answer.

Please review

Next chapter: Jon
The dark shape of Castle Black was visible. The day was coming to an end, and Jon was eager to be back to the castle. He knew he wouldn’t find much rest there. Too much work remained to be done. He spent the whole day trying to solve quarrels between different Free Folk tribes. They were already difficult to control when Mance was alive. Tormund barely succeeded, and now he was gone. Toregg, his son, did his best, and although his father prepared him, he was young and needed to assert his authority, which he had no choice but to do in the way of the Free Folk. That meant a lot of dead bodies and broken bones.

At least he could get a warm meal and work with a fire burning in the hearth. It would be work until late in the night, but with some heat, not like the cold that seemed to be piercing his skin right now. It seemed that winter didn’t need the White Walkers to make its existence known to everyone. Sometimes, Jon feared one of them would appear in the blizzard. So far, it didn't happen.

The gates were opened as soon as the men recognized him. Some men were still working outside in the courtyard. A storm was coming, and they were preparing for it. They may be buried under snow for days if not longer. The remaining tunnels under Castle Black would be very useful in that case. Jon was glad he sent men to unblock the tunnels. Many more would work on it during the snow storm if they remained stuck inside.

As he unhorsed, Edd walked to him. “Lord Commander.”

Jon had gotten used to be called this way again very quickly. The vote had been quick. All the remaining sworn brothers chose him without discussion at the first turn. He didn’t know if they chose him because he was the best candidate, or because there was no other true choice. Edd had been designated as the candidate by someone, but he had been the first to say he would be the worst Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch they could find, as his time while Jon was King in the North proved it. Jon didn’t share Edd’s opinion, but in the end almost everyone voted for him and here he was, 999th Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch, after he was the 998th.

“Edd. Glad to see Castle Black didn’t collapse in my absence.”

“I’m as surprised as you’re glad of it. How much trouble did you have with the wildlings?”

“No more than usual.”

“That means a lot of trouble, you know that?”

“We both know that, Edd.”

He nodded. “There’s someone waiting for you in your office.”
“I’ll go and see him soon.” For now, all Jon wanted was a bowl of stew with his men, to breathe if only for a few minutes.

“I think you’ll want to see him right away. I wouldn’t have someone sent by the queen wait if I were you.”

“The queen?”

“Aye. Better go and see him right away. If she sent him, it must important as hell. He said it was urgent.”

Jon walked to his office. Inside, candles were lit near his desk, and a small man covered in furs waited for him, a horn in one hand.

“You’d think after thousands of years, the Night’s Watch would have learned how to make a good ale,” he told Jon before taking a sip. He didn’t seem much bothered by the taste. “It’s a chance for you that I can drink almost anything, even though I prefer vintage.”

“Tyrion. What are you doing here?”

The small man pulled a seemingly offended face. “Glad to see you too, Jon Snow.”

“Edd told me you had something urgent to tell me.”

“Urgent? No. Important, yes, but urgent, I wouldn’t say so. At least not yet. Things that are not urgent today can be urgent tomorrow, or the next month, or in a few years. I suppose anything that’s not urgent becomes urgent one day if we haven’t dealt with it before it became urgent.”

Jon sighed, then allowed himself to laugh. “Welcome to Castle Black, my lord.” They shook hands and Jon took place behind his office. “How did you come here?”

“Viserion, of course.” Jon should have known. “He’s hunting right now. He’ll be back when I need him.”

“I’m afraid you’ll be stuck here for quite some time. There’s a storm coming.”

Tyrion grimaced. “And here I thought all this snow and this wind was just a normal northern winter.”

“It is, but storms are normal in the North during this season.”

“Well, it seems I’ll have to suffer living at the Wall for some time. If this goes on, people will believe I am a sworn brother of the Night’s Watch me too.”

“I wish I could convince you to be one of us. We need clever men right now.”

“Thanks for the offer, but I don’t believe your aunt would appreciate that if her Hand chose to join the Night’s Watch. She’s already disappointed that her nephew chose the Wall over her.”

“She told you that?”

Tyrion sighed heavily and drank. His face didn’t show disgust, but he slightly shook his head and put down the horn he was drinking from. “Yes, she did. I’m her Hand, so she tells me a lot of things, and I hear a lot of things as well.”

Jon remembered how Daenerys looked like when she understood he wouldn’t come to King’s
Landing with her. “I’m sorry that she feels like that, but my place is here, at the Wall.”

“Is it?” Tyrion showed skepticism.

“Yes, it is.”

“Have you found any White Walker since your expedition in the north?”

“No. There are wights. Our men come upon them once upon a time, and we have reports from the castles near the Gift that wights are spotted on their lands.”

“I suppose half the people who claim to have seen wights only imagined they did.”

“Maybe, but the other half actually saw them,” Jon replied.

“No arguing on that. Are the wights really a threat though?”

“Depends. When our men find them, most of the time they don’t seem to know what they’re doing, but they fight if attacked, and some deaths were reported among the population.”

“How many deaths?”

It was Jon’s turn to sigh. “I don’t have an official counting.”

“Would you say there are deaths every day, every week?”

“Every week, probably.”

“And you have enough men to deal with them?”

“Aye. They’re disorganized. It’s more a hunt than anything else. Northmen are strong, and they know how to fight. We won’t need the southern troops for long.”

“I know. We receive your reports in King’s Landing.”

“Then why have you come?”

Jon was glad to see Tyrion again, but he had a lot of work to do and didn’t have much time to spare for his friend. Tyrion straightened on his seat. He was about to talk about the real matter of his presence.

“We have a problem, Jon Snow. A problem that might endanger all the Seven Kingdoms eventually.”

“What is it?” Jon was all ears opened. They already had a lot of challenges to face, but he couldn’t turn his back on something that threatened people he swore to protect.

“Daenerys is barren.”

Jon was stunned for a moment. That was not what he expected at all. “What?”

“She cannot have children.”

Jon shook his head. “I know. I get it. What I mean is… How?”

“To make it simple, let’s just say she lost her ability to have children after her miscarriage. She has not bled since then, and none of the sexual relations she had ever since led to pregnancy.”
Jon remained still for a moment, assimilating the news, then fell back in his chair. “I didn’t know.”

“That’s not something many women like to talk about,” Tyrion muttered. “However, it poses a problem that goes beyond the queen’s desire to have children. The problem lies in the fact that she is the queen.

“Of course.” Jon hadn’t thought about this right away, but this was no secret to everyone with that information. “If Daenerys cannot have children, then she will have no one to succeed her.”

“There. Even if she gets married, and I doubt she ever will in her circumstances, after her death, there’s no one to take the crown. The Seven Kingdoms will fall into chaos and a war will decide who will sit on the Iron Throne, and that is if someone succeeds. The last century proved how difficult it was to keep seven kingdoms united without dragons.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Well, I may have a solution, but I don’t think you’ll like it.”

Tyrion was staring straight at him. “No.” Jon knew what he was thinking about, and it was out of the question.

“There are only two Targaryens left in this world. You are the only one who can be her heir.”

Jon scoffed. “I swore a vow to the Night’s Watch.”

“And this vow ended the day you died.”

“I swore it again.”

“It is questionable that a man can make the same vow twice. Has it ever happened in the history of the Night’s Watch?”

“Probably not, but that’s not the question.”

“Of course, it is. We can use it as an excuse to make you leave the Watch, while not creating a precedent that could be used by everyone else to desert it. You’re the only one who can claim he swore the vows twice.”

“That’s ridiculous. You’re trying to use any excuse you can find to get me out of the Night’s Watch.”

“Of course, I am. That is the only way for the Seven Kingdoms to not fall into chaos after Daenerys is gone. She cannot have children. If you are released from your vows and able to marry and have children, all this problem is solved.”

Jon couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “You want to use me so I can give nephews and nieces to Daenerys?”

“I wouldn’t say it that way, but yes, just like your brother Robb did when he made his will and chose you as his heir if he died childless.”

“That’s not the same thing.”

“Yes, it is, Jon Snow, and you know that.”

Jon sighed and stared at his friend. “I won’t do it. My time as king is over. I have a duty to stay here,
to protect the Seven Kingdoms.”

“Yes, I know. You are the shield that guards the realms of men. But have you ever wondered if the best way to protect the realms of men was not to freeze your balls at the Wall?”

Ser Davos told him a similar thing once. “My place is here, at the Wall. People need me here. I am their Lord Commander.”

“People need you much more somewhere else.”

“I made my choice a long time ago. And I won’t change my mind?”

“Why? Can you explain to me why you’re so set on spending the rest of your days at the Wall? The White Walkers are gone, and the wights are no more a threat for the people than bears or other wild animals. You are not needed here. We have more than enough men to repair the Wall and to guard it. Why won’t you leave it?”

Jon inhaled deeply to calm himself. “There are many reasons.”

“Well, tell me then.”

“First, I swore a vow, no matter what you say, this is important to me. When too many people make false promises, words stop meaning anything. Then there are only lies, and lies won’t help the world in any way. Second, there are people who count on me here, brothers that I abandoned when I rode south to Winterfell, and I refuse to abandon them again. But the main reason is that my place is at the Wall. I am the bastard of Winterfell, or the bastard of the Tower of Joy, whether I am Jon Snow or Jon Sand or whatever my name is doesn’t matter. My place is not on the throne, or anywhere near it. My parents started a war, and I refuse to be the possible cause of a future war. I refuse to take a chance that somehow, a war could start because of my presence in the south.”

Maester Aemon had made this choice a long time ago, and he had lived with that. Jon couldn’t say he was happy to make this choice, but he was ready to live with it as well.

Tyrion Lannister looked at him as if he was a child of ten. “You may be more Ned Stark’s son than Rhaegar’s.”

“Yes, he’s the man who raised me.”

“Yes, and honor was very important for Ned Stark. He got killed for that.”

“Joffrey killed him.”

“True, but if Ned Stark hadn’t wanted to do the honorable thing, he might have stopped Joffrey before he got killed, and this war that destroyed your family might never have happened. Sometimes you have to do dishonorable things to make the right choice.”

Tyrion leaned towards him. “Now, let’s talk about your vows. What is it? Night gathers, and now my watch begins. It shall not end until my death, and it goes on. I think at one moment you must say I shall live and die at my post. I am the sword in the darkness, I am the watcher on the walls. I am the shield that guards the realms of men. Am I right?”

“Yes, you are.”

“Well, a wise man once told me that the best way to help the most people might not be sitting in a frozen castle at the hedge of the world.” Tyrion smiled as Jon remembered when he heard this. “Ser
Davos is doing quite well with the Dreadfort. I stopped there on my way. Second, you will not abandon your sworn brothers by leaving them, because you will probably prevent future wars, and wars are everything but helpful to the Night’s Watch. As for being a bastard and cause for possible future wars, you are more likely to be a cause for future war if you stay here than if you go in the capital and accept to be your aunt’s heir. And being a bastard almost means nothing now. Look at us. You’ve been named Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch twice and King in the North once, and I am Lord of Casterly Rock and Hand of the Queen.”

“You’re not a bastard, you know it.”

“Yes, I am, Jon Snow. I know it better than anyone.”

All dwarves are bastards in their father’s eyes. He said that to him a long time ago, the first time they met. “I will not go.”

Tyrion sighed in despair. “We’re giving you the chance to get married, to have children and start a family, and to see those children become kings and queens one day. And you’re going to say no?”

“And who would want to marry me?” Jon asked, meaning that no one would want to marry a bastard.

“Margaery Tyrell.”

Jon looked carefully to his friend to be sure he wasn’t lying. “Margaery Tyrell?”

“She’s already agreed. We only need your approval. Don’t act as if it’s surprising. After all, she would be marrying the heir of the Iron Throne. It’s barely a step below marrying a king, and the three she was wed to were pretenders.”

“I guess she hopes to see her children on the Iron Throne one day.”

“Probably,” Tyrion conceded. “I suppose she also hopes that her fourth marriage will be the right one. The first three didn’t end very well.”

“That’s reassuring.”

“It’s not only at the Wall that your life can be in danger.”

“You know I will not go, Tyrion. Why have you come?”

“Because I do not share your certainty, Jon Snow. You are stubborn, but that didn’t stop you from getting the wildlings south of the Wall when no one else would. It didn’t stop you either from accepting to become king when we needed it. When it’s necessary, you can do what is necessary. Well, this is the case again. You swore to be the shield that guards the realms of men. Here at Castle Black there is no shield you can be that another man couldn’t be. But in King’s Landing, you have a role to play that you and only you can play.”

Tyrion stood up. “Sleep on it, Jon Snow, or Aegon Targaryen if you prefer.”

He left Jon’s office. The Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch got out of the room to dine with his men later. He didn’t talk during dinner, lost in his thoughts. Daenerys and their last discussion came back to his mind. She had looked very sad that he wasn’t coming with her. Jon still struggled with the fact she was his aunt. Accepting that the Targaryens were his family as much as the Starks wasn’t something easy to cope with.
When he was done with his dinner and walked outside, Ghost came to join him. He was back from the hunt. Jon caressed his white fur. Ghost was alone, just as he was. All his brothers and sisters were gone, either dead, nowhere to be found or far away. Jon thought about Bran, who left for the north… with Benjen. Jon hadn’t known what to do when his uncle rode away with his little brother. Benjen disappeared north of the Wall a long time ago. Everyone thought he was dead. The only time they thought they knew something about what happened to him was when Jon’s men lured him into a trap, telling him a wildling saw Benjen. It was only a lie meant to have him killed, and it worked. Jon felt the scars on his chest for a moment.

What had happened to Benjen? It was him, for sure, but he looked different, as if he was… As if he was dead and brought back to life. Ghost was standing still in front of him, allowing Jon to pass his hand through his fur without complaints. He was the last direwolf still with his master. Nymeria may be alive somewhere, but Arya had not seen her since her journey to King’s Landing so many years ago. All the others were dead.

“What are we gonna do, boy?” Jon asked him. Ghost looked at him, not giving any answer, though Jon felt he understood what he was going through.

The storm was approaching, and winds were getting stronger, but that didn’t stop Jon from seeing the dragon fly and land on the Wall, far over their heads. Jon and Ghost must look like ants to him from his position. Stark and Targaryen blood ran equally through his veins, but Jon didn’t feel like a Targaryen. He never did. He always wanted to be a Stark, and always felt like a Stark. Almost. There were times he didn’t feel like one, because he was a bastard. Wasn’t it? He felt different from his brothers and sisters because they didn’t have the same mother, or so he thought, not because he was a Targaryen.

All of a sudden, he wished Maester Aemon was still alive. There were so many things he needed to know. He could have asked questions to Daenerys, but he never really tried to know more about his other family. She was miles away, in King’s Landing. The closest living being that connected him to his father was the dragon that sat on top of the Wall. Rhaegal gave his life to defeat the White Walkers. Two dragons remained, and just like the two Targaryens who remained, one was in the south, the other in the north.

Jon’s steps brought him to the winch cage. They had repaired it not long ago. Ghost followed him. Before he stepped into the cage, Jon looked up to the dragon, then down to the wolf.

“Stay here, boy.” He wasn’t sure of how the dragon and the direwolf would react in the presence of each other. Jon left his wolf behind as the cage brought him up to the dragon, Ghost reducing to a point on the ground while Viserion kept growing as Jon approached.

When Jon reached the top of the Wall and got out of the cage, he only made a few steps before he realized Viserion wasn’t alone. Tyrion was there, standing next to him. Dragon and man were looking north. Jon couldn’t help but find it odd that the small man stood next to Viserion, the small dragon Daenerys named after the brother she despised.

“You want to admire the view, Jon Snow? I’d have thought that you’d be bored by now,” Tyrion said as he noticed his presence.

“I haven’t come for the view,” Jon replied.

“Why have you come then?”

“I guess I’m looking for answers.” Tyrion and Viserion were both looking at him, green and golden eyes fixing Jon.
“Answers to what?”

“Questions, I guess.”

Tyrion smiled, recognizing a joke of his own style. “Well, ask. Maybe I can answer, and this might help you in your decision.”

Jon brushed aside the decision for now. “How can you ride Viserion?”

That was the first question to come to his mind. He couldn’t ask Tyrion many questions about the Targaryens. He wasn’t one. But he could ask him questions about dragons. His friend was fascinated by them.

“The same way you and Daenerys can ride one.”

For a long moment, Jon and Tyrion just looked to each other. Then Tyrion just shot another mocking smile and looked north again. Jon met Viserion’s eyes, who kept staring at him to the opposite of Tyrion. Jon forced his eyes back on his friend.

“What are you talking about?” he asked, confused.

“You remember when I told you I used to dream I had a dragon? Well, you did the same kind of dreams, and so did our queen.”

Another long moment went by. Jon’s brain was in a haze. “That’s impossible.”

Tyrion grimaced. “If that was impossible, I wouldn’t be here.”

“How? That can’t be. You were born at Casterly Rock. Your mother was…”

“Joanna Lannister. She’s my mother, no doubt about it. I came out of her. But I didn’t come out of Tywin Lannister.”

“Who?”

Tyrion inhaled deeply before he answered. “The Mad King. He raped her. Don’t be so surprised. The man was ready to burn down an entire city to ashes. Does that surprise you that he would rape the wife of his Hand? And that the Hand in question would let him do in the hope that his daughter would be queen?”

Jon was horrified. Not only by the revelations, but also how calm Tyrion looked as he said it.

“I hope it’s not one of your jokes, for there’s nothing funny about it.”

“I’m not jesting, Jon Snow. I am the bastard son of Aerys Targaryen the Mad King and Joanna Lannister, half-brother to Daenerys Targaryen and half-uncle to the man standing right before me who’s freezing his balls because he’s not close enough to a dragon.”

Jon shook, still unable to believe what he heard. “What’s going on? Is everyone in the world a secret Targaryen?”

“It might be difficult to prove out of any doubt, but we might well be the only three left.”

Jon sighed, unbelieving. “So, you’re my uncle?”

“Yes, Snow. I am. I wish my nephew was a little less gloomy.”
“Does Daenerys know about this?”

“Yes, she does.”

“Well, it seems she has the heir she needs after all.”

“Are you dumb?” Jon was surprised by the question. “You really think I can be her heir?”

“Why not? You are her brother…”

“Don’t tell anyone.” From the tone of his voice, it was a warning. “What do you think? That I can go before everyone in the Seven Kingdoms and proclaim I am the bastard son of the Mad King? I can’t. Daenerys needs me to rule Casterly Rock. The moment the truth comes out, I’m a dead man. House Lannister and the Westerlands rebel against me. Anyway, I’m not even sure I can have children now.”

The last sentence was almost said in a whisper. “What do you mean?”

Another sigh accompanied the response. “When I found Sansa in the Vale, we met one of the men who conspired to kidnap her. He said Littlefinger poisoned her. She will never be able to have children again.”

The shock was greater than for the news of Tyrion being a Targaryen. “That can’t be.”

“As if Joanna’s death wasn’t enough.”

“What?” This time, it was as if someone struck him to the stomach. Tyrion looked at him as if he was a stranger, then his mouth opened.

“You didn’t know?” He looked on the ground. “Littlefinger killed her. One of his men dropped her in the sea.”

“No.”

Jon was breathless. He leaned against a wall of snow. He remembered seeing Sansa with her child. What kind of a monster killed a baby? He looked to Tyrion, who kept gazing far away.

“I’m sorry.”

“News travel slowly. I suppose you don’t know what I did in the Westerlands.”

“What have you done?” Jon asked, unaware of what Tyrion was talking about.

“It doesn’t matter. It’s done. I don’t know what would have happened without Sansa.”

Jon didn’t push the matter further. “How is Sansa?”

“What do you think? Her daughter is dead.”

“She must be broken.”

“Worse.”

“Does she know? About you?”

“I would never hide anything from her.” He sighed. “She’s just relieved I’m no longer burning
castles down. And that’s the problem.”

Jon nodded. “I heard about he Eyrie.”

“No one was inside. We only burned down the castle, not people.”

“I know. Daenerys made it clear in her message.”

Tyrion turned to face him. “She needs you, you know. More than anyone else. You won’t help here at the Wall. The White Walkers are gone. We both know it. The wights will be gone soon enough too.”

“Probably, but they could come back. Bran told me so before he left.”

Tyrion nodded. “Tell me, could the Night’s Watch hold the dead on its own?”

“No,” Jon recognized after a moment.

“Could the dead be defeated with a Westeros divided in seven kingdoms, all vying for power and occupied to fight each other while the real threat is advancing on them?”

“No.”

“Well, if a united Westeros is necessary to keep the dead at bay, and if you really want to protect Westeros from them, then I suggest you figure a way to keep the Seven Kingdoms united once Daenerys is gone. Because I can’t see a way right now, not if you stay at the Wall. Take care, Snow.”

Tyrion patted his arm as he walked past Jon. Before he disappeared at the corner he threw, “As miserable as you are, Jon Snow, at least your parents loved each other, and you grew up with a nice family. Daenerys and I cannot say the same.”

Jon was alone at the top of the Wall. Well, not really alone. Viserion was there, staring at him. Two pools of molten gold were fixed on Jon, and he was conscious of it. They kept staring at him. Jon stayed there for a long time, and the storm kept getting stronger. Finally, he went down. The cage swayed as it carried him back to Castle Black. Ghost was no longer waiting for him in the courtyard.

He spent the whole night pacing in his room, thinking. In the morning, he went to see Tyrion.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Sansa

Two chapters released together the next week-end.
Sansa XXXIX

Chapter Notes

A great day. Part 1.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

SANSA XXXIX

The sheets were comfortable. Sansa rolled in them. She felt better, too much better, at each new position she took. A light breeze, cold but light, caressed her skin where the sheets didn’t cover her body. Her red hair fell on her back and her shoulders, providing some protection from the cold air of winter. She rested her cheek against the pillow, her belly against the bed, her legs entangled. Her arm wandered to her right, where…

Nothing. She opened her eyes to find the other side of the bed empty. Straightening, she looked around. Their bedchamber was filled with furniture, but no living being was to be seen. Her heart rate quickened. She got up from bed, her body suddenly exposed to the cold, and pulled on a nightgown very quickly.

Slowly, carefully, she walked to the closest door, then as slowly and carefully as she walked, she opened it. Through the slit, she saw a small frame sitting in a chair, reading a book. She sighed in relief and berated herself in silence. It happened sometimes in the last two months that she would be worried of not finding Tyrion where she expected him to be. She would need time to lose this instinct to fear the worst.

Her husband looked up from his book and smiled warmly when he saw Sansa looking at him through the door. He then brought a finger to his mouth, indicating her to remain silent. Sansa just opened the door enough to enter, then she closed it and walked to her husband to lay down a kiss on his lips.

“Still fearing that I’ll disappear?” he asked in a whisper.

Sansa looked away, unable to let a smile grow on her lips. She and Tyrion knew each other too well. They didn’t need to talk to know how each other felt during the period that followed Joanna’s disappearance.

She brought her attention to the second person that caused her the most worries in her life. Her daughter had grown up. She could crawl on the floor, and Grand Maester Marcon said it wouldn’t be long before she could walk. For now, she was sleeping, quiet as a lake in a day without wind.

It was two months now since she was brought back to her. Sansa believed she was dead, lost forever. Then, out of nowhere, a woman came to her, and she was there, her daughter. Joanna had been alive that whole time. Littlefinger couldn’t kill her. She was too precious for his possible plans. He hid her in the Fingers, where he grew up, somewhere no one would think to look. No one but Kinvara, it seemed.

Tyrion had been speechless when he came back from his trip at the Wall. He didn’t understand when he saw her so happy at his return, until Sansa led him to their chambers and showed him their little
Joanna, alive and well. They both cried of joy that day. A feast was given that evening, and Sansa didn’t remember being so happy, or seeing Tyrion happier. Their daughter was back.

With Joanna’s return, everything changed. She and Tyrion already had their doubts concerning Serion Lannister’s declaration that she was barren. According to the new Grand Maester, there was nothing to prove that she could no longer have children. Now that they knew he lied about their daughter, he most likely lied about that too. Sansa was full of hope for the future. Each time she looked at her daughter, joy threatened to overcome her.

She and her husband remained in silence in the room, their daughter sleeping next to them. None of them dared to wake her up. They just stood there, looking at their child. At one point, their hands were joined. The world was perfect. No war, no winter, no politics or plots, just her, the man she loved, and her daughter.

It didn’t last, for everything was destined to end. The door opened to give way to Willia, her personal handmaiden. “My lord, my lady, please excuse me, but it’s time to prepare.”

And so they went back to reality. They had to leave their little daughter behind and to prepare for the day. Sansa couldn’t blame anyone for that. Today was indeed a very important day. Willia helped her to don a red gown with grey stripes. For breakfast, she wouldn’t wear something too sophisticated. The time would come for finer gowns and hairstyle later today.

Tyrion had donned his own set of clothes for the occasion, and he was quite handsome in that, though he didn’t look like someone who was going to take part to today’s festivities.

“What’s on your mind?” she asked him once Willia and his squire were gone. His name was Tyg. Tyrion always said he missed Podrick, and Sansa couldn’t help but sympathize with him. She missed the shy squire too.

“I should be happy. Shouldn’t I?” His face showed how tired he was.

She sat and laid a hand on his, just like he always did when he wanted to comfort her. “What’s going on?”

“I can’t stop thinking about that day. At Castamere.”

For a very short moment, her hand wanted to withdraw from his. Sansa had not forgotten that day either. Tyrion had burned down an entire castle to the ground, repeating the actions of the man who raised him, emulating the methods of both his fathers. Sansa feared to lose him that day.

“I killed people, Sansa. I don’t regret killing Rolph Spicer or any of his men who took part to your abduction, but… There were other people I killed in that castle. People who didn’t deserve to die. I could have found a way to spare them, but instead I just… burned them.” He looked at her. “Does that make me a monster?”

She could see how doubts were devouring him. They had talked about it before, especially after Joanna was brought back to them. Tyrion blamed himself for killing people out of revenge when their daughter was still alive. He would regret not killing Sybell Spicer sometimes, but most of all he regretted killing innocents, people who had nothing to see with her and Joanna’s disappearances. He was suffering for what he did. He confessed everything to Daenerys, who forgave him, saying she made mistakes in the past as well, and that she could understand someone’s will to avenge the people he loved. Jon had not been so understanding first, but he had come around it.

“You’re not a monster,” she declared. “I was afraid for a time that you would turn like your father,
but you didn’t. They were the monsters. You’re not. You were just… hurt, and you didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know what to do either.”

“I wish I could take back what I did.”

“You will not be remembered for that,” she told him.

“I’m not sure. I may have ordered the *Fires of Castamere* to not be played today, the song will be sung for a long time by bards in the taverns, and not only in the Westerlands.”

“I’m sure everything will get better. We all make mistakes. I made my own.”

Tyrion nodded, then looked back to Sansa and forced himself to smile. “We’d better go. We must break our fast with the groom.”

Sansa chuckled at the mention of the groom. She took Tyrion’s hand and, together, they went to the Queen’s Ballroom. When they arrived, everyone else was already present. It was a breakfast in small committee, nothing to see with Joffrey’s wedding. Only the members of the family were present.

Jon sat at a corner of the round table, with Daenerys on his left and Arya on his right. Jon and Daenerys were engaged in a discussion when Tyrion and Sansa walked in. Arya was listening to them, but her eyes turned to Tyrion and Sansa before they stepped inside the room. The suspicious expression she had disappeared as soon as she realized it was her sister.

“You’re late,” the queen declared when they arrived near them.

“Later than you,” Tyrion replied, which earned him a discreet berating smile from his half-sister. Even after two months, it was not always easy for Sansa to conceive that Tyrion and Daenerys Targaryen were related, and to think of her as her half-sister-in-law. Sansa and Tyrion took their place in front of Jon and Daenerys. “I hope we didn’t interrupt anything.”

“They were going over today’s agenda,” Arya answered. “A coronation in the morning, the wedding at the beginning of the afternoon, and the wedding feast in the evening and, well, the wedding night afterwards.”

Arya struggled to not laugh uncontrollably at the mention of the last stage. Jon looked uncomfortable all of a sudden, while trying his best not to show it, and Sansa had to refrain from laughing as well. Daenerys and Tyrion were sharing an accomplice smile.

“I hope we don’t have any poisoning on the menu today,” her husband declared.

“I made sure it wouldn’t happen,” Daenerys told them.

“I wish I had been there the first time. I would have liked to kill Joffrey, with a chicken wing if needed,” Arya said.

“How do you kill a man with a chicken wing?” Tyrion asked.

“I don’t know, but I would have found a way.”

“I think we could discuss something else than murders at wedding for a wedding day,” Sansa suggested.

“I agree,” Daenerys said. “Since you’re all here, I think it’s time for presents.”

Jon dropped the piece of bacon he was chewing on. “I told you it wasn’t necessary.”
She made a sign to a nearby servant who left through a side door. Sansa looked at the four people assembled with her around the table for breakfast. The traditions of the Reach dictated that a bride should break her fast with the women of her own family on her wedding day, while the groom was to break his fast with his family and the men in the family of his future wife. However, Jon and Margaery had agreed to have their breakfasts with their respective families. Jon didn’t wish to receive any gift on his wedding. Margaery had been surprised, and Mace Tyrell had been even more surprised, but Margaery had agreed with Jon in the end, saying it wouldn’t do to offer costly gifts in the middle of this harsh winter.

As a result, Margaery was breaking her fast in another part of the castle with her parents, her grandmother, and several of her cousins who came from Highgarden. As for Jon, he was with his own family, which was limited to Daenerys on his father’s side, and Arya and Sansa and Tyrion on his mother’s side. Apart from Jon, Daenerys, Sansa, Varys and Genna, even though the latter didn’t want to admit it, no one knew of Tyrion’s true origins, and it had to remain that way.

Sansa regretted Jon didn’t have more of his family present for his wedding. Wars, from Robert’s Rebellion to the War of the Others, as some started to call it, had cost dearly in lives to both Targaryen and Stark families. Bran was still alive according to Jon, but far away, north of the Wall, and he doubted they would ever see him again. If they counted Sansa, there were only three Starks left in the Seven Kingdoms.

The servant came back, an absurdly long object in his hands, wrapped in long sheets. He slowly removed the sheets and presented what was hidden under to Jon. Sansa gasped when she recognized the sword, sheathed into the pelt of a wolf. Jon and Arya’s reactions were no different. Jon slowly stood up and walked to the man, then seized the sword with his two hands. It was a long and heavy sword, so long and heavy that Sansa didn’t see how he could hold with a single hand.

“How?” He turned to Daenerys, asking her how it was possible. Sansa had the same question on her mind, and she suspected Arya did too.

“Tywin Lannister had it melted down and forged two swords with its steel. I thought it would be appropriate to melt down the two swords and return the true sword to its legitimate owner.”

Ice. The name of her father’s sword. Looking at Jon holding it, she really thought it was brought back. The pelt that was used as a scabbard looked just like the one Theon used to carry when her father left Winterfell to bring justice.

“I’m sorry if it’s not totally identical to the original. The smith did his best to reproduce the blade he melted three years ago,” Tyrion said.

Sansa turned her head to look at him. “You knew?”

Her husband shrugged. “Daenerys asked me before she had it forged again. Both Widow’s Wail and Oathkeeper officially belonged to House Lannister. But I never liked Widow’s Wail, not since Joffrey used it to cut to pieces my wedding gift. As for Oathkeeper, well, I think both Jaime and Lady Brienne would have wanted your father’s sword to be forged again.”

“Wait, Oathkeeper was in Winterfell,” Arya interrupted. “How did you get it?” she asked to Daenerys, almost accusing her.

“I’m the one to blame, Lady Arya.” Tyrion was smiling smugly as Arya threw daggers at him.

“You cousin and I stopped by Winterfell on our way to King’s Landing. I brought the sword with
Sansa couldn’t believe it. Tyrion hid this from her. She was furious at him. So furious that she would kiss him were other people not present. She managed to hold back laughter, but her smile gave up much of her feelings. Jon was still staring at the sword he held in his hands. Then slowly, cautiously, he sheathed it back into the pelt, then looked to Daenerys.

“Thank you, Dany.” Only Jon called her this way. “But I can’t accept it. This sword has belonged to House Stark for centuries. Only the Lord of Winterfell can wield it. It’s not mine.”

Daenerys’ face remained neutral. She showed no surprise or insult when she replied. “This is a gift, so it’s yours, whether you like it or not. You can do whatever you want with it. If you think it does not belong to you, then you are free to give it to whoever you want.”

Jon looked at the sword in silence for a moment, then turned to Sansa and presented the sword to her. “You’re the Lady of Winterfell. This sword is yours.”

She looked at it, the handle just like she remembered, the pelt hiding the blade. And then she remembered a time, when she was a little girl, and a man took this sword and brought it down on her father’s neck. This sword was used to end her father’s days.

“I can’t.” She may be the Lady of Winterfell, but she wasn’t a Stark anymore. She made peace with that, but she wouldn’t try to be someone she wasn’t. “Father… he would have wanted you to have it.”

“She’s right. That’s what he would want,” Arya added.

Jon looked at both of them, then to the sword again, and finally to them. “Thank you. It means a lot to me.”

Ice was brought to Jon’s apartments by a servant and the matter was close. The sword of House Stark would remain in the hands of the heir of the Iron Throne. The rest of the breakfast was uneventful. There were eggs, bread, apples, grapes and several other fruits, though they didn’t seem as tasty as usual. Winter prevented them from having the best.

They discussed of light matters. This short moment was meant to relax before the eventful day that was waiting for them. The day was doomed to be busy and tiring. They went back to their rooms to get ready for the coronation.

Willia had to arrange Sansa’s hair in a very complicated style, a crossing between the uses of the North and the fashion of the Westerlands. The jewels that adorned her head would have caused mixed reactions among northern ladies. A third of them would laugh for finding her stupid to carry so much riches on her. Another third would turn red out of jealousy. The last third would notice the small details betraying her northern origins. Her hairstyle wasn’t that different from the one displayed by Lord Manderly’s daughters at White Harbor, though it displayed more wealth and wasn’t dyed.

She had two necklaces around her neck. The first she always wore. It was a simple gold chain with a small medallion also made of gold, displaying a lion on the surface. The inside of the medallion was made of silver. If you opened the medallion, you would find a direwolf under the lion. Never forget what you are. Indeed, she would neve forget. Above the first medallion, a second one was placed, consisting of a huge red ruby with a golden lion above it. It was the same she wore for Margaery’s wedding with Joffrey.

The gown Sansa put on for this morning was made of silver silk, with red embroidery running all
over it, displaying shapes of wolves and lions. When she looked at herself in the glass, she found the
result quite satisfying. The gown was more grey than silver. All her appearance was a delicate
balance between Stark and Lannister. She went to the next chamber. Joanna was playing there.
Sansa laid a kiss on her forehead and her daughter nearly managed to get hold of a strand of her hair.

When Sansa went back to their rooms, Tyrion was back from his solar, wearing a rather dark attire,
with red shades. She allowed him to contemplate her for a moment, smiling at his expression. She
had a pretty good idea of what he was thinking about.

“You look glorious,” he finally said.

“You look handsome.” His smile falsely told her he didn’t believe what she said. He offered his
hand, which she took, and they walked to the Throne Room together, leaving a servant to take care
of their daughter.

The Great Hall was crowded with the people who had come to King’s Landing from all over the
Seven Kingdoms. All the great lords of Westeros would swear their fealty to Daenerys Targaryen
and her children and grandchildren on this day. They found Jon standing on the side of the court,
a lone, talking to no one.

“I think my brother requires my help,” Sansa told her husband.

“Probably. Would it bother if I left you alone with him? I have to discuss with some people,” he
asked her.

“Go on.”

Sansa headed towards her half-brother. He forced himself to smile when she approached. “You’re
beautiful, Sansa.”

“Thank you, Jon. You’re quite handsome as well.”

Jon reddened. He was garbed in costly but quite simple leather clothes. He was the very image of her
father and his uncle. No wonder no one ever suspected he was the son of Rhaegar Targaryen.
Despite this, Jon seemed very uncomfortable in his attire.

“You don’t look like someone who’s about to get married.” Not to mention he was about to be
officially recognized heir to the Iron Throne.

“Well, judging about the way weddings tend to go in this city, you’ll forgive me if I’m not jumping
to the roof.”

“Everything will be fine, Jon,” she said, a reassuring smile on her lips.

“I know. It’s just that I never thought I would get married, and even now that I’m about to be wed, I
can’t shake this feeling that I shouldn’t be doing this, that I’m doing a great mistake.”

“What kind of mistake?”

Sansa had seen her coming from behind her half-brother. Margaery wore a gown made of green silk,
displaying more wealth than Sansa did, and also covering less than the gown Sansa wore. Jon turned
very quickly, completely caught by surprise by her voice. Margaery smiled sweetly at him, and it
wasn’t difficult to see that Jon was losing all his means.

“I hope you don’t mind me talking to you before the ceremony,” she told him.
“No. Not at all, my lady,” Jon stammered. “How are you today?”

“I’m good. Very good, in fact. It’s the day of my wedding, after all. Shouldn’t I be happy?”

The situation was comic, Jon obviously not knowing what to say in Margaery’s presence. Sansa’s friend had taken the habit of teasing Jon during the last weeks. Sansa had tried to help Jon to be prepared at the life at court, but this was no easy task. Jon had never really participated to balls and festivities at Winterfell. He sat in the seats below, away from his family, who sat on the dais, in front of everybody.

As a result, Sansa had somehow tried to educate Jon in the ways of life in King’s Landing. Sansa had taught him to dance, and after clumsy beginnings, Jon had managed to master the dance decently. He also spent time with Margaery, at least once every day. Their first meeting had been difficult. Margaery no longer had the same assurance with men, and Jon never had any with women. With Sansa’s help though, they managed to hold a conversation and got to know each other. Margaery finally got used to tease Jon on every subject. Jon looked gloomy and sullen first, but then Sansa noticed his behaviour changed when he was in the presence of Margaery. He began to be more comfortable around her. Sansa suspected he took some pleasure in his future wife’s banter. He even laughed a few times.

This time, however, he wasn’t laughing. There wasn’t even the twinkle Sansa witnessed when he was with Margaery in the past days. He was just frozen like a statue. Margaery seemed to have realized it, for behind her happy appearance Sansa noticed the concern in her eyes.

It was appropriate that the heavy doors of the Throne Room opened at this moment to let Daenerys enter. She was accompanied by a guard of Unsullied soldiers. They escorted her to the Iron Throne, all the people in the room, lords, ladies and knights of Westeros giving way to her.

“I’m afraid it’s time for me to join my family. We’ll see each other later, my soon-to-be husband,” Margaery said on a playful tone, managing to almost not make it sound forced. She walked away, and Sansa heard Jon exhale deeply after she disappeared into the crowd.

“Everything is right, Jon?” she asked her brother.

“Aye. You better go find Tyrion.”

He wasn’t wrong. Sansa promised herself to go and talk to her brother later. She found Tyrion in the first rows of the attendance.

“We have a new queen,” Tyrion said just as Daenerys took place in the Iron Throne. With her dark robes contrasting with her silvery blond hair, she was the image of beauty and terror united. Even if Sansa could call Daenerys a friend, she couldn’t deny the fear the queen could instill to other people and how dangerous it was to have her as your enemy. She was a Targaryen through and through.

“Better her than me,” Sansa whispered so only her husband could hear her. They exchanged a gaze and smiled, both remembering a similar exchange they had for another wedding.

“You all stand before Daenerys Stormborn, of House Targaryen, the First of Her Name, the Unburnt, Queen of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoynars, Lady of the Seven Kingdoms, Warden of the East and Protector of the Realm, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Breaker of Chains, Mother of Dragons, Doom of Death.”

The strong voice of a herald travelled through the room, making the silence previously established more solemn. Of all these people assembled today, some among the most powerful men and women
of Westeros, none dared to speak, not even Tyrion with his sharp tongue. The Throne Room was
decorated for the occasion. In Robert’s times, it used to be decorated to display the prosperity of the
Seven Kingdoms during Robert’s reign. Joffrey had changed it only a few days after he climbed on
the throne, changing the appearance of the Throne Room so it would inspire fear among those who
would walk in. Daenerys had taken a different approach from both. The dragon skulls, hidden in the
dungeons for twenty years, were back. That of Balerion, Aegon’s mount, was half the width of the
room. The smallest of the skulls could have been mistaken for a cat. The skulls themselves were
enough to intimidate anyone who walked in. Heavy clouds covering the whole sky, the dark day,
and the many torches that lit the room enhanced the feeling of threat created by the dragons’ skulls.
The roof, destroyed by Drogon when Daenerys took the city, was repaired. The other decorations
were stark in contrast, but nonetheless managed to create some sort of beauty and peace, encouraging
petitioners to present their request while remaining careful not to anger their queen.

“Twenty-two years ago,” Daenerys began, “my father, Aerys of House Targaryen, the Second of
His Name, King of the Andals, the First Men and the Rhoyans, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms and
Protector of the Realm, died here, while sitting in that very chair when I am now.”

The crowd of noble was completely silent, waiting for what their queen would say next. She stood
up from the throne. Daenerys surprised them all with her next words.

“My father should never have been king. He should have died long before that fateful day when the
rebels took this city. Jaime Lannister’s greatest crime was not to have killed his king. It was to have
let him live long enough to attempt to destroy the city.”

The words created a wave of shock among the assistance. Of all the things they expected the queen
to say, these were the last they imagined.

“My father,” Daenerys continued, “was a monster. There was a time when I was child that I thought
that all these stories about my father, about the Mad King, were lies created and spread by his
enemies. It was only a few years ago that I heard the truth about the extent of the Mad King’s
cruelty. He set towns and castles aflame and killed their inhabitants by the thousands.”

Sansa heard Tyrion shifting next to her. She seized his hand, trying to make him understand she was
with him.

“He murdered sons in front of their fathers,” the queen continued. “He mistreated his wife and his
children, people of his own blood. He burned men alive with wildfire and laughed as they screamed.
He would have destroyed this city if he wasn’t stopped in time, with all the men, women and
children inside, loyal to him or not.”

“I have not come to restore the Targaryen dynasty. This dynasty ended in the chaos and the blood of
innocents spilled so that the powerful of this world could create their own dynasty, to crush people
on the ground just like the Mad King did. Aerys Targaryen, Robert Baratheon, Tywin Lannister,
Cersei Lannister, Euron Greyjoy, they were all spokes on a wheel. This one was on top, then that
one was on top. And on and on it spun, crushing those on the grounds.”

“I have not come to conquer Westeros like they did. I have not come to be one more spoke on the
wheel, and I have not come to stop the wheel. I have come to destroy it. I have come to save
Westeros from the real threat, while the Aerys Targaryen, the Robert Baratheon, the Tywin and
Cersei Lannister and the Euron Greyjoy of this world bickered like children for ruins.”

“I am not restoring the Targaryen dynasty. I am creating a new one, one that will last forever I hope,
one that will protect the Seven Kingdoms instead of enslaving them, and if one day that dynasty
turns to be just like the previous ones, that it turns out it cannot protect Westeros from the real threats,
then I expect someone will end it before it crushes too many people on the ground.”

“I ask you to acknowledge me as your queen. As the one true queen of all the Seven Kingdoms, and to follow my successors, and to stop them if one day they ever stop serving the people of Westeros.”

A heavy silence settled in the Throne Room. The speech Daenerys Targaryen just gave was nothing like the speeches made by other kings through history. She looked to them, waiting for them to answer her question, but Sansa suspected she was also warning them of the dire consequences if they refused her as their queen.

“Long live Daenerys Stormborn, the one true queen of the Seven Kingdoms. Long may she reign!” someone shouted in the crowd. Some people stood aside from the origin of the voice. It came from a man stuck to a wheeling chair. Doran Martell, Lord of Sunspear and Prince of Dorne.

“Long may she reign!” Tyrion shouted to his turn.

“Long may she reign!” a knight nearby added.

“Long may she reign!”

Soon, the whole room was shouting for Daenerys, some with enthusiasm, some for the form. When it seemed everyone had acknowledged Daenerys as the queen, she sat back into the Iron Throne and raised her hand to impose silence.

“Jon Snow, come forward.”

Jon did as his aunt ordered him to. He stood in the small rectangular space that was left empty in front of the dais and knelt before Daenerys. Sansa thought, not without regret, that not long ago, Jon was King in the North. Now he knelt before a southern queen. She could be his aunt, he remained a king who was forced to abdicate.

“When I first came to Westeros and heard of the King in the North who claimed to be the son of my brother Rhaegar, I thought of you as an enemy. I was wrong. Before we met, what I saw was a pretender. I know the truth today. You are my brother’s son. I never got the chance to know Rhaegar. He died before I was born, and I will always regret it. But I don’t regret meeting you. You didn’t choose to be king. You were chosen by the people of Westeros to protect them, and that’s what you did. If it wasn’t for you, half of the Seven Kingdoms might have fallen to the White Walkers. The people of Westeros are in your debt forever, and so am I. You abandoned your crown when it was the right time, which only shows further how honorable you are. I can think of no one else if something was ever to happen to me. Rise, Jon Targaryen, Prince of Dragonstone and heir to the Iron Throne.”

Daenerys’ smile grew as she said it. Sansa seldom saw her so happy. Jon stood up and came to sit on her left. He smiled as well when he faced the crowd, though not as much as his aunt.

“Tyrion Lannister.”

Sansa’s husband stepped forward and knelt just like Jon did a moment before. Very few knew it, but he was kneeling before his sister.

“Ever since we met, you advised me. And every one of your advices contributed to saving Westeros and ending this war. You helped to bring together the kingdoms so they could fight their common enemy. Where your lord father slaughtered Northerners, you saved them and fought by their side against Ramsay Bolton, then against the White Walkers. You proved your loyalty, your honor, and your competence ever since the War of the Five Kings began. One of my dragons trusted you
enough to make you his rider. And you saved my life.”

“While in Essos, I thought all the houses who rebelled against my family and sentenced me to a life of exile were traitors who deserved to die. You were the first to prove me I was wrong. I owe you a lot, and I will never forget the help you provided to me since the first time we met. Rise, Tyrion Lannister, Lord of Casterly Rock, Lord Paramount of the Westerlands, Warden of the West, and Hand of the Queen.”

Tyrion did as he was told, just like Jon, and climbed the steps of the dais.

“For a very small man, he casts a very large shadow.”

The voice came to Sansa’s right. She slightly turned her head to see Kinvara standing there. Sansa hadn’t noticed her presence. She turned her head to Tyrion as he climbed the last steps. Indeed, the torches created a long shadow behind Tyrion’s back, a shadow that loomed all over the steps he climbed. It was something that many people seemed to notice, how Tyrion’s shadow often made him look taller than he actually was.

“Yes, he does,” Sansa acknowledged as her husband took his place.

Daenerys now sat surrounded by Jon and Tyrion. “The three heads of the dragon are gathered together,” Kinvara whispered echoing Sansa’s thoughts. “How is your daughter?”

“She’s fine,” Sansa answered, unable to stop a large smile from appearing on her lips.

“Good.”

Sansa didn’t have more time to discuss with Kinvara. She had come to appreciate the High Priestess very much after she helped her escape Littlefinger and saved Joanna. Daenerys called her name

“Sansa Lannister of House Stark.”

Her heart bumping in her chest, Sansa came before the dais and curtsied.

“There is a long history between House Stark and House Targaryen. What my father did to your grandfather and your uncle was a horrible crime, and he deserved what happened to him. And so did Joffrey Baratheon and Tywin Lannister for what they did during the last war to your family. But before that, for hundreds of years, House Lannister, House Stark and House Targaryen were allies. Torrhen Stark knelt before Aegon the Conqueror without fighting, and Aegon chose him as his Warden of the North, and his successors continued to entrust the North into the hands of House Stark for three hundred years. One of the many Lords of Winterfell during that period even served as Hand of the King. And the Starks only rebelled when my father betrayed their trust and their loyalty. I know only words cannot repair what has been made in the past, but I hope that one day the alliance between the North and the former dynasty of Targaryens will emerge again, stronger, and will last longer, between the dynasty I wish to establish and your family. Rise, Sansa Lannister of House Stark, Lady of Winterfell and Wardeness of the North.”

When Sansa looked at Daenerys her smile was reassuring. She looked a little bit longer to Jon. His expression was encouraging as well. As for Tyrion, her gaze remained on him the longest. His face showed he would always be with her, no matter what happened. Sansa joined back the crowd. She had no place on the small council, hence she wouldn’t stand on the dais. At least half the northern lords who were present had mixed expressions. Some looked at her as if she was a traitor.

Yesterday, Sansa, the queen, Jon and Tyrion had met the northern lords all together. The most powerful families, the Umbers and the Manderlys, had been warned in advance, but the other houses
were told their plans at this moment. It was decided that the child of Tyrion and Sansa who would inherit the North would be raised in Winterfell from the age of six. The new Lord of the Dreadfort would be in charge of his education, but their child would live at least four months every year in one of his bannermen’s castles. It eased the protests of the Northerners, who sometimes looked about to revolt. There were fewer who seemed about to enter rebellion now in the Throne Room, but still a few.

Her uncle Edmure was next to kneel, accompanied by his wife Roslin Frey. The speech Daenerys had for him was shorter, and he quickly stood up as Lord of Riverrun and Lord Paramount of the Trident. Mace Tyrell was called forward with Lady Alerie and went back to the crowd, confirmed as Lord of Highgarden, High Marshal of the Reach and Warden of the South. Then came Margaery, who personally knelt before Daenerys, confirming again that she gave up any claim to being queen. The last Lord Paramount to kneel was Doran Martell.

The Lord of Sunspear had to be pushed in a wheelchair by a dark man with a strange axe. It was obvious any movement was painful to him, but he managed to kneel, with the help of a woman who was his wife, Mellario of Norvos. Daenerys’ words for him were very kind and respectful. It was obvious she appreciated not only his support during the war, but also his coming to King’s Landing, considering his health. She also welcomed his wife, who had arrived from the other continent two days ago. The Lord of Sunspear was confirmed in all his titles and named Master of Laws. He declared he was honored by the nomination but couldn’t accept because of his duty to his people and his declining state. Daenerys accepted that Anders Yronwood would serve on the small council on Prince Doran’s behalf, and the Lord of Yronwood went to sit on the dais as well. Doran Martell took place on the dais too, his lady wife remaining at his side and helping him to sit.

Daenerys called forward the remaining men who would constitute her small council. Paxter Redwyne was confirmed Master of Ships, and Lord Varys was named Master of Whisperers without much surprise. Kinvara was made a special advisor. The most unforeseen nomination was that of the Grand Maester Marcon, who would also act as Master of Coin. The commander of the Unsullied, a man called Torgo Nudho, was given a lordship, as well as Dothraki commanders. The queen also announced, to the great surprise of many people, that there would be no Queensguard and that her safety would be ensured by Torgo Nudho and the Unsullied. The commander of the Unsullied was also granted a seat on the small council. Ser Jorah Mormont and Ser Barristan Selmy would be known as the last knights of the Kingsguard. She then named Lord Dickon Tarly Governor of the Vale and gave the authorization to the wildlings to live on the lands of the Gift under the authority of the Night’s Watch. Toregg, the eldest son of their former leader Tormund, was there to acknowledge it. He didn’t kneel or bow or do anything. All he did was to nod to thank Daenerys.

All the lords who were present then had to pledge their loyalty to the new dynasty, one by one. The Lords of the Vale had to do it all over again, like they did at the Gates of the Moon. So many went on that Sansa only noticed a few of them. Wyman Manderly was the most civil of the Northerners, Robett Glover was the most hostile, but all knelt nonetheless. Some had a scornful gaze for Sansa on their way back and forth. Ser Davos Seaworth stood out from the rest with his plain clothes more fitting a sailor than a nobleman. Daenerys confirmed his position as Lord of the Dreadfort, kindly advising him on a humoristic note to be better than his predecessors. The former smuggler said that if he wasn’t better than the Boltons, he feared Daenerys’ retaliation as much as 62 furious men of Bear Island. That brought laughter into the room, lifting the solemnity of the ceremony for a moment.

All the other major houses of Westeros, the Mallisters, the Blackwoods, the Brackens, both Houses Royce, the Hightowers, the Leffords and many more swore fealty to Daenerys and her children and grandchildren.

The crowning of the queen didn’t happen just yet. The new High Septon gave a long prayer for the
new queen and the new Targaryen dynasty. Then Kinvara came and delivered a long speech about the war that just ended, using many expressions that left a part of the crowd dumbfounded. Some seemed to think the Red Priests had no place here.

Finally, the crowning came. In normal circumstances, the queen would have been crowned before everyone made their pledge, but Daenerys had taken a different path. She told Sansa she wanted the people to choose her as their queen, not to barely accept her only as an accomplished fact, but to actually choose her. Another change compared to usual ceremonies was that it wasn’t the High Septon who crowned Daenerys. It was the Grand Maester who did it. One moment he was writing feverishly and the next he was taking a crown made in Valyrian steel with square-cut rubies. He was the one to place it on the queen’s head. Tyrion had explained Daenerys didn’t want a representative of any religion to crown her. She didn’t want to give the impression she was favoring one faith over the others.

Daenerys stood with the crown that was worn by Aegon the First three centuries ago, opening a second dynasty of Targaryens with the crown that started the first one. When Marcon proclaimed Long may she reign, the crowd echoed and burst into applause. All wasn’t over for Daenerys walked through the crowd that stood aside on her passage. She arrived to a group of people whose attire was more similar to Ser Davos’ one. They were led by a woman.

Yara Greyjoy and Daenerys Targaryen were face to face for everyone to see. Tyrion and Jon were right behind their queen, and the rest of the small council wasn’t far beyond. The two queens remained there, as if eyeing each other.

“Your Grace,” finally said Yara Greyjoy, without bowing or curtsying or making any movement showing any kind of submission.

“Your Grace,” Daenerys replied in kind. Another moment of silence followed as both queens kept staring at each other. The Lady of the Seven Kingdoms was the first to speak again. “I recognize your authority over the Iron Islands and its people, as their queen.”

“And I recognize your authority over the Seven Kingdoms and its people. The Iron Islands will respect the integrity of your lands.”

“And we will respect the integrity of yours.”

The queens then took each other’s arm, and the pact between the Iron Islands and the Seven Kingdoms was officially sealed.

The festivities were cut short afterwards. A feast should have followed, but it was kept for later. The coronation was to be followed by Jon’s wedding with Margaery in the afternoon after all, and it was quite a challenge to hold a coronation and a royal wedding within the same day.

She and Tyrion went back to their rooms where they took a quick lunch and changed for the wedding. Sansa donned a new gown and new hairstyle. Her new gown was a delicately arrangement of blue, red, gold and silver. Tyrion was way quicker to change. Before Willia had time to help Sansa don her gown, Tyrion walked in. Their handmaiden looked at him in shock.

“My lord, you shouldn’t…” she began, but Tyrion interrupted her.

“Come on, Willia. That’s not the first time I do it, and that’s not as if my wife and I had much to hide from each other. Please forgive my intrusion, my lady,” he told Sansa while performing a stupidly extensive bow.
“You’re all forgiven, my lord, but don’t expect me to forget about it,” she replied on a joking tone. “I’ll make you pay one day.”

“I’m eager to see what kind of punishment my lady wife has in store for me. I think I’ll leave you to your preparations. I must talk with the queen and with the groom before the ceremony. It doesn’t bother you?”

“No, not at all. I’ll meet you in the Great Hall.”

Tyrion nodded and left the room. When Sansa was ready, she went to see that Joanna was still well, and once she was sure of it, she walked to the Maidenvault. The guards knew her well, so they let her pass. When she arrived to Margaery’s apartments, it was Mira who answered her.

“Lady Sansa.”

“Lady Mira. Can I see Margaery?” Sansa asked her.

“They are almost over with preparing her for the wedding. I’ll tell you’re here,” her friend answered. Mira had been invited to the coronation and the wedding, and for the time she was in the capital she had offered to act once again for Margaery as a handmaiden. Margaery was only too eager and pleased to accept. All her friends from her time in the city were dead. Mira was the only one to survive because she left before Cersei unleashed her madness.

Sansa didn’t have time to talk further with Mira as she walked back into the room. She came back a moment later.

“Lady Margaery is ready to receive you.”

“Thank you, Mira. How are you today?”

“I’m all right, my lady. It’s easier than the first time, and this time his father will be there.”

Sansa knew what she was talking about. She had experienced giving birth when her husband was away, and she hoped that when their next child would come Tyrion would be present. They were almost sure now that she could still have children. Nothing Serion Lannister told them before he died could be taken as granted.

When they walked in, Margaery was up and everyone including her mother and all her cousins and handmaidens were admiring her gown, made of white satin. Everyone but Lady Olenna who, as sharp as ever, turned her attention to Sansa as soon as she walked in.

“Well, look at this. A wolf among the roses. Or a lioness. I’m not sure. How do we call an animal who’s half a wolf and half a lion?”

Margaery laughed. She had seen Sansa enter only the fraction of a second after her grandmother. She walked to her and kissed her on the cheeks

“Hi, Sansa.” She turned to the other women in the room. “Could you please leave me a moment alone with Lady Sansa?”

“Of course, my dear,” Lady Alerie said. “Ladies, come.”

“So, I’m kicked out without ceremony like all the half-minded women in this room?” the Queen of Thorns said once only she, Margaery, Sansa and Mira remained.
“I can come with you, Lady Olenna,” the latter suggested.

“Good.” She stood up and Sansa listened to her rambling as she left with Mira. “I have all the difficulties in the world to find another handmaiden for my granddaughter with some kind a mind of her own. The intelligence of her entourage didn’t cease to drop since you left her service. If only you weren’t married. Not only you would still be in Margaery’s service, but I could betroth you to one of my cousins who needs a clever woman to talk some sense into his head.”

Margaery and Sansa couldn’t hold back their laughter as the door closed on them. “I think this baby will clearly remember my grandmother’s voice when he’s grown up,” Margaery said.

“Your grandmother makes quite an impression on most people,” Sansa commented as she took hold of herself.

“On all people, you mean. So, how do I look?”

Margaery wore a gown similar to those she wore for her two previous weddings, but that also put differences in evidence. The one she wore today was thicker to protect her from the cold of winter. As such, it covered her shoulders and hid her back, although the fabric was thinner in these places. It was richly decorated with leaves of gold and silver branches, and her brown curls were falling on her back and on both sides of her head.

“I believe many men will be jealous of Jon.”

Margaery chortled, but turned her head away. Her face took a sadder expression. “I wonder. My first three husbands all died. One was assassinated by a shadow, another was poisoned, and the last committed suicide.” Speaking of Tommen, Margaery’s voice came out weaker. “What should I expect for the fourth?”

“None of your husbands were like Jon.” Sansa tried to be reassuring, but she doubted that it worked.

“No, they weren’t, but they’re all gone. The four of them are gone.” Margaery didn’t need to specify who was the fourth in question. “I envy you, Sansa. I’ve been straying from one marriage to the other for the past years and… I wasn’t happy in any of them.”

“Not even with Tommen?”

Margaery hesitated before she spoke. “Maybe I didn’t try to be happy with him. Now all that’s left of him was taken away from me.”

“I’m sure you will be happy with Jon. He’s a good man.”

Her friend nodded. “I know. A bit gloomy, but I’ve seen worse. He’s also quite good-looking, and more important than anything, Grandmother believes he has more brain than all the men I married before.” Smiles came back on their faces. “Do you know if he’s a virgin?”

The question startled Sansa. “I don’t know.”

Margaery looked thoughtful for a moment. “Is your brother capable of lying?”

“Yes, he is, though he’s not lying very often.”

“That’s what I thought. He has too much of the North in him. I asked him if he was a virgin once.” Sansa said nothing for a while. “And… what did he answer?”
“No.” Marhaery shrugged. “Only no. Well, I hope whoever he slept with taught him a few tricks.”

Sansa could see that Margaery forced herself to look merry. “Are you alright, Margaery?”

Her friend sighed. “My children will be kings and queens one day. I may never be the queen, but it’s almost as if I was becoming one by marrying your cousin. I should be happy. That’s what I always wanted. But I don’t feel like I’m happy, or at least not like I should be. I guess…”

Margaery’s eyes were lost in the horizon. Sansa knew what it was. Margaery had lost many people she loved to Cersei. Sansa had wanted to be queen just like her not long ago. Margaery had come to King’s Landing better prepared, but she wasn’t ready for Cersei’s madness, and in the end, they ended up in similar situations.

“Never mind.” Margaery’s voice was hoarse, but the next moment she straightened herself and stood proud, displaying again a merry expression. “It’s time for me to wed again, and this time I won’t allow my husband to die. If he does, I’ll kill him, if my grandmother doesn’t kill him before me.”

With a last chortle, Sansa and Margaery walked out together and headed for the Great Hall, where another royal wedding was about to take place.

Chapter End Notes

Please review

Next chapter: Tyrion
“So, ready to tie yourself to a rose? Be careful, she has thorns.”

“Were you so cheering when you wed Sansa?” Jon Targaryen replied.

“I tried, and I failed. What do you think? That I was overjoyed to marry a girl of fourteen? A girl who was my family’s prisoner, whose father was beheaded by my nephew, whose family was at war with mine? And that was before I knew what my father was planning for her mother and brother.”

“You’re not very good at preparing people for marriage.”

“No, I suppose not. I’ve never been good at making people feel better.”

He and Jon Snow were alone before the ceremony. It would begin very soon, but they still had some time ahead of them. Jon Snow wore a simple doublet. The only decoration were silvery pins to hold it closed.

“How did you do, with Sansa?” he asked. “How did you manage to live with her, to be happy with her?”

“I don’t know,” Tyrion answered. “It just happened. We got to know each other, we learned to live together. We had time for this. I guess the fact we both hated Joffrey also helped. But one day I realized that I loved her. Are you wondering if the same will happen to you and Margaery?”

The young man didn’t seem convinced. “I don’t see myself falling in love, not again.”

They stayed silent. Tyrion thought of Shae, but most of all about Tysha. He had fallen in love with her. He was young and stupid. *You are still young and stupid,* Shae had told him. Was he still young and stupid? Tyrion had felt younger than ever as his marriage with Sansa blossomed. But he didn’t have the impression to be young and stupid like he was. The idea that the love Sansa felt for him was fake couldn’t set foot in his mind. Maybe the love of Shae was fake, but the love of Sansa? And for Tysha, he knew now that he wasn’t young and stupid. *She was no whore. Tysha was… she was what she seemed to be. A wheelwright’s daughter, chance met on the road.* Had she really been in love with him? He thought of Sansa. There were so many things about her behaviour that reminded him of his first wife. She must have loved him for real. And he raped her.

Tyrion was aware of the story of Ygritte, the wildling girl Jon Snow fell in love with while he lived among the wildlings. No wonder he didn’t want to fall in love again. Love hurt. Tyrion had experienced it far too often. But at the same time, he thought of Sansa and Joanna, their little daughter who was starting to learn how to walk and talk, and despite all the suffering he endured because of love, he couldn’t deny all the happiness it brought to his life. A happiness he had lost hope of knowing.
“We never know what life is preparing for us. If I were you, bastard, I wouldn’t say my vows a third time too quickly.”

“Even if I tried to, you would talk me out of it, Imp.”

Tyrion leaned forward. “Look, I fell in love with Sansa, which is no surprise at all.” It was possible he was in love with her before they got married and he didn’t realize it. “And she fell in love with me, the Imp of Casterly Rock, the bastard born from a royal rape. Can you fall in love with the Rose of Highgarden? Can the Rose of Highgarden fall in love with the heir of the Iron Throne? I’d say the question requires no answer, nor does it need to be asked.”

Jon looked to Tyrion with a smile at the corner of his lips. “Maybe you’re better at consoling people than you think.”

“Only when they’re bastards, cripples and broken things.”

Jon Targaryen was a bastard. Officially. He still thought so. Tyrion and Daenerys never told him about the marriage of his parents. Brandon Stark was a cripple when Tyrion gave him the plans of a saddle so he could ride again. Sansa was a broken thing when they first spoke.

“Is it true that the Tyrells tried to marry Lady Margaery to you?” his nephew asked all of a sudden.

“Yes, they tried. But I was already married.”

He never regretted refusing the offer. Kevan might have thought it was a better deal for House Lannister, Tyrion couldn’t imagine his life with someone else than Sansa.

“How do you think it would have been between you two, had things be different?”

“I don’t know. I guess we will never know. But one day, we’ll be able to say whether you and Margaery Tyrell being together is a good thing. But before we get to that point, we have a wedding. I just hope you will live longer than her other husbands.”

“I hope so too.”

The heir of the Iron Throne had a resigned expression on his face. “Let me give you some advice, bastard. Give a chance to your rose. I know I would if I were you. Just be careful, like I said, she has thorns. Wear an armor and never let them stick in your skin.”

Jon chuckled. “What the hell do you know about being married to a rose?”

Tyrion thought of Sansa. “All the dwarves in this castle are married to a rose. Be ready, Jon Snow. War and marriage are not so different. Allies can turn into enemies, and enemies can turn into allies.”

With that last word, Tyrion exited. Except for a few Unsullied, the corridors in this part of the Red Keep were almost desert. Everyone had to be in the Throne Room already, where the wedding ceremony would take place.

When he arrived, Tyrion thought they had made quite a good work at preparing the place. New decorations were installed for the second ceremony. The decorations were about celebration now, where those for the coronation had been sterner, more solemn. The room was already full when he walked in.

With his small frame, he managed to make himself a way to the dais where Daenerys was discussing with the High Priestess. Kinvara turned to look at him as soon as he emerged from the crowd, and
his sister noticed his presence at the same time.

“Here you are. Is Jon ready?” the queen asked.

“I think he will survive the wedding. The wedding night might be another story.”

An imperceptible smile was all that betrayed Daenerys’ amusement. “The wedding night is none of my concerns. Only the wedding is.”

“I have to disagree. If you want Jon Snow to have children, I’m afraid his activities in the bedchamber will have to be at the top of your list of concerns.”

It was strange that he was telling something Tywin Lannister would have told, though not as a jape. Tyrion didn’t think that having children would be a problem for a couple. The two seemed in perfect health and nothing pointed to a barren marriage. Jon Snow, or Targaryen now, was a man of duty like his uncle, and Margaery Tyrell was unlikely to not wish for the consummation of the marriage. She wasn’t marrying a dwarf after all.

“The Lord of Light will see to the success of this union,” the High Priestess declared.

“Is that written in one of your holy texts or one of your prophecies?”

Kinvara had a sorry smile. “Still skeptical about our Lord.”

“Forgive me, but I guess I lost any faith I could have in gods a long time ago, and it will not come back. Don’t lose your time trying to convert me, my lady. You’ll have more chance with other people.” She nodded, as if she understood. “I never got a chance to truly thank you.”

“For what? For saving your life, for saving your wife, or for saving your child?” she asked.

“All of them, I guess.”

“You don’t need to thank me. I’m only doing what my Lord commands.”

“And he commanded you to save three Lannisters?”

“The fact the three of you are still alive is the proof that he wanted it. You will excuse me, my queen.”

The High Priestess walked away after bowing towards Daenerys. Sansa arrived at the same moment.

“Was that Kinvara?” she asked.

“Yes,” Daenerys replied.

Tyrion only had eyes for his wife. “Well, everyone will be looking at the bride except for me. I’m afraid I won’t be able to detach my eyes from you, my lady.”

Sansa reddened at the compliment, which made her look even more beautiful. She was a shining beauty.

“I think it’s time for the ceremony,” Daenerys decided.

She made a sign to the herald who hit the floor thrice with his heavy stick. Tyrion and Sansa joined the crowd, while Daenerys remained on the dais. Jon crossed their path and Sansa gave him an encouraging smile as he joined his aunt.
It took some time for the people to position themselves well enough for an alley to take shape between the dais and the great doors. Since the Great Sept of Baelor was destroyed, there was no sept large enough for the ceremony to take place. The High Septon offered to have it in another of the septs in the capital, but Daenerys decided the wedding would take place in the Throne Room, probably a way to assert her authority over the Faith. The High Septon had seen his power decrease since the events with the High Sparrow and Cersei’s reign, and Daenerys was determined to not engage herself in favor of any religion. As a result, both the High Septon and the High Priestess Kinvara stood by her side at the top of the dais.

The large and heavy doors opened to reveal the bride. Margaery Tyrell stood there. Tyrion had to admit she was beautiful. Not as much as the woman who stood by his side, the mother of his daughter, but still beautiful. The bride made a few steps into the Throne Room. Her father was waiting for her. Mace Tyrell took her by the arm and escorted her to the dais. They slowly progressed through the alley that was left free for them. When they were close enough, Tyrion noticed that Lady Margaery was paler than before. Her façade was gone. Her smile was no longer forced. It was smaller, less shining, but Tyrion thought it also looked more sincere, with a certain sadness in it.

For the fourth time, the Lord of Highgarden gave away his daughter for another man to take her. Only this time, he was giving her to a prince, not a king, and he was giving his heir along with his daughter. Margaery Tyrell stood away from her father and climbed the dais. She arrived at Jon’s level and turned her back to him. Mechanically, Jon Snow put the cloak on her shoulders. It was dark cloak, with the red three-headed dragon on it. Together, they climbed the last steps and arrived at the top, before Daenerys and the representatives of two faiths that everything in the world separated but the queen standing between them.

The High Septon stepped forward. “Your Grace, my lords, my ladies, we stand here in the sight of gods and men to witness the union of man and wife. One flesh, one heart, one soul, now and forever.”

Tyrion had already assisted to many weddings in his life. This one had something particular though. For the first time, a septon wasn’t the only one officiating the ceremony. After he gave a long speech on the duties of both husband and wife, and after he tied the hands of Jon Targaryen and Margaery Tyrell with a ribbon and declared them one heart, one flesh, one soul, the High Priestess stepped forward as well. Judging by his facial expression, the head of the Faith of the Seven was not too happy.

“At the beginning, the Lord of Light made us male and female. Two parts of a greater whole. He also said that man and wife shall leave their families to forge a new one. In their joining, there is power. Power to make life, power to make light, power to defeat the death.” Jon turned his head towards the High Priestess, an uncertain expression on his face. “By becoming one flesh, these two people are fighting death by creating new life. By becoming one soul, they are fighting death by creating a link so strong that they will always face death together, increasing their strength in this fight. By becoming one heart, they reach eternal life. For the Lord of Light is also the Lord of Love, and our Lord is Love. He loves us all, and there’s no link that is stronger than love. These vows they are taking today will never be broken, and they will bind them for the rest of their lives.”

She stepped away. Jon Snow kept looking at her for quite long, but she gave no sign that she was noticing it. Abruptly he turned to look at his bride again and cleared his throat.

“With this kiss, I pledge my love.”

He said it awkwardly, but what mattered was that he said it. Before the queen and the entire Realm,
Jon Targaryen and Margaery Tyrell shared their first kiss and became man and wife. The assistance applauded like they always did at each wedding.

The highest lords and officers of the Crown moved to the Small Hall where the main wedding feast took place, while the minor lords remained in the Great Hall where another feast would take place. There was simply not enough place for all the lords of Westeros who were present to hold together into a single room.

The first service came in the form of a mushroom soup with spices that came from across the Narrow Sea. The newly wed couple occupied the presiding place, Margaery on the right of Jon Snow. Her family was on her own right. To the opposite of Joffrey’s wedding, her brother wasn’t there. Tyrion and Sansa were with Daenerys on Jon’s left. He was talking with his wife. Although the conversation didn’t look very cheery, it was constant. Tyrion supposed it was a good sign for the beginning of a marriage.

“Do you think I was wrong to let Kinvara speak at the ceremony?” Daenerys asked him as they were half into the soup.

“I think that when we want to bring radical changes, to change radically but slowly is a better option if we want to avoid rebellions, riots and wars,” he replied.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“That it was better than letting Kinvara officiate the whole wedding on her own.”

“I think the way she blessed the union was quite beautiful,” Sansa commented from Tyrion’s left. Daenerys was sitting on his right, between him and Jon.

“What’s in that?” Arya asked. She was sitting next to Sansa and refused to wear a gown. Though she accepted to wear clean clothes. She still had her sword on her.

“Spices that grow near Meereen. Its people put it in many of their meals,” Daenerys replied.

The Stark girl grimaced. “Too spicy.”

“Is she always that direct?” the queen asked Sansa.

“Yes, she is,” his wife confirmed, with an apologizing face.

“How many services are there?” Arya asked, looking a little bored already.

“Seven,” her sister answered.

“It’s a chance we don’t have seventy-seven courses. I think some of the guests almost didn’t make it. I’m even surprised Joffrey was the only one to die that day,” Tyrion said.

The next course consisted in a salad, probably made with the last fresh vegetables of the Reach that were available.

“It’s better,” Arya said after she ate the first piece of lettuce. She looked at her cousin at this moment. He was laughing with Margaery. Daenerys was looking at them, a look of envy on her face.

“Are you alright?” Tyrion asked her.

“Yes. I just guess I will never marry again. My wedding was… different.”
As they went through the second service, musicians began to come, replacing the jugglers who entertained the guests so far. First came a bard Tyrion thought he had seen before. She was a woman, and she had a very beautiful voice. The melody she played was beautiful and sweet, and sad at the same time, just like her voice as she sang.

\[\text{Rising fury in the sunlight}\]
\[\text{Soaring up into the sky}\]
\[\text{Flames that douse the chill of moonlight}\]
\[\text{Touching heaven as they fly}\]

The words came back and again. It was more about the music from the lyre than its lyrics. It was soothing, and to the glory of House Targaryen as well, of course. The young woman received many golden dragons from the guests for her performance.

“She has a very beautiful voice,” Sansa commented.

“Do you wish to invite her to the Rock?” Tyrion asked her.

“Why not? I guess singers and troubadours have it hard with the harsh winter that we have. Unless her Grace wants to keep her services for herself?”

“I may ask her to stay for a while, but I will allow her to travel to the Westerlands whenever she wants,” the queen said.

The third service was there, which consisted in another plate of vegetables with spicy sauces. Tyrion knew some of them. Daenerys told him that many came from the other continent. He wished he had been able to make the tour of the Free Cities when he was sixteen.

A group of four bards, two with a lyre, another one with some kind of drums, and the fourth with a flute arrived and began another slow melody. Tyrion supposed it was chosen in honor of the bride who wore a gown of satin of the same color.

\[\text{Nights in white satin, never reaching the end,}\]
\[\text{Letters I’ve written, never meaning to send.}\]
\[\text{Beauty I’d always missed with these eyes before.}\]
\[\text{Just what the truth is, I can’t say anymore.}\]

\[\text{Cause I love you,}\]
\[\text{Yes, I love you,}\]
\[\text{Oh, how, I love you.}\]
Gazing at people, some hand in hand,

Just what I’m going through, they can understand.

Some try to tell me, thoughts they cannot defend,

Just what you want to be, you will be in the end.

And I love you,

Yes, I love you,

Oh, how, I love you.

Oh, how, I love you.

Nights in white satin, never reaching the end,

Letters I’ve written, never meaning to send.

Beauty I’d always missed, with these eyes before,

Just what the truth is, I can’t say anymore.

Cause I love you,

Yes, I love you,

Oh, how, I love you.

Oh, how, I love you.

Lady Margaery applauded first and the guests followed. The main course had arrived. Roasted legs of goose were served along with small potatoes, spiced rice, small tomatoes cut in half with herbs on them, and carrots filled with cheese. While Sansa and Arya engaged into a discussion, Daenerys caught Tyrion’s attention.
“Do you think I should worry about the war in Dorne?”

“I wouldn’t call that a war,” Tyrion replied as he wiped his mouth with a towel. “Only seven houses rebelled and three have already been defeated. Prince Trystane is already negotiating with two and believes he can bring them to abandon without problem. Resistance might last through the year, but no longer.”

“Maybe I should be more concerned about the settling of the Dothrakis and the Free Folk in the North.”

“Yes, you should be. We should all be. Dothrakis, Northerners and wildlings, all together on the same lands. The perfect recipe for a complete mess.”

He looked to Sansa. She wouldn’t have an easy task as Wardeness of the North, especially not if she was to rule the North from Casterly Rock.

“Perhaps we should try to think about something else for this evening,” he suggested.

“It’s my duty to worry about my people all the time,” she replied.

“Even kings and queens deserve moments to rest.”

“Not me.”

It was no use to argue with her. Other bards came to entertain the guests with their songs in the meantime. As many people were finishing the main course, a man with a black beard was now coming forward with a whole bunch of people with various instruments. Tyrion realized he had played at Joffrey’s wedding. Either he survived the destruction of King’s Landing, or he was a wandering bard who only came here when there was a special event to celebrate and a few coins to make. Tyrion wondered how this group of musicians could manage to wander all together through the Seven Kingdoms. The lyre began to play, then drums joined.

When the wolves cry out
Echoes in the old walls
Distant are the calls
On the winter’s wind
When the wolves cry out
Honour in the black bonds
Held in the beyond
As the lights they dim
Sometimes the last in line
Are the ones who last in time
Blood on the snow
Blood on the ashes

I’m not ashamed of what I am
Make it my own
Make it my castle

I’m not ashamed of what I am
Honour calls
Honour calls

Casting away the final mists of doubt

When the wolves cry out
The smallest they will grow great

No more shall we wait
To rejoin the pack
They will heed my shout
So much have I lost here
Loves I held so dear
Taken by the black

Sometimes the lost bloodlines
Are the ones who last in time

Blood on the snow
Blood on the ashes

I’m not ashamed of what I am
Make it my own
Make it my castle

I’m not ashamed of what I am
Honour calls
Honour calls
When the refrain came for a third time, most of the northern lords joined the bard. When the song was over, they were very loud to applaud. Jon Snow, on the other side, seemed quite stunned. Everyone else was clapping his hands politely.

“I think your brother has an admirer,” Tyrion told his wife. She was looking at the bard as he and his
companions were busy preparing another song.

“He was there at Joffrey’s wedding. He sang something about winter. He may be a Northerner,” she said.

Servants brought the fifth service, which consisted of various fruits. Tyrion had his cup of wine filled again.

“Northerners are proud people indeed,” the queen commented, as the northerners were being very loud across the place. Some had drunk too much already.

“Yes, and stubborn,” he replied. “No offense meant, my lady,” he added for Sansa.

She settled to laugh very shortly, meaning she didn’t mind. The queen resumed to speak in the meantime. “Dothrakis, Northerners, and Free Folk, all on the same lands. Maybe I should have settled the Dothrakis only in the Riverland and the Crownlands.”

“I disagree. Dothrakis are nomads. They are a travelling people. They would never have enough place in the southern kingdoms for that, even with all the victims of the recent wars. And not enough of them would accept to settle for a life where they would live in cities or cultivate the land. Unsullied are more suited for that.”

“I agree. All the same, I expect some problems up in the North.”

“I know.” He looked to Sansa. They would both have a lot of work to do in the northern part of Westeros to prevent any major conflict between the different wildling tribes, the Dothraki hordes, and the northern lords. They would need the help of Jon Snow. Tyrion knew they could rely on him, but they couldn’t expect him to settle all problems.

The bard and his men were ready and began to play again. Tyrion understood very quickly that the song would be about the North again.

From the mists of the mountains a deafening call
Bellows down over the plains
On a host of battle-worn ears it does fall
Pushing out through the thunder and rain
These men of the north they have suffered too long
The anger it swells in their veins
Of the spirited roars of lost warriors’ songs
Distant echoes are all that remain
And my voice is my violence
Clear the sky’s frozen tears
And no more we'll be silent
With this Northerner's song in our ears

And we stand tall
Sons of the snow
We will not fall
Under these blows
For our hearts they are hardy
Our spirits are strong
And our voices are lifted into
This Northerner's song

Conquer the anger and ravenous rage!
Make it a part of your power
Pummeling down let your bloodlust engage!
Under your force they will cower

Feeling the fury so pure and so bright
Breaking the bonds of surrender
Under the moon for our home we will fight
And we will die to defend her

And my voice is my violence
Clear the sky's frozen tears
And no more we'll be silent
With this Northerner's song in our ears

And we stand tall
Sons of the snow
We will not fall
Under these blows
For our hearts they are hardy
Our spirits are strong
And our voices are lifted into
This Northerner’s song
Northerner’s song
Northerner’s song

These perilous peaks
On the rim of the sky
I move in the midst
Of the clouds drifting by
At the top of the world
On a white, doomful day
Men of wisdom will show me the way

And we stand tall
Sons of the snow
We will not fall
Under these blows
For our hearts they are hardy
Our spirits are strong
And our voices are lifted into
This Northerner’s song

This one proved to be slower than the previous, but northern lords appreciated nonetheless. Tyrion spotted Margaery saying something into Jon’s ear, and he saw him nod. The first thing the wife asked to her husband. Without much surprise, he said yes. Jon Targaryen looked more comfortable than at the beginning of the day. The wine certainly helped. Everything was better when your belly was full of it.
The sixth service was the pie. It wasn’t as huge as the one for Joffrey’s wedding, but there was more than enough for everyone present. Unlike Joffrey, Jon Snow didn’t cut the pie with his sword. Tyrion thought that for the first time, Margaery Tyrell might have a marriage that would last if her husband did nothing stupid.

The seventh service consisted in a lightweight dessert. By this time, the music had changed to a slower beat, one that was fit for dancing. As soon as the seventh service was over, Daenerys stood up and all chatter ceased to listen to her. She announced it was time for the dance. Since it was a wedding, Jon Snow and Lady Margaery would have to open. As he walked to the dance floor, Tyrion noticed that his cousin-in-law was throwing a look that asked for help to Sansa. The latter seemed to enjoy the situation, very quietly and very discreetly.

The music started, and the new husband and wife began to dance. It wasn’t difficult to see how uneasy Jon Snow was, but luckily enough for him, Margaery was a very good dancer and led him perfectly. They were soon joined by other people and they disappeared in the crowd of dancers.

“Will you pardon me?” Sansa asked him after a moment.

“Enjoy yourself.” With a smile, Sansa left to join the dancers. She was very good at dancing. Right now, Tyrion regretted he wasn’t taller so he could be with his lady wife on the floor. As a result, he found himself alone with the queen.

“So that’s it,” she said after a while. “My dynasty is ensured.”

“Safer,” Tyrion corrected.

“Mirri Maz Duur thought she would put an end to House Targaryen by killing Drogo and Rhaego. I guess she never thought there was another Targaryen in this world. Or two.” She whispered the last two words for him. She looked with a sincere smile at him. A smile Cersei never had for him.

“Cersei believed she could execute me and put her father’s death on me. I guess she never thought that a Stark girl forcibly married to a dwarf would cause her downfall.”

They shared an accomplice smile. Tyrion looked at his wife dancing. He would never cease to be amazed by her beauty. She danced with Lord Glover, then changed and found herself dancing with Jon Snow.

“You know she doesn’t see herself as a Stark anymore,” the queen told him, taking him out of his reverie.

“Yes, I know,” he replied with an ounce of regret.

“Do you still feel like a Lannister?”

He settled back into his chair. “Yes, I do. Forgive me, your Grace, but it’s difficult to feel like a Targaryen when it’s been over thirty-five years that you thought you were a Lannister and did everything to feel worthy of being a Lannister. Much like Jon Snow… I mean Jon Targaryen will always feel like he’s a Snow, or a Stark, rather than a Targaryen.”

She nodded. “You know, I just announced to all the Seven Kingdoms that I was cutting all links with the previous Targaryen kings and establishing a new dynasty, but I still feel connected to my ancestors and to my father. Despite all the things I know he’s done, he’s still my father, and I still feel like he’s my father. Maybe it would have been different if I had known him. Maybe I would be able to hate him and to detach myself from him.”
“I’m not sure. Tywin Lannister seldom treated me as his son. To him, I was an embarrassment to his family. But when I think of him, even with everything he’s done to me, I still think about him as my father. I guess we can’t choose our family.”

He and Cersei had rare moments when they connected. These never lasted much long. Most of the time, it was when it was question of her children. For despite the fact Cersei and Tyrion despised each other, he always loved Tommen and Myrcella. Cersei probably never believed it, but he cared for her two youngest, and despite all his hatred for Joffrey, Tyrion would never have killed him like she thought. Nor would he ever have killed his father. He remained his father, and Cersei’s and Jaime’s.

With Daenerys, it was very different. In the silence they shared as they looked to the dancers, each understood the other. They could talk and understand each other very easily. Daenerys was no dwarf, and she was no bastard either, but she had spent her entire childhood under the fear of her brother Viserys, forced to flee from one city to another, always hiding from Robert’s assassins. They all faced great challenges, and here they were today, the Queen of Westeros and the Lord of Casterly Rock.

Tyrion commanded a new cup of wine and he emptied it. In the meantime, Daenerys left to talk with Varys and Marcon. Sansa had left the dancing floor. She was now talking with Lady Mira and Lady Margaery in a corner.

“Seems like I’m not the only one who feels like he doesn’t belong here.”

Tyrion was caught by surprise when he was addressed by Lord Davos Seaworth. “You still don’t feel like nobility?” Tyrion asked.

“I never will. I was born a smuggler. I will die a smuggler too.”

“People would believe now that you are Lord of the Dreadfort, you would feel more noble.”

“I don’t. Putting a ser or a lord in front of a name doesn’t change who the man bearing the name is.”

“You don’t feel like dancing?”

“No. I’m quite clumsy at it. Sailor’s legs are not made for dance. And my wife is not very enthralled to dance either.”

He looked in a direction and Tyrion saw the wife of the Onion Lord in discussion with Kinvara.

He kept talking with Lord Davos for a time, until a woman walked in their direction. She was of middle age with black hair, a tanned skin, and when she saluted them, her accent was impossible to hide. Mellario of Norvos, Lady of Sunspear and Princess consort of Dorne, wife of Doran of Martell.

“My husband Doran wished to speak to you, Lord Tyrion.”

“Well, it was nice to speak with you, Lord Davos,” Tyrion said before he followed the Lady of Sunspear. The Onion Lord bowed in respect and walked away. “Do you enjoy the festivities, my lady?”

“I would enjoy them more if my son was present,” she replied dryly.

“Things are complicated,” Tyrion said. “The last time Prince Trystane was here, we had a lot of problems.”
“I know. Doran already explained me everything. That doesn’t make what I said less true. I would enjoy this wedding much more if my son was present.”

“I’m sorry, my lady. I didn’t want to insult you.”

“You did not. I just don’t feel like I belong here. I never felt at home when my children were away.”

She stopped and looked at him. They were outside the dance floor. “Have you ever met my son?”

“I cannot say I have.”

“Trystane wrote to me from time to time. He mentioned you in his letters.”

“He did?”

“Only once. He talked to me about a discussion he had with your niece, Myrcella. He said she loved you very much.”

That wasn’t something he expected. “It was very kind of her.”

“The letter itself was all about the discussion he had with her. She said you used to spin her in circle, even after she grew up to be taller than you.”

Tyrion remembered that. “Yes, I did.”

“It may not be the best moment or the best place, but I would like you to tell me more about Myrcella later. I would like to know the girl my son loved.”

“Yes, of course. That’s not a problem.”

“Thank you. Doran is waiting for us.”

They resumed their path and arrived where the Lord of Sunspear was. His guard with the blade was standing behind him and watching everyone. When Tyrion approached, his hold on his spear tightened.

“Hotah, let them approach,” the prince told him from his wheelchair. The guard kept staring at Tyrion. He didn’t feel comfortable at all with this big man hovering over him. That kind of man created a large shadow.

“Lord Tyrion,” the Prince of Dorne saluted him.

“Prince Doran.”

“Finally, we meet. I regret we didn’t before, but you had the chance to know my brother.”

“Yes, I did. Very shortly, but I knew him.”

“Oberyn respected you. I found it surprising, considering you are a Lannister.”

Not as much a Lannister as you think, my prince. “I guess your brother was more than the bloodthirsty man ready to kill any Lannister he comes across, like some people believe.”

The prince nodded very slowly. “He was my brother.” There was a hint of accusation in his voice.

“And Myrcella was my niece.” Doran Martell didn’t reply for a moment.
“Did you plan for Oberyn to die when you had him fight the Mountain?” he finally asked.

“What I wanted was for your brother to kill the Mountain, so I could get rid of him, and so he could satisfy his desire of revenge. He saved me from the execution when Cersei accused me of my father’s murder. I had a debt toward him, and I was going to pay it. I tried to make sure your brother would win, and I failed. I’m sorry. But your brother was careless and insisted to deal with Clegane himself.”

“That doesn’t surprise me,” the prince said after a time. “Oberyn was never careful.”

“Now, it’s my turn to ask you a question. Did you have Myrcella killed?”

“We do not kill children in Dorne.”

“That’s not the question I asked.”

The Prince of Dorne sighed. “I tried to protect her, and I failed, just like you failed to protect Oberyn. We can either keep blaming each other and continue the cycle of revenge that killed so many of the people we loved, or we can acknowledge that all the people who killed them are now dead. I believe you had no hand in Oberyn’s death. I ask that you believe me when I say that I had no hand in Princess Myrcella’s death either. She was the woman my son loved, and I would never sentence a child to death because of her father’s or grandfather’s crimes.”

“Then we’re done killing and blaming each other,” Tyrion stated.

“We are. I don’t hold you responsible for your father’s crimes. Don’t hold me responsible for the crimes of my nieces.”

“I won’t.”

They shook hands then turned to other subjects. Some concerned the ongoing rebellion in Dorne and other matters of state, but they also talked of history, of dragons, and of their respective families. Doran Martell talked about the life Myrcella had while in Dorne, and Tyrion provided anecdotes about Oberyn Martell’s passage in King’s Landing. They were joined by Daenerys, Mace Tyrell and his wife later. The Lord of Highgarden offered his respects to Doran Martell and Lady Mellario. The two ladies talked with the queen while Tyrion discussed with the prince and the other lord. Lord Tyrell was affable, and Doran Martell proved to be very civil, though a certain animosity would point from time to time. Centuries of wars between the Reach and Dorne couldn’t be erased within one single conversation. Tyrion thought the conversation between the women was much less tensed.

A young woman with green eyes and brown hair, wearing northern clothes with touches that reminded the kingdom of the Reach, came to Tyrion.

“My lord, Lady Lannister needs to see you,” Lady Mira said.

Tyrion took leave from the Prince of Dorne and the Warden of the South and left with the Lady of Ironrath. Mira Forrester made a courtesy to Lord Tyrell before she walked away.

“I hope things are better at Ironrath, my lady,” Tyrion told her.

“They are getting better. We are rebuilding the castle.”

“Good. We don’t want your second child to grow in a home in ruins. It’s bad enough the first was born during a battle.” The wine was taking its toll on him.
“I don’t intend to let this one come into a world of terror,” she replied shortly.

They arrived where Sansa was standing. She was talking with Gerold Hightower, Lady Mira’s husband. The young man was now Lord of Ironrath. Tyrion didn’t know what to think of it. He still believed this man dishonored himself by leaving his wife behind with a child.

“Here you are.” The way Sansa said it and from the colors on her cheeks, Tyrion suspected she had more than her share of wine as well.

“Gerold, should we go and dance again?” Lady Mira asked her husband. He accepted immediately.

Tyrion and Sansa looked at them joining the other dancers. The music was quite swinging, and Tyrion saw sweat on more than one face. Then the music changed to a slower rhythm.

“Do you want to dance?”

Tyrion looked to Sansa. Had she really said it? “Are you sure, my lady? We will make quite an amusement for the other guests.”

She didn’t wait for a reply and seized him by the arm, dragging him to the dancing floor. Without really knowing what he was doing, Tyrion found himself dancing with his wife for the first time. He was tall enough to place his right hand on her waist, and Sansa was of course tall enough to lay her left hand on his shoulder. The other hands were joined. It was clumsy at first, but maybe because of the wine, Tyrion managed to forget about all the people around and that he was dwarf dancing with his wife who was at least two feet taller than him. He kept looking at Sansa, and for a long time they just turned around together. He got lost into the slow melody. There was only the two of them in the world.

He looked at her in detail for the first time since very long. He had noticed how she changed through their marriage, from the terrified girl of fourteen who was afraid to share the bed of the Imp to a young woman who would soon reach her twentieth name day. Her features had kept developing through this period. The last traces of childhood had disappeared.

He couldn’t get his eyes out of her, and she stared at him in the same fashion. He felt her shiver under his touch. Her blue eyes were shining, and a strand escaped her perfectly arranged hair.

The music stopped, and although their hands separated, they couldn’t take their eyes away from each other. She was so beautiful.

The herald chose this moment to hit the floor with his stick. Tyrion turned instinctively to see his sister standing next to the Iron Throne, well in sight of everyone.

“This is the first time I assist to a wedding in Westeros. Up to now, all the weddings I saw followed different customs from here. However, that doesn’t mean I am ignorant of the customs. And I know that as part of the wedding, there is also another ceremony, when the time comes for the bride and the groom to retire to their rooms.”

People shouted immediately, covering whatever Daenerys said afterwards.

“To bed! To bed! To bed! To bed!”

Margaery Tyrell got hoisted into the air right away by half-a-dozen pair of arms. Jon Snow followed suit not long afterwards. Tyrion supposed he really must be drunk for Jon Snow wouldn’t have laughed like this if he was in control of his actions.
People went back to dancing when the husband and the wife were gone, and the music started again. People resumed to dance. Tyrion looked to Sansa.

“Shall we retire, my lady?”

“Yes.”

They left the Small Hall and went to their personal room. Once in the bedchamber, Sansa fell onto their bed.

“I’m drunk,” she said, bursting into laughter.

“Me too.” Tyrion jumped on the bed and slowly approached his wife until he buried his face in her neck.

She smelled so good. He started to kiss her, and he could hear her giggles. As his hands began to wander over her body, the giggles were replaced by moans. Their tongues began to battle. She was so warm. One by one, their layers of clothes were removed, and they ended up making one. They were back to Casterly Rock, where nothing else mattered but their love. They had found each other again.

He woke up later, in the middle of the night, his body still covered with sweat despite the cold temperature. Across his position, Sansa was lying on her side, her face turned to him, her red hair covering half on her left cheek. He brought his hand to it and removed the glowing strands from her face. A timid smile was stamped on her face, probably there following their lovemaking. Tyrion kept caressing her face and tossing strands away from it. She didn’t wake up. He wouldn’t mind if she did, but he wouldn’t mind either if she didn’t wake up. All he wanted was for her to be happy. She was his wife, and right now that was all that mattered to him.

“Tyrion.”

He stopped in his motion. Sansa was still asleep. Her lips hadn’t moved. And it wasn’t her voice who said his name. It was a voice that haunted his dreams and his nightmares. He realized at this moment that Sansa’s hair shouldn’t be glistening they way they did. There was a light in the room. Tyrion turned his head to look at the origin of the voice and the light.

In the doorstep stood a woman who was probably at the end of her twenties, with black hair and blue eyes, wearing simple but well maintained clothes that most of the common folk in the cities of the Westerlands wore. She held a candle in her hand, glowing faintly. She also had a necklace. A simple, but pretty necklace. Tyrion frowned first. The jewel was identical to one he bought a long time ago. And then…

“T… Tysha?”

She gave him a sad half-smile. She was older, but it was her. “I was wondering if you would recognize me.” He turned to Sansa. She was still asleep. He was debating whether he should wake her up when Tysha interrupted his thoughts. “She will not wake up. At least, not for now. When she does, I’ll be gone.”

She sat down in a nearby chair and laid the candle on a table. All this time, she kept looking at him.

“Am I dreaming?” Tyrion asked.
She shrugged. “Does it matter?”

Tyrion didn’t know what to say. He didn’t know what was going on right now. He didn’t have the impression that he was dreaming, but at the same time the current events just seemed impossible.

“What are you here?”

“Truth be told, I don’t know.” She looked to Sansa, still sleeping peacefully, unaware of what was happening, if it was actually happening. Maybe Tyrion should try to wake her up, only to find out if what he was seeing was real. But was the Sansa sleeping by his side even real? If this was a dream, then she couldn’t be more real than the other woman sitting across their bed.

“She’s pretty,” Tysha said. “How old is she?”

“Nineteen,” he answered.

“And she was fourteen when you married her?” He didn’t need to voice his answer. She understood right away. “The same age,” his first wife whispered.

A certain time went on during which no one said anything. Tyrion was still uncertain of what was going on. At the same time, his eyes kept travelling between Tysha, sitting in front of him, and Sansa, sleeping by his side.

“Did you really believe I was a whore?” The silence turned heavy like steel.

“That’s what Jaime told me,” he replied weakly.

“And you believed him. I guess it’s understandable. Who would you choose to believe? The wife you’ve known for a fortnight, or the brother you’ve known since you were born?” She looked down. “Was there ever a moment when you doubted his word?”

“There were times I thought you truly loved me.”

“Only a few times?”

“Times.”

She closed her eyes, then reopened them. “I had a family before. I may have believed my brothers me too.”

Another silence followed. This one was unbearable for Tyrion. “I’m sorry.”

“I used to hate you, you know.”

“You were right to hate me. I should have protected you.”

“How? How would you have protected me from Tywin Lannister?”

“I should have tried.” Like he did for Sansa. He should have refused. Instead he obeyed his father, like a good dog, and he raped the woman he loved.

“Your father did this. He forced you to do it. He forced your brother to lie to you. He had me raped by his men. I still remember each of them. I remember every coin they put in my hand.” Tyrion remembered too. He especially remembered the golden dragon he placed himself. “It was Tywin Lannister who did it.” She inhaled and exhaled slowly. “And now he’s dead.”
“Yes, he’s dead.” Gods be praised, whether they existed or not. “And Jaime will spend the rest of his life at the Wall.”

“Good riddance.”

“Yes,” he said in a whisper he doubted she heard. His relationship with Jaime had forever changed when he told him the truth, but at the same time, Tyrion couldn’t help but try to find him excuses. Most of the time, he tossed them away, but he kept looking for some reasons to forgive Jaime.

“Your father is gone. Your sister is gone. Your brother is gone. You’re the only one left.”

Their eyes met. They stared at each other for a very long time. They had never looked at each other this way before. Tyrion remembered how full of love the eyes of his first wife were while they lived in that cottage near the Sunset Sea. Later she had looked at him begging for help, and afterwards she never looked at him again.

“What do you want?” If she wanted to kill him, she could do it right away. He wouldn’t offer any resistance. He thought of what he did to her, of what he did at Castamere, of what he almost did at the Crag. If it hadn’t been for Sansa…

He looked at her. Then his eyes moved to the door that gave on the nursery where Joanna was kept.

“I want to tell you… that I forgive you.” He looked back to Tysha. “I used to hate you for what you did to me, but not anymore. It’s your father who did all this, and no one else. You have a wife now, a child, and you will have more. There is so much you can offer to the others, to this world. You can make it better than when your father lived. You are a good man, Tyrion. I know it. I’ve seen it with my own eyes when I was your wife, and you’re still the good man I married back then.”

“I don’t think I’m a good man.”

“Yes, you are.”

“I raped you.” He looked away. “I burned people alive.”

“You also saved millions of people, and you saved Sansa.” It was strange to hear Sansa’s name from the mouth of his first wife. “No one is perfect. Your father was evil. There is some evil in you, it’s true. But you don’t have to follow it. You’re not your father, Tyrion.” He heard it before. Back at the Twins, before he executed sons of Walder Frey.

“You have so much to give,” she continued. “Don’t let the past stop you. You have a good life ahead of you, and people who are counting on you. Be happy.”

“I could have been happy with you.” He looked at her. He saw the beginning of tears take shape in her eyes. Then she looked down and shook her head.

“I wasn’t meant to be your wife. Sansa was.”

She stood up, took the candle and walked to the door. Before she opened it and left, she turned to him one last time.

“Farewell, my love,” she said in a strangled voice.

Long after she was gone, Tyrion realized he was crying. He wiped the tears from his face and rose from the bed. He put a nightgown and went to the nursery. The servant was dozing next to the crib. Tyrion chased her and climbed on the stool. Joanna was sleeping peacefully. She inherited her
mother’s ability to sleep, it seemed. He took her into his arms. She didn’t wake up. He held her through the whole night.

She looked very much like a Lannister. At the same time, Tyrion noticed the similarities with Sansa. She would have high cheekbones, like her. He almost lost her, and that led him to commit atrocities he would never forget. He could have emptied Castamere before he burned it, or he could have let the other people get out and burn it over the head of Rolph Spicer. He could have refused to rape Tysha. He could have avoided the slaughter of the Northerners at Moat Cailin. There were so many things he could have done differently.

_You’re not your father, Tyrion._ He wasn’t sure if he was or not. At the Crag, when he decided to eliminate all House Westerling, he thought he couldn’t run away from who he was, from who his father was. But at the same time, Tyrion couldn’t deny that he had tried to be different from his father since the very beginning. In the very least, he never wanted to be like him. He wanted his father to approve him, to consider him as a son, but he never wanted to be like his father. No matter who his father was, he didn’t want to be like him. That was why he didn’t kill the Westerlings finally. Sansa reminded him. _How are you different from your father then?_ That shook him, and he realized how wrong he was.

Somehow, he envied Daenerys. She never got to know her father. The Mad King would have been terrible with her. Tyrion didn’t have the same chance. He didn’t grow up with his biological father, but he grew up with one who was as horrible if not more with him. His daughter was resting in his lap. He didn’t want to be like Tywin or Aerys. He wanted to be a different father for his daughter.

When the day arrived and that a greyish light started to enter the nursery, Sansa walked in, wearing a red nightgown, yawning. She smiled at him when she saw him with their daughter in his arms.

“You couldn’t sleep?”

“No. A woman kept me awakened.”

She didn’t question him further, probably not understanding the true meaning of his words, and came to sit by his side, caressing the short blond hair that was growing on Joanna’s head. “Was the woman in question quiet?”

“Very.”

Slowly, his left hand took her right one. They looked to each other, like they did the last evening. He thought of what his two fathers had done to their wives. He wouldn’t submit Sansa to the same horrors. She was his wife, and he wanted to be a good husband.

“I love you,” he said, meaning it more than ever.

“I love you too,” she replied.

And they remained sitting there, with their daughter between them. She opened her eyes and looked at both of them, a huge smile appearing on her lips. Tyrion thought that probably for the first time, they were a real family.
And with this "A Shadow and a Wolf" almost ends. There's only an epilogue left and it should be uploaded the next week-end, on Saturday if I have no inconvenient.

Please review

Next chapter: our last POV, a character who I think all readers love

Here's the list of all songs in this chapter. They're all available on Youtube:
- Cry of the Dragons, by BrunuhVille, featuring Sharm
- Nights in White Satin, by The Moody Blues
- When the Wolves Cry Out, by Miracle of Sound
- Sovngarde Song, by Miracle of Sound (with small modifications)
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone. Here is the last chapter of "A Shadow and a Wolf". This is the end of a work that started two years, eight months and fifteen days. I hope you loved to read it as much as I loved to write it, and I hope it will be the same for the concluding chapter of this great adventure.

EPILOGUE

40 years later

She shook her head, then when it didn’t succeed, she tossed the blond hair that flew in her eyes aside with her left hand. The wind was strong, as usual when she rode her dragon. Having your hair flying into your face was a small inconvenience of flying. Ever since the day she climbed on him for the first time, she had always loved flying on the dragon’s back. He could be older, he was still strong and capable of flying from the sandy dunes of Dorne to the icy mountain’s peaks of the Lands of Always Winter.

For now, the feeling of freedom and elation that came with the flight allowed her to push back the concerns that tormented her. She knew it wouldn’t last, for when she would land, the time would come to face the problem. In the meantime, she enjoyed the moment. Below her, the landscape was populated with small villages and farm lands coexisting with forests, hills and a few mountains.

The North had changed within the last decades. Joanna knew that the winter that followed the War of the Dead, also known as the Great War, was very hard for all the Seven Kingdoms. Her father told her he had travelled to Dorne when this winter was coming to an end and that snow could be seen on the hills. If snow covered the dunes of Dorne, she could barely imagine how it was here, in the North.

The winter in question lasted three years. It took everyone by surprise. Everyone expected this winter would last at least five years, probably more. But no, it only lasted three. It didn’t mean this winter had been easy. The North had already been devastated by wars in the years preceding the Great War, but the invasion of the White Walkers almost condemned it. Some maesters estimated that the North had lost half of its male population between the beginning of the War of the Five Kings and the end of the Great War, and that was without counting the women, the children and the old. Everything north of Winterfell had been devastated and all life in the region eradicated. The southern part of the North had fared better but faced its own share of battles and lost many men as well.

The winter had claimed many more people. Even the Free Folk, used to harsh winter, could barely survive. The Dothrakis who had been settled on these lands, unprepared for winter, died by the thousands. Some were happy about it, feeling Dothrakis were better allies when they were dead than alive. The situation was the cause of many skirmishes and clashes to claim what few food and livestock was available, increased by the tensions between the three different nations that shared the same territory and who followed different laws.

The Night’s Watch barely survived. By the end of the Great War, with the new recruits from the prisoners of war who chose to join it, the Night’s Watch could only count five hundred men. Most of
the castles on the Wall were occupied by the Free Folk. At the end of the winter, barely two hundred men had survived. Three Lord Commanders perished, victims of the weather. There were so few men left that the brothers of the Watch chose the last man who was ready to lead the Night’s Watch. It was her uncle, Jaime Lannister.

She met her uncle three times. The first was when she was sixteen. She decided to make the tour of the Seven Kingdoms, and her father allowed her. She travelled everywhere, beginning by the Reach and continuing to Dorne, then coming back north through the former Stormlands and the Crownlands, making her way along the Kingsroad to the Trident, then going to the Vale and finally visiting the North before coming back home. When she went to Castle Black, a dark castle at the feet of the gigantic stone wall deprived of its ice, Ser Jaime Lannister was waiting for her. He was an old man at the end of his fifties, yet she could recognize the traces of his former shining blond hair in the white ones he now had. Despite his age, he proved to be in excellent physical condition. She saw him spar with his men in the courtyard and none could defeat him. He also fought the knights who accompanied her during her journey, and they met the same fate. They didn’t talk a lot together. Her lord father seldom spoke of his brother, and although he refused to share the reason with her, she suspected something grave had happened, something that wasn’t the murder of the Mad King or their sister. Anytime she tried to engage a conversation with him about it, he excused himself and changed the topic. However, by the end of her visit, he gave her a message for her father. She brought it back with her and gave it to him as soon as she came back to King’s Landing.

That was when her father told her the truth about his first marriage. When she met him again a few years later, they talked about it. Ser Jaime Lannister had nothing to say for his defense. She could see however how much he regretted his actions. When news came the next year that the Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch was dying, she convinced her lord father to fly to the Wall before it was too late. They arrived just in time. She left her father and his brother alone together. No one knew what was said, or if anything was said, but when Ser Jaime Lannister gave his last breath and her father came out of the room, he didn’t say a word. He was devastated.

Now the Night’s Watch was strong of five thousand men. Movements between the Realm and the lands north of the Wall were constant but closely supervised by the Watch. Most of the Free Folk had gone back to live north of the Wall when the winter was over, but many of the tribes maintained good relations with the Crown. Legal trade and travel between the two worlds were no longer prohibited.

After the Last Winter, the climate of Westeros had changed drastically, especially in the northern kingdoms. It had now been thirty-eight years since snow was seen somewhere else than the highest mountains of the continent. A consensus had grown among the maesters that winter would never come again. The cause lied with a volcano north of the Wall. The place where the White Walkers were created was right at the feet of this mountain. It erupted when the place in question was destroyed by the queen Daenerys and the prince Jon. The gases that were then released by the volcano, gases still rejected today, created a kind of a screen that first stopped the heat of the sun from reaching the land. As a result, temperatures dropped, causing the colder winter in living memory. Gases dissipated with time and the air warmed up. The volcano kept throwing gases however, but less than before. Instead of stopping the heat from reaching the land, it prevented it from leaving. As a result, the temperature increased further, and places where summer snow was usual became warm and fit for agriculture. Today, all the southern part of the North had changed for that activity as a way of subsistence. Changes were slower in the northern part, where the soil needed time to adjust, but crops could already be seen growing near the Last Hearth and on the banks of the Last River.

All that, Joanna could see it from where she sat. All the progress made under the reign of Daenerys Targaryen was visible from the skies. With the help of her nephew, the prince and heir Jon
Targaryen, and the Hand of the Queen, Tyrion Lannister, the queen ensured peace and prosperity to Seven Kingdoms and their inhabitants. Lands devoted to hunting or deemed useless were converted to farming. New roads were built, old ones were repaired or extended. The same happened with harbors, especially in the Westerlands and the Crownlands. The conjunction of peace and the disappearance of winter allowed the population of Westeros to increase, helped in that by new sanitary measures in cities that allowed to reduce the circulation of diseases and enhanced life conditions for millions of people. Her father was no stranger to these reforms. He used to say that his lord father probably never thought that putting his second son in charge of the cisterns and drains of the Rock would someday improve the life of the common people.

The royal army helped to achieve these results. Two years after her coronation, the queen announced that the Unsullied would train recruits from the common people of the Crownlands to fill their ranks that began to dwindle. The following year, commoners of the Vale were allowed to join the recruitment as well. Five years after the coronation, all the common people of the Seven Kingdoms were welcomed in the army. Another five years and the queen officially announced the creation of the Army of the Realm. It already existed in the facts, but it was announced officially for the first time. Made of ten thousand permanent units and ten thousand more in reserve, the Army of the Realm was stationed all over the Crownlands and the Vale, with its largest contingent in Storm’s End. Seven officers, chosen by the queen, commanded the permanent units. They were to swear loyalty to the queen and to be at her service for all the duration of their service, like all the other soldiers. They had to forsake all the other oaths they made during this period. The units in reserve were commanded by seven other officers. Four of them were chosen by the four Wardens of the North, the South, the West and the East. This meant the queen could choose one, since she was officially the Warden of the East. Another officer was named by the Prince of Dorne, the sixth by the Lord Paramount of the Trident, and the last by the Governor of the Vale.

The Army of the Realm spent its first ten years of unofficial existence serving as both an army and a workforce. Still today, it fulfilled both functions. The Unsullied at first tried to maintain order in the Crownlands. They had a lot of work with the unification of the former Stormlands to the royal lands. They also helped to rebuild King’s Landing and enforce the law in its streets while the City Watch was being reconstituted. And they worked to make the roads more practical for winter. When the Last Winter came to an end, they kept working on extending and improving the network of roads in the Crownlands. Guard posts were established all along the network and especially along the Kingsroad. Two years after the end of winter, the Grand Maester Marcon could declare that the saying that a maid could travel from Dorne to the Wall while keeping her purse and her virginity had finally come true.

The Seven Kingdoms were at peace, and Joanna could see it from where she was. Now she could also see Winterfell taking shape from afar. She was close to the castle. It wouldn’t be long before she landed in the courtyard and was reunited with people she longed to see.

Outside its walls spread the Winter Town. It didn’t change much since the last time Joanna came. Its thousands of houses and minor buildings were still the same, dwarfed by the tall towers of the castle. Joanna knew it was only in appearance that the town didn’t expand. When her grandfather Eddard Stark was still alive, four of five homes in the town were deserted during summer. It was during winter that the town became one of the most populated settlements in the North, when families of everywhere in the North gathered to survive the hardships of winter. The town and its buildings were made to face the harsh winters of the North, but it wasn’t enough to prevent people from dying every day during the Last Winter.

The Winter Town was emptied after this winter was over. The first time she came to Winterfell, Joanna couldn’t help but be surprised by how such a vast town was empty of people. But every time she came back in the years that followed, the population of the town had increased. Now that she
was approaching, Joanna noticed a few new houses in the outskirts. The population of the town had grown over the decades, slowly but surely. Now it had grown enough for new homes to be needed, as empty buildings were no longer enough to welcome new inhabitants. A direct result of her father’s policy to offer men of the south with families, but with nothing for their living, an access to the new cultivated lands of the North as they were opened to farming. Even with the increase of the natural population of the North after the Last Winter, the Northerners weren’t enough to occupy the whole land. Settlers from the other kingdoms filled the void, and the North would soon be a kingdom not only remarkable by its size, but also by its population.

Joanna ordered Viserion to descend more gently. The towers of Winterfell were looming closer. They were now at their level. She could see the people on the ground looking up to them, and the faces of the sentinels on the battlements. Viserion slowed down as he neared the courtyard. When he was above it he flapped his wings to hover, then slowly and carefully reduced his altitude. That gave more than enough time to the people in the courtyard to clear the ground. Joanna safely landed and Viserion folded his wings.

Winterfell. The last time she came here was five years ago. It hadn’t changed a bit. For all that was said the North was changing, Winterfell would never change. It would always stand here, proud, a proof that the Starks would always rule the North.

She dismounted her dragon and came to rub Viserion’s head. He closed his eyes. Of the four dragons in Westeros, he was the smallest and the kindest of all. No wonder he chose her father as a rider.

She removed the hood covering her head, letting her long hair fall free. In formal events, she would have them brush so that they would fall over her shoulders and on both sides of her face, but while riding, whether it was a horse or a dragon, it was better to keep them behind your head. They had fewer chance to block her vision.

The household of Winterfell was looking at her. They all knew her. She had come here very often. Still, they stayed away, maybe because they were afraid of Viserion, and probably out of respect as well. The Mistress of Coin deserved respect as an advisor of the queen.

He came out of the Great Hall, wearing the traditional heavy furs of House Stark. His short stern auburn hair contrasted with the brightness of his green eyes. He told her once how uncomfortable the furs were in hot temperature, but how important it was to be seen with them regularly, in order to honor the traditions of the North. He stopped in front of her, arms crossed on his chest. A woman taller than him followed behind, her green eyes pale in comparison to that of her husband.

“Lady Joanna,” the Lord of Winterfell welcomed her.

“Lord Stark.”

They stayed there for a moment. Slowly, a smile crept on both their faces. He opened his arms.

“Come here, sister.”

“Robb.” She let herself be taken in an embrace with her little brother.

Robb was seven years younger than her. Called after their uncle the Young Wolf, he had inherited enough Stark features for the Northerners to accept him. The people of Winterfell said they could see some of Eddard Stark in him, and more of Robb Stark. He had grown up in the North from the age of six, raised mostly by tutors and servants, mentored by Davos Seaworth, the Lord of the Dreadfort at the time and acting Warden of the North on behalf of her lady mother until Robb reached his
majority. Lord Davos had died when Robb was only ten. Jon Targaryen had come back to Winterfell after that. He assumed the wardenship of the North for six years, still officially on the behalf of his cousin. When Robb reached the right age, he stepped aside and let him assume all responsibilities as Warden of the North and Lord of Winterfell. At the age of twenty, Robb married a lady of House Manderly, who sadly died in childbirth a year later. The child only survived his mother for a week. Devastated, Robb needed eight years before he wed again, this time with Alysanne Glover, the woman who was standing next to him. She and Joanna welcomed each other as it was appropriate.

“How are Brandon and Sansa?” Joanna asked.

“Brandon is sick. He couldn’t come out. As for Sansa, she’s too young. But they're both strong. You don’t have to worry about their well-being,” his wife said.

“If you say so.”

She looked at her brother. By his expression, she knew he asked her, as usual, to be forgiving with his wife. Lady Alysanne was very protective of her children.

“We’ll have a feast tonight to honor your visit. The hospitality of Winterfell is yours,” Alysanne added.

“I thank you.” Her brother was the Warden of the North and no one could put that into question. But at Winterfell, it could be debated if he was its lord, for his wife ruled the place like she owned it.

“Where is she?” Joanna asked Robb. His face took a sadder expression.

“You’ll find her in the godswood.”

“Thank you.”

She spoke in Valyrian to Viserion and he flew away to hunt. She headed for the godswood where she would find the person she was looking for. The godswood of Winterfell was among the largest in the Seven Kingdoms. She needed time to reach its center, where Joanna suspected she would find her. She wasn’t wrong. Sitting on a stump next to the weirwood, her lady mother had her eyes closed.

Lady Sansa Lannister of House Stark had been called the most beautiful lady in the Seven Kingdoms by many people, her lord husband the first. Though it didn’t mean much. Many women could claim to be the most beautiful woman in the world. The queen herself and Joanna received that nickname more than their share, and so did Margaery Tyrell. Joanna never cared for these flatteries, no more than she cared about the resemblance many people noticed between her and her aunt. Or at least she tried to.

The Mad Queen, as Cersei Lannister was known today, had been her father’s sister. Tyrion Lannister never had something good to say about her. She had tried to kill her parents more than once. Cersei Lannister even placed a price on her head when Joanna was just out of the crib. She burned half the city of King’s Landing. Scars of her fires still lingered in the capital today. She saw a portrait of her one day. To her discouragement, Joanna was indeed the picture of her aunt. Her parents assured her when she was very young that it didn’t matter, that she had nothing to see with that woman, but it was difficult when whoever had known Cersei Lannister was surprised and thought for a moment she was back among the living whenever they met Joanna for the first time.

She had steeled herself against this the best she could, and her family was never bothered by the resemblance. Her father was very supportive. Her mother as well. That woman was only sixteen
when she gave birth to Joanna. Now at fifty-eight, her youth, that Joanna witnessed for the first twenty years of her life, was gone, replaced by wrinkles. She had kept her high cheekbones, and among the hair that turned greyer every year, half the strands were still red as an autumn sunset. Behind the closed eyelids were blue eyes still full of life.

“Mother,” she called as soon as she was close enough.

The two eyes opened and looked at her. Immediately, a quiet smile took shape on the thin lips. “I suspected it was you. You’re the only one who can ride Viserion.” Her lady mother slowly stood up and came to hold her daughter into her arms. Joanna didn’t protest and gave in. She laid her head on her mother’s shoulder, and her mother did the same. They were of the same height. “My little girl.”

“I’m glad to see you, Mother. It’s been a long time.”

“Let’s walk a little. I need to stretch my legs.”

They wandered through the godswood. Sansa Lannister was still quite robust, though Joanna noticed she walked slower than before. She hoped it was only because her mother wanted to enjoy the moment longer than because her health was declining.

“How do you feel?” Joanna asked her.

“Better. It’s still difficult, but better.”

“Maybe you should come back. It’s been a year already.” She let some time for her mother to think about it, then added, “We all miss you.”

Her lady mother stopped to look at a tree with triangle leaves. For a long time, she just stared at it.

“We will talk about it after dinner. Give me some time,” she told her daughter. Joanna didn’t dare to refuse. It was difficult for her, but far more difficult for her mother. So she gave her the time she required, and they spent the hours that followed walking among the trees and pools.

Her lady mother might not want to talk about the very subject that brought Joanna in the North, but she desired to talk about other things. She asked questions about her children, and also about her grandchildren.

Gerion had not changed. He was the elder son of Tyrion and Sansa Lannister, the heir to Casterly Rock from the moment he was born. Joanna was only three years older than him. Despite their proximity in age and the great similitudes in their physical appearance, from their green eyes to their shining golden hair, they had nothing in common. Joanna had been quick of wits and mind very early, surprising the two maesters who took charge of her education. At thirteen, she was already discussing matters of state with her parents at dinner, and even with the queen when she was present. At sixteen, she was writing books on dragonlore. Two of them ended in all the libraries of the Seven Kingdoms in the years that followed. At nineteen, she was managing the Westerlands for her lord father, occupied in King’s Landing to help the queen manage the entire Realm. Five years ago, she became the first woman to occupy the seat of Master of Coin on the small council. Her place was among books, with numbers and columns, or inspecting infrastructures, lands, roads and mines to find ways to better operate them. She was good at ruling as well. She had great knowledge of the laws of the Seven Kingdoms, general laws and those applying to specific areas. The queen had considered her for the office of Master of Laws first. When the position was open ten years ago, she wanted Joanna to take it, but her lord father opposed. Not that he doubted her abilities, but he needed her at Casterly Rock, and maybe he also waited for a better position to open up for her. Five years later, it was her father who suggested to appoint her Mistress of Coin. She had enough time to make
Gerion Lannister had been officially acting Lord of Casterly Rock, in the absence of his father who was Hand of the King, since he was thirteen. Betrothed since he was twelve, married at seventeen, he had proved his ability to father children, and not only through the three sons and the daughter he had with his lady wife. However, he never really ruled. Gerion was only at ease when he was holding a sword in his hand, or a crossbow, or a bow and arrows. He spent his days practicing his skills at battle, riding, patrolling around the lands of the Rock or in the streets of Lannisport. There had been a time when his only desire was to go to war and prove himself to be the best swordsman in the Seven Kingdoms. He had the opportunity when the Iron Islands rebelled in Year 18 of the New Dynasty. The queen of the Iron Islands, Yara Greyjoy, had died in a tragic accident at sea. Her son, too young to rule, was left in the care of Lord Rodrik Harlaw who acted as Regent. However, Harlaw couldn’t stop the movement in the islands that asked for the Ironmen to go to war against the Seven Kingdoms. Rumors circulated that their queen was killed in an attack from a vessel of the Reach. A group of twelve ships from the island of Great Wyk accosted in the Reach and ravaged many villages. The attack was too sudden and unexpected, and the local lords had no time to react. By the time their forces arrived, the Ironmen were gone, leaving a trail of fuming villages, raped women and murdered children behind them. The retaliation was immediate. All ships of the Iron Islands that were in the harbors of the Reach were seized. Some of the crew were killed when they resisted. Rodrik Harlaw tried to stop the escalation in vain. Without the authorization of their king, all the Iron Islands but Pyke and Harlaw rebelled and declared war against Daenerys Targaryen.

The war was short-lived. Within two months, the Iron Islands were defeated. Each and every lord in the islands waged war in his own way. They had no general to command their whole fleet. The three dragons, Drogon, Viserion and Margarion set all the fleets on fire. The islands and their castles were besieged, and soon all the rebels surrendered or were defeated. Rodrik Harlaw had not rebelled, so he could remain regent and Yara’s son was still king. However, he had to accept garrisons on the islands that rebelled for ten years. That didn’t stop queen Yara’s son, Balon, from rebelling when his uncle died. He foolishly gathered his fleets and made to Lannisport, trying to repeat Euron Greyjoy’s plot to destroy the Lannister fleet and hence have total control on the Sunset Sea. It failed. Her lord father had learned from the attack of the Iron Islands that he witnessed in his childhood. And the garrisons on the islands and Varys’ network of spies warned them of the upcoming attack. Together, Joanna and Gerion with the help of their lord father, they prepared for the invasion. When the Iron Fleet arrived, it was surrounded from all sides. The ships of the Lannister fleet boarded or sunk those on the flanks, while Viserion, that the Ironmen didn’t expect to be there, burned down the others. Barely twenty chips managed to escape, including one with King Balon. Without ships to protect their islands, the Ironmen were quickly invaded. Most of the work was done by the Westerlands. Gerion planned the whole invasion. In the first rebellion, he proved his ability on the battlefield as a knight. In the second, he proved he was also capable of conducting battles and leading a war. By the time the men of their brother Robb and the soldiers of the Reach arrived, half of the islands were conquered, and Pyke was under siege. After six months of resistance, Pyke fell and Balon Greyjoy was executed. His sister Bala was sent into exile and the Iron Islands became officially part of the Westerlands by a decree of the Queen Daenerys.

So was Gerion Lannister. A knight, a great swordsman, a wonderful duelist, a gifted bowman, a war strategist probably more clever than his father. But a lord? Not at all. Joanna had been the one ruling the Westerlands for twenty years. When Gerion conquered the Iron Islands, it was her job to put into place a system that would allow to keep control over the islands. It was a task she would have happily given to another. The Iron Island were a constant source of worry, a pot of wildfire ready to blow at the first opportunity. Despite this, she enjoyed ruling the Westerlands. It became obvious very early that Gerion could never be a lord like their father. He wasn’t fit for that. They tried to have him take care of politics and administrative matters, to no avail. Gerion remained the warrior who led
the armies of the Westerlands and rode with his men on his own lands to apply the law while Joanna served justice, held court, negotiated with their bannermen and ruled the lands of their family. All in all, they made a perfect pair, completing each other. She and Gerion had a very good relationship. Unlike the woman and the man they looked like, there was never any thought of incest between them. They loved each other like a brother and a sister. When she was named Mistress of Coin and left for King’s Landing, Gerion was very sad. They had come to rely on each other and were inseparable despite their differences. Although she left very capable officers behind her to fulfill the duties she once performed, Joanna knew her brother would rather have her by his side.

It was some time since she had seen Serena, but she gave what news she had of her little sister. Six years under Joanna, she was married to the Lord of the Hightower. It had taken a lot of maneuvering from her father to arrange this marriage, but he succeeded. She now had four children. Two were already knights, and one of her daughters was to marry very soon into House Lefford.

As for Ned, their little brother to them all, his activities were growing. The Bank of Lannisport that he founded had expanded its activities to Oldtown and White Harbor. He was now considering to open an establishment in King’s Landing, though the laws made it much more difficult to start and conduct banking activities in the city. An undesirable effect of well-intentioned but poor policies to protect borrowers from their lenders. The queen had insisted to pass along this legislation, despite her father’s best efforts to dissuade her.

Ned. The only one of them who inherited their father’s dwarfism. He had suffered from it in his childhood. Despite his parents being very close to him and Joanna’s own efforts to be close to him, he shut up to a large part of the world very quickly. Finally, he made his way into the world. He didn’t want to be respected only because he was a Lannister. He wanted to prove to everybody that he was capable of something. Hence, with a small amount of money their parents gave him, he created his own trade when he was only eighteen. Five years later, he gave back all the money to his father, with interests, saying he should see it as an investment, not a gift.

He was the most lonely of their family, but that didn’t mean he hated them. During the first rebellion of the Iron Islands, Gerion was severely hurt. His wound festered and he almost died. Ned left all his activities behind and spent an entire month by his brother’s side until he was sure he would recover. He said that whenever they needed help, they could count on him. They seldom needed it, but they appreciated it all the time he did something for them.

Her mother asked her questions about Ned’s bride. Indeed, their little brother was betrothed… to the daughter of a wheelwright. Joanna hadn’t met her. She had been shocked to hear about it, but after thinking about it, she thought she ought not to be so surprised. After all, Ned didn’t care whether someone was nobility or not. No more than their own lord father when he got married the first time. If he was happy with this woman, she could live with it. It wasn’t as if he was the heir to Casterly Rock anyway.

She spent the whole afternoon telling her mother everything she knew about her brothers and sister. When the evening closed on them, they went separate ways to prepare for dinner. Joanna hadn’t changed since she arrived. She took a bath, had her hair brushed and combed, and put on a purple gown she brought with her.

The feast was great. It was simpler, less organized than the feasts she organized at Casterly Rock or the ones she participated to in King’s Landing, but it was more than satisfying. The most satisfying part was that she spent it talking with her brother. Their mother didn’t talk much, but she seemed to enjoy it, quietly, in her own way, a smile always displayed on her lips. It was good to see her feel better.
After dinner, when everyone had gone back to their rooms, Joanna walked to the apartments of her lady mother. She let her enter when Joanna announced her presence. Sansa Lannister was looking through the window in the night. Days ended earlier here than in the south. Winter might have disappeared, but days still grew shorter as you progressed north.

“You said we would talk about it after dinner. Should I remind you that a Lannister always pays her debts?” Joanna said.

“You don’t have to. I’ve known for a very long time.” Her mother stood away from the window and came to sit on her bed. “I miss him,” she said in a tired voice.

“We all miss him,” Joanna said in a low tone.

“One year. One year now since he left us.”

Joanna closed her eyes and sat next to her lady mother. Indeed, one year to the day, her lord father had left them. He died peacefully in his bed while he was sleeping. The maester said he felt nothing. Apparently, her father had drunk a lot the previous evening. The maester warned him to not drink too much at his age. At the age of seventy-six, Tyron Lannister, Lord of Casterly Rock, Shield of Lannisport, Lord of the Westerlands, Warden of the West, Hand of the Queen, dragonrider, gave his last breath.

There had been a huge tournament in Lannisport during the two weeks that preceded his death. Gerion had won it. That was probably why he drank so much. Gerion confessed some time later that he had been drinking with their father but, too much drunk as he was, he didn’t notice how much his father drank. Gerion still blamed himself for that today.

Because of the tournament, most of the court was there. Daenerys and Jon Targaryen, the half-sister and the nephew of Joanna’s father, although very few knew it (she was the only one of his children to know the truth), were present, and so were the grandchildren of the queen. Gerion, Ned, Serena, Robb, all the Lannisters, they were all reunited for this occasion. What should have been a time for celebration turned into a general mourning. Funerals were organized. Her father’s body was exposed for a complete week in the sept of Lannisport. Their mother watched over him all the time. She refused to leave him except to shit and piss. Joanna relayed with her siblings to bring her food and keep her company. She also received the visits of septons and discussed with people who had come to pay their last respects to Lord Lannister. It seemed everyone was there. Even the High Priestess Kinvara, the Mistress of Whisperers, who everyone believed was in King’s Landing, came to comfort her lady mother. She left for Winterfell with Robb not long after the burial.

“I came here so you wouldn’t be alone,” Joanna told her.

“Thank you. But you should be with your brothers, and with Serena. I already have Robb here.”

“We need you to be there. All of us. Don’t you think it’s time for you to come back?”

“I don’t belong to Casterly Rock anymore.”

“What are you saying? You are the mother of its actual lord. You’ve been the wife of its lord for over forty years. You had five children, four with the Lannister name, and the only one who didn’t receive it was for political reasons.”

“My place is no longer there.” When she looked to Joanna, she was crying. “Your father is dead. Casterly Rock doesn’t feel like home anymore.” She looked around to the walls and the roof of her bedroom. “This is my home. This is where I grew up, where I was born. Your father used to tell me
that I would always be a Stark. *Never forget what you are,* he said." She touched the golden necklace picturing a lion she always wore. "I tried to listen to him, but I couldn’t. I didn’t feel like a Stark anymore. I was a stranger here. At Casterly Rock, I felt I was home. But now that he’s dead, I don’t feel it is anymore. Casterly Rock was only my home while your father was alive. I don’t belong there anymore."

“You remember when you once told me that a mother’s place was next to her children. Well, you have one child at Casterly Rock, and another living right next to it. And right now, your other daughter is with them, commemorating their father’s death, and I would be with them too if it wasn’t for you. So tell me. If your children are at Casterly Rock and your place is at their side, why wouldn’t you belong there?”

Her mother sighed. “You should learn to forget what I say.”

“Like the threat to never talk to me again if I refused to marry Eddard Tully?”

“Oh, please.” Her mother hid her face inside her hands. Joanna couldn’t stop herself from laughing. She mentioned the accident on purpose. “I feel horrible whenever I think about it.”

It happened when Joanna was twenty. Ever since she was twelve, her parents tried to arrange her a betrothal. However, when at thirteen her lord father announced her he was about to conclude a betrothal between her and Jon Targaryen’s eldest son, the future heir to the Iron Throne, she made such a scene and a crisis that Lord Tyrion decided to never conclude a marriage contract for one of his children without his or her approval. His lady wife wasn’t very happy about that, and for cause.

Joanna refused all the pretenders who came to her. She refused to even consider the possibility of getting married. She didn’t tell her parents, but she would hear nothing about marriage. She didn’t know why exactly. Maybe it was because she didn’t want to be bound to a man and wanted to maintain her independence. Perhaps there was also the fact she had never been interested in men. She wasn’t interested in women either. She talked about it with her father once, and he was stunned. He said the only person like that he ever saw in his life was Varys, the now deceased Master of Whisperers. After some research, he came back to her and told her she was among the very few people in the population who felt no sexual attraction to anybody or anything. The fact remained that she refused again, and again, and again to marry.

Finally, her lady mother invited her uncle’s eldest son, Eddard Tully, Lord of Riverrun and Lord Paramount of the Trident, during another tourney. He rode with Joanna’s favor in the tournament. He allowed him to wear it only because she thought it would make no difference. She didn’t care about it. He also danced with her at the ball that closed the tournament. By the end of the night, he proposed to her, and she kindly refused.

Her lady mother had summoned her in the middle of the night. Her lord father was yawning, obviously longing for sleep. Apparently, Joanna’s mother had arranged everything about the visit, hoping her daughter would say yes. It was true that she always got along very well with Eddard, but it changed nothing. She didn’t want to marry, as strange as it may seem for a woman who didn’t want to be a septa or a Silent Sister.

It wasn’t her mother who revealed all this to her. She left Joanna with her father, saying he had something to tell her. Her father proved to be way calmer than his wife. They had a very long discussion, during which Joanna explained why she didn’t want to marry. At first, he was skeptical and tried to tell her everything she would miss, but she wouldn’t change her mind. In the end, she reminded him of his promise to never marry her to someone she didn’t want to. He had looked down to his desk. When he raised his head, a mournful smile was on his face.
“Sometimes, a lord must do what a lord must. Tell Lady Lannister to come in,” he shouted to his squire.

“So?” her mother had asked, looking straight at Joanna. But it had been her father who spoke. He looked very tired.

“Well, it seems our daughter has a very difficult choice to make. She must decide whether or not she will marry a man she doesn’t want to marry.”

“She has to marry one day,” Joanna’s mother had protested. “We were not in love when we were wed. My parents were not in love either. We learned to love each other, just like they did.”

“It’s not given to everybody to fall in love with the person they were forced to marry,” Joanna opposed.

“Alright, alright. No more arguing,” her father interrupted. “A decision must be made, so let’s get to the point. Joanna, you realize that if you refuse to marry Eddard Tully, your lady mother will never forgive you.”

“Yes, I do,” she replied, exasperated. She was fed up with her mother’s persistence to find her a husband when she didn’t want one. She knew it was normal in their world, but she didn’t like what was normal in this situation.

“Very well. Then, you really have a very unhappy alternative before you. Your mother will never forgive you if you do not marry him. And if you do, since you don’t want to marry him, I’m the one who will never forgive you.”

Joanna had been in a state where she didn’t know if she ought to laugh or to cry of joy. Anyway, she left the room as quickly as possible as a heated debate started between her parents. It was said her lady mother didn’t speak to her lord father for an entire week afterwards. She came to her senses in the end and tolerated the situation. The day Joanna was named Mistress of Coin, she said she was proud of her and didn’t regret she never got married.

Today, Joanna couldn’t help but almost laugh at her mother’s behaviour. Joanna thought she regretted more what she said to her husband afterwards than her stubbornness to marry her daughter. The Lady Sansa removed the hand that hid her eyes. “Very well. I’m going home.”

The decision was taken. The next morning, Joanna was breaking her fast with her lady mother before their departure. Her mother’s personal handmaiden, a young woman of twenty with a pale skin, very slender, green of eyes and with hair so brown that they looked black, served them.

“Thank you, Sera,” Joanna’s mother told the handmaid when she came to take back the untouched food to the kitchens.

“You call her by her name now?” Joanna asked.

“I got used to it. It was hard for me. She looks so much like her mother. Whenever I look at her, I see Mira. There’s so much of her in her daughter.”

Mira Forrester was an old friend of her mother. She had served as her handmaiden for a time when she was in King’s Landing. The two women remained in contact afterwards, but twenty years ago, the Lady of Ironrath gave birth to her fourth child. It was a girl, her first one after the three sons she had. However, Mira Forrester only had the time to name her daughter before she died of complications that happened during the delivery. Her mother was in the capital when it happened. She travelled all the way to the North in order to be present for her funerals. Margaery Tyrell, then
newly appointed Lady of Highgarden after the death of her lord father, made the journey as well.

Joanna and her mother left early after breakfast. Robb and his wife came to say goodbye. Once the farewells were made, they climbed on Viserion and flew back to Casterly Rock. They needed a few days to arrive there. They stopped at Barrowton, Riverrun and the Golden Tooth, to only name a few. And then, one day, they saw the silhouette of the Rock at the horizon. Viserion didn’t need instructions on the way to land at the Rock. He did it dozens of times if not more.

As soon as they landed, Gerion arrived to welcome them. He embraced their mother tightly and did the same with his sister. Serena and Ned arrived not long after, and they shared the same embraces. Joanna had been afraid Serena would be gone to Oldtown by now, but she chose to stay when they received Joanna’s raven announcing the return of their mother.

Gerion later showed their mother where she would live now. They were all surprised except for Joanna when he showed her the lord’s chambers, the ones she shared with their father for decades.

“These are not my rooms. They belong to you now,” she said to her eldest son.

“As long as you’re with us, these rooms will be yours. That’s what Father would have wanted.”

They then excused themselves at her request. They didn’t protest as they could see she was beginning to cry. Ned stayed behind with her. He had always been the favourite of their mother where Joanna was their father’s favourite. They agreed to meet all together in the crypts in two hours. Joanna used the time to go to her own chambers. She took a bath and put on fresh clothes. As she waited for the time to go below, in the dark tunnels of the castle, lying in her bed and resting after days of travel, a voice disturbed her.

“I see you were successful in your mission.”

Joanna opened her eyes and slowly sat on her bed. “Yes. I’m glad she’s here.”

“Of course, you are,” the woman replied. “I’m glad she’s here me too.”

“Are you?”

“Your father deserves it.”

Joanna nodded. She looked at the torch on the wall. The wall under it seemed normal, but in fact it hid a secret passage that could be opened from both sides. Only the actual Mistress of Coin and Mistress of Whisperers were aware of its existence.

“Will you be with us?” Joanna asked her.

She had a sad smile. “I’m not part of the family.”

“You almost are. You had a daughter with him. You saved his life. You saved my mother’s life. And you saved me.”

She turned around and looked into the fire. “That doesn’t make me a Lannister,” Tysha replied. She was wearing her red robes, her long dark hair falling on her back. “I will be there, in the shadows, but not with you. It’s not my place.”

Joanna understood. They had talked about this again and again for the last twenty years. “The statue of Tywin Lannister will be there.”
“Yes, I know.” She said very softly, but with an edge that would make her hatred of this man obvious to anyone with ears.

Joanna sighed. “I don’t think I will ever understand. How could Tywin Lannister do such a thing? How can a father do that to his own son?”

She knew of course that Lord Tywin had not been the real father of Tyrion Lannister, but he had acknowledged him as his son, just like Eddard Stark did for Jon Targaryen, and her cousin only had good words for the man who raised him. That made her father Lord Tywin’s son whether he liked it or not. How could he do this?

“Total absence of love,” Tysha answered to her question. “Just like darkness is total absence of light, evil is total absence of love. That’s who Tywin Lannister was. Evil.”

Someone knocked at the door. “Lady Joanna, it’s time. Lady Lannister and your brothers and sister are waiting for you,” her handmaiden said from the other side, without opening the door. Joanna ordered all her handmaidens to never enter her rooms without her authorization.

“I’m coming,” she replied. She turned to Tysha who touched a red stone around her neck. Her appearance changed. It wasn’t he first time Joanna saw it. She was surprised when she first witnessed it, but now it didn’t bother her.

“I’ll leave you to it,” she told Joanna.

“Thank you, Kinvara.”

The High Priestess left using the same secret passage she used to enter. Over twenty years now that she knew the truth, when one evening the High Priestess came to her rooms and told her. She was the only one to know the whole truth in all the Seven Kingdoms. Not even her lord father, and even less her mother, were aware of it.

Fifteen minutes later, they were all standing in the Hall of Heroes in front of a statue representing her lord father. Tyrion Lannister was represented a book in one hand, an axe in another. The sculptor did a wonderful work, forgetting no detail. Even the scar on his face was displayed at the perfection. His grave was right under it. On it you could read the following:

_Tyrion Lannister_

_Born in 37 BND_

_Lord of Casterly Rock, Shield of Lannisport, Lord of the Westerlands, Warden of the West, 3 BND – 39 ND_

_Hand of the Queen, 1 BND – 39 ND_

_Dragonrider_

_Beloved brother, husband and father_

_A very small man can cast a very large shadow_

Indeed, the inscription on the grave couldn’t be more accurate. Torches were positioned, lit in every occasion, that projected the shadow of the statue in such a way that it made three times the height of her brother Gerion.
The current Lord of Casterly Rock was present with his two sisters and his youngest brother. Only Robb couldn’t be there. He had urgent matters to attend in the North which prevented him from following Joanna and their mother to commemorate his death.

Their lady mother stood ahead of them. They remained there for a long time, looking at their father’s statue. Gerions’s wife and his three children weren’t present, no more than Ned’s betrothed or Serena’s husband and children. This moment was for them and only for them, their mother and her children, the immediate family of Tyrion Lannister.

Their lady mother turned to them after a very long time. It was obvious she had cried. There were traces of tears on her cheeks. When she talked to them however, her voice was calm, measured.

“Thank you all. I regret Robb isn’t here with us, but I want you to know something. Your father would be proud of you, every one of you. And I’m proud too.”

She embraced them all one by one, and then they left. Joanna was the last one to leave with her mother by her side. She perceived a slight movement in the dark behind her. She looked away, continuing her path back to the surface, leaving her father some time alone with another woman.

20 years later

There were now two statues. The second was just finished. The axe had been removed from the hand of the man, and now it held the hand of the woman. Tyrion Lannister stood in next her, motionless, stuck in that pose for all eternity. They were together forever. The long shadow that the former Lord of Casterly Rock projected was still there on the stoned floor, while the shadow of his wife wasn’t that long in comparison.

She was fourteen when she met him on that road. Back then, she thought he saved her. In some way he did, though his brother did most of the job chasing the men that chased her. The next morning, she was married to him. Their bliss was short-lived and a fortnight later her life was turned to hell. Tywin Lannister ruined it. His brother, Kevan, helped her escape. She went to Pentos, where she lived for many months. She gave birth to a daughter. She couldn’t know who the father was, but she thought it was him. She couldn’t take care of her, and she reminded her too much of him. She abandoned her. She hated them all, even that child who came from the husband who raped her. It destroyed her, for despite the fact she hated her daughter for being the child of a monster, she loved her too.

Free of anything and anyone binding her, she escaped to Volantis. There, she became a Red Priestess, then High Priestess when Benerro passed away. Through the years, R’hillor showed her the truth. She saw what had happened on this fateful day through the visions he gave her. All her hatred came down on Tywin Lannister, the man who destroyed her life and the lives of those he forced to ruin hers. She also saw the man she loved getting married to another woman, who was the same age as she was when they met. Then one day, she saw a vision that terrified her.

She saw the young woman who married Tyrion, in a dark room, a very cold place, with two other men. One had a diabolical smile on his face, and he forced the other one to stay while he did to her the same thing she was subjected to.
R’hhlor never showed her these visions for nothing. She had seen more than enough to know what she had to do, to change the course of time. For three days, she remained in meditation, connecting with R’hhlor, asking, begging him to provide her with the necessary force to accomplish her mission. The third day, she succeeded. She penetrated the spirit of the man she hated so much. She only did what was necessary. She didn’t rejoice at the idea of torturing. She could have, but it was dangerous for her to use too much power, and that wasn’t what R’hhlor asked of her. She killed him. Nothing more, nothing less. Tywin Lannister never woke up. That changed everything. The girl was never taken away from the city, her fate changed completely.

Later, she went to Meereen. R’hhlor showed her the way again. Only, she misinterpreted them and realized it just in time. She thought the young woman with blond hair she saw flying a dragon was the Lord’s Chosen One, Azor Ahai Reborn, the Prince that was promised. She was wrong. She realized it when she saw Daenerys Targaryen fly over Meereen with her own eyes, in that day when she defeated the masters. She wasn’t the woman Kinvara saw in her visions, nor was it her dragon she saw. She recognized the dragon she saw in her visions for he was in the skies that day, but not with the queen on his back.

These visions kept haunting her, and then others came to haunt her. Visions of a baby, among them. She thought it was her daughter first, but then she slowly realized it was another child. She met him again in the Neck and found him dead. She thought it was over, but she tried all the same, and against all expectations, he was back. It was the last time she kissed him. And when she saw that he could ride a dragon, she understood. The young woman with blond hair was indeed not Daenerys Targaryen. The woman in question was real, only she wasn’t a woman yet. She had just been born.

R’hhlor had showed her the way. She did what was necessary, saved the mother and then the daughter, finding absolution for the horror she committed so many years ago. She had abandoned a child. She saved another and gave her back to her parents. She did what R’hhlor asked of her.

Tyrion probably believed all these years that all he saw that night of Jon Targaryen’s wedding was only a dream. He was wrong. She had never been only a dream. His brother Jaime knew she wasn’t a dream when she revealed herself to him in his cell. Tell him, or I will, she threatened him. And he did tell his brother the whole truth.

She went to see Tyrion after putting something in Sansa’s drink that would make sure she slept. That was the last time Tysha ever spoke to Tyrion. The following times, when she talked to him, it was Kinvara who spoke. She never revealed the truth to anyone but Joanna, after she learned the truth about her father’s first marriage. She owed it to her. In some way, Joanna was the daughter Tysha could have had and that she abandoned.

The daughter was now about sixty. She served the new king as she had served his aunt before. Kinvara had seen many come and go over the last decades. She would have to stay a little while longer. Her mission wasn’t over yet. It would be over only when Joanna would leave, and so far her health remained strong and she was giving many signs that she would live for many more years. Kinvara expected she would outlive all her siblings. After that, she would go back to the east and continue to serve R’hhlor for the years she still had left. Such was the path of all Red Priests: to serve their Lord just like Azor Ahai did and continued to do. Just like Revan had been doing for thousands of years, and kept doing.

For now, the magic of her necklace wasn’t working. She aged more slowly than common people. Despite this, grey hair was beginning to show on her head. Usually, it would be hidden by R’hhlor’s power, but now it wasn’t.

In her hands, Tysha held the necklace Tyrion had bought her a long time ago, while they lived in that
cottage. She wore it all the time, and despite the conflicting feelings she had towards him after she left Westeros, she always kept it. Perhaps a part of her always suspected there was more to his actions on that day she was destroyed than it appeared. When her Lord showed the truth many years later, she was relieved to not have thrown it away. She wore it the last time she spoke to Tyrion.

Slowly, she approached the statues with their hands joined. Tyrion was still holding his book, like he always did since he died. Sansa, with her free hand, was caressing a direwolf. There was a little gap in their joined hands, between their thumbs and forefingers. There was just enough space. With caution, she put the necklace in the hole. It slowly disappeared, inch by inch, until it was in their hands, hidden from everyone’s sight.

She stepped away and looked at them one last time. They were meant to be together a long time ago. Tysha was never destined to marry him. Sansa was. Tysha was doomed to disappear and let someone else take her place, so she could be there in time to fight the darkness and bring R'hllor’s light into the world. Tysha had to die for Kinvara to live. She was destined to be alone all her life. Tyrion Lannister and Sansa Stark were meant to spend their life together. Her attention was drawn to the large shadow at Tyrion’s feet and the direwolf by Sansa’s side.

“A shadow and a wolf,” she whispered.

She closed her eyes and turned around. Tysha never looked back. As she walked away, her hand came to the medallion around her neck. Within seconds, Tysha disappeared to never come again. Kinvara left the crypts to continue her mission: to serve her Lord and bring its light into the world. For evil would hide in the places no one would think of and surge when they last expected it.

Author's Notes:

First, about the epilogue. I can now confirm it to everybody: Kinvara is Tysha, Tyrion's first wife. I use the opportunity to compliment CLH_CLH, who was the first to suggest the idea that the two women were only one, at the first chapter where Kinvara stepped into the story. You surprised me by suspecting the truth at the very beginning. As for Revan, maybe it wasn't that clear in this chapter, but he was in fact Azor Ahai, Jon Snow's ancestor, and you can assume he's still alive since Kinvara states he's still serving their Lord.

There are also two references to scenes from TV shows I love very much. The first is the disagreement between Tyrion and Sansa when Joanna related how she refused to marry someone at the age of twenty. It comes from Pride and Prejudice, by Jane Austen. The second is when Kinvara explains to Joanna why Tywin behaved in such a way with Tyrion: "Total absence of love". It comes from Smallville, Season 7 Episode 16, when Clark Kent and Chloe Sullivan discuss the murder of Lionel Luthor by his son Lex.

Now, I spent over two years and a half writing this fanfiction. I didn't think it would turn out to be so long. When I started, it was an experience more than anything else, and I didn't plan to rewrite the entire series. Finally, it came to it: a fanfiction over a million words. I must confess there were times I just wanted to abandon this project. I had other ideas in my mind and wanted to dedicate more time to my original stories and my other fanfiction projects, including "A Rose and a Lion". But I kept writing, encouraged by you, all the people who were reading it, and also by the conviction that I couldn't stop a project that wasn't finished yet.
Now here it is, over and finished. I always meant to end ASAAW this way, with Joanna as the final
POV and the explanation of why this story was called "A Shadow and a Wolf". There were
modifications on the road. For example, my original idea was to have Jon marry Daenerys in the end.
Margaery was supposed to die when the Great Sept exploded. Revan was also not supposed to
become a character with a major role. He was only supposed to be a cameo at first, but I loved so
much to introduce him into the story that I couldn't resist making him Azor Ahai and helping Jon and
Daenerys to bring a permanent end to winters. The existence of more Children of the Forest very far
in the north and Bran leaving to meet them is also a late addition. Kinvara was also not meant to
appear, or at least not to play a major role, and she wasn't supposed to be Tysha. But I had this mad
idea, while I watched Season 5 and Tyrion listened to a Red Priestess in the streets of Volantis that
this Priestess could be Tysha. Somehow I found myself thinking that Kinvara could be Tysha, and I
ended making her the cause of Tywin's death.

This story is not perfect. There are a few things I would probably modify if I was to rewrite it. First,
the long time spent in the Neck by Tyrion and Sansa and their army. Second, how I handled
Margaery's escape from death. Third, the way I told the part of the story evolving around the second
destruction of Castamere and how Tyrion almost turned like Tywin that didn't come out the way I
was planning to. Despite this, I'm satisfied with what I've written after so much time, and I hope you
enjoyed ASAAW as you read it, chapter after chapter.

I want to thank everyone who read this story, who left comments or kudos, who subscribed to it or
bookmarked it. You are the reason why I wrote it in the end, and the reason why I kept writing it
when I just wanted to stop. I'm proud to have delivered this piece of writing to you, and I'm proud to
have been (for a short time) the only person to have written a fanfiction on Game of Thrones long of
1,000,000 words on AO3.

I want to thank especially those who commented on the story from the beginning or who came along
later: Tativi and CLH_CLH, SerGoldenhand, morgana67, wildhoneyfritri, AzraelGFG,
ValeriaC, 1Astrum1, Alice_1, FrostWyrm96 and many others. All your comments encouraged me
to continue.

This may be the end for "A Shadow and a Wolf", but this is not the end for me. The idea to write
first came to me when I was sixteen, for a project school. I put aside this idea for the years that
followed, but this interest was revived by the meeting of three separate things: Game of Thrones,
fanfictions, and Smashwords.

I discovered Game of Thrones when I was seventeen or eighteen, when a friend of mine talked about
it for the first time, when the first season was released. But since it seemed to be only about sex and
violence, the way he spoke of it, I wasn't interested. Then another friend, probably three years later,
while I was finishing my degree, showed me two cutscenes: the Red Wedding, and the Purple
Wedding. And in the scene of the Purple Wedding, I saw Peter Dinklage, who I previously saw in
"X-Men: Days of Future past". I was intrigued and went to see on Game of Thrones Wiki who was
the character he was playing. That's how I met Tyrion Lannister. I ended watching cutscenes where
he was present on Youtube, and that's how I also discovered Sansa and began to ship them together.
Then I started buying the seasons on iTunes, watching the whole show from the beginning.

While watching, I also started to read the books, and I also kept looking for websites about Game of
Thrones, until one day I fell upon a fanfiction by pure luck. It was "Things we do for love" from
pellaeonthewingedlion. I became immediately a fan of fanfictions, and soon I considered the idea of
writing one of my own. I finished to read the five books of ASOIAF, then I started to write. The
13th day of February 2016, the first chapter of "A Shadow and a Wolf" was uploaded. On June 8th
of the same year, my 23rd birthday, I uploaded the first chapter of "A Rose and a Lion". In the
meantime, I also discovered a website called Smashwords, where another fanfiction author published
her own original stories. That decided to write my own original stories.

In some way, Game of Thrones gave me back the desire to write. I'll never thank enough this friend at the university who first showed me scenes of the TV show, for without this, ASAAW would never have existed, nor its comrade ARAAL, and neither would I be writing a science fiction series and planning for more fanfictions and original books.

Game of Thrones changed my life, and I hope it will keep changing my life. GRRM still has two books to release, and HBO still has one season to show us. On my side, I still have two more fanfictions that happen in this wonderful world, one already started, another in project. I know GRRM disapproves that we write fanfictions about his work, but I would like to thank him nonetheless, for without him, I may never have started writing.

Again, I thank you all for reading this fanfiction that a poor guy spent more than two years of his life writing. I invite you to read my other fanfiction, "A Rose and a Lion", and those that will follow.

If you wish, you can also consult my personal page on Smashwords, where you can discover who I really am, my projects and, when I start to publish, my original books. They will only be available in French first, but I will do my best to translate them as soon as possible: https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/Gracques

For the last time, I ask you to leave your reviews and your impression on this story.

Gracques

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